

# Navigating African Biblical Hermeneutics



# Navigating African Biblical Hermeneutics:

*Trends and Themes from our  
Pots and our Calabashes*

Edited by

Madipoane Masenya  
(Ngwan'a Mphahlele)  
and Kenneth N. Ngwa

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Navigating African Biblical Hermeneutics:  
Trends and Themes from our Pots and our Calabashes

Edited by Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele)  
and Kenneth N. Ngwa

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele),  
Kenneth N. Ngwa and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without  
the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1451-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1451-5

DEDICATED TO ALL OUR FOREMOTHERS AND FOREFATHERS  
IN AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	x
Preface .....	xi
Introduction .....	1
What Comes Out of the African Pots and Calabashes? Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan’ a Mphahlele) and Kenneth Ngwa	
<b>Part 1: Methodologies in African Biblical Interpretations</b>	
Chapter One.....	20
Rethinking Paul’s Sexual Ethics within the Context of HIV and AIDS: A Postcolonial Afro-Feminist-Womanist-Perspective Alice Yafeh-Deigh	
Chapter Two.....	40
A Gender-Sensitive Methodology in African Biblical Interpretation: Insights from the Book of Proverbs Funlola O. Olojede	
Chapter Three.....	57
The African Bantu Concept of Ubuntu in the Theology and Practice of Bishop Desmond Tutu and its Implications for African Biblical Hermeneutics Aloo Osotsi Mojola	
<b>Part 2: Bible, Power and Wealth in Africa</b>	
Chapter Four.....	70
The Bible, Power and Wealth in Africa: A Critique of the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa Robert Wafawanaka	
Chapter Five.....	90
Power, Wealth and the Torah in an African Liberationist Perspective: A Response to Robert Wafawanaka Ndikho Mtshiselwa	

Chapter Six.....	103
From the Blood of Abel to the Blood of Zechariah to the Blood of Victims Who Died at SCOAN: A Critical Reflection	
Hulisani Ramantswana	

### **Part 3: Sexuality, Masculinities, HIV and AIDS and the Bible in Africa**

Chapter Seven.....	122
What of the Problematic Norm? Rereading <i>The Book of Ruth</i> within the Mongo Women's Context	
Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Marthe Maleke Kondemo	

Chapter Eight.....	137
Roots of Ensneced Homophobia in Sub-Saharan Africa: Case Studies of the Baganda and Bagisu Communities in Uganda	
Robert Kuloba Wabyanga	

Chapter Nine.....	157
Reimagining Household Ethos (in Africa) in Light of the Implied Rhetorical Effect of Ephesians 5:21-33?	
Elna Mouton	

### **Part 4: African Biblical Responses to Global Crises of War and Mass Violence**

Chapter Ten.....	180
Bible after Gunshots: African Biblical Hermeneutics as Postwar Hermeneutics?	
Kenneth Ngwa	

Chapter Eleven.....	199
Violence and Lessons That We Never Learn: A Postcolonial Reading of Genesis 18-19	
R. S. Wafula	

Chapter Twelve.....	216
Sexual Assault in the Liberian Civil War	
Thema Bryant-Davis, Katurah Cooper, Alison Marks, Kimberly Smith and Shaquita Tillman	



Chapter Thirteen ..... 236  
 The Armour of God (Eph 6) in the World View of Ndorobo  
 Shelley Ashdown

**Part 5: Responses to Chapters in Part 3 and Part 4**

Chapter Fourteen ..... 258  
 Sexuality, Masculinities, HIV and AIDS and the Bible in Africa:  
 A Response  
 Dorothy BEA Akoto

Chapter Fifteen ..... 265  
 Reading in Context: A Response to Part 4  
 Gilbert Okuro Ojwang

Contributors ..... 276

General Index ..... 280

Index of Authors ..... 284

Index of Scripture Texts ..... 290

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Dialogue is the kernel of wisdom.” This isiZulu saying represents both the process and the product that is now embodied in this volume. This dialogue has been personal, cultural, professional, and institutional. As the metaphorical “cooks” who have nurtured the production of this book, we are extremely grateful and indebted to the gracious collaborative work of its authors, the “host” organization (SBL), reviewers, endorsers, and the publisher.

We are grateful for the patience exhibited by each author as we prodded and queried on their essays. What we expected, assumed, and received from them was not only a commitment to the necessary quality of their work, but also their willingness to be ongoing dialogue partners in a process of manuscript production. Our appreciation goes to SBL for hosting the sessions on African Biblical Hermeneutics out of which these rich pieces of scholarly work arose. Also, we are extremely grateful to the editors of CSP for initiating the process that turned papers at the SBL meeting into essays now contained in this book. We thank especially Victoria Carruthers, the author liaison at CSP, for her patient and steady responses to our inquiries about preparing the manuscript for publication. Our thanks also go to our two peer reviewers who gave invaluable feedback that greatly enriched the final product, to Funlola O. Olojède for providing invaluable assistance in the editorial process and to our endorsers, for lending their voices and reputations in support of this work. Without our individual authors and the untiring work of all our liaison editors at CSP, this manuscript would not have seen the light of day in its current form.

We hope that the African dialogic wisdom found in these pages will nourish the work of African biblical hermeneutics in particular and biblical hermeneutics in general.

Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan’ a Mphahlele) and Kenneth Ngwa,  
co-editors.

## PREFACE

I am very delighted to be invited to write this preface. I have been attending annual Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) meetings since 1986 and I had wished already then that African context(s) would be taken into consideration in scholarly articulations of African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH). Thank God that my prayer was answered later when the scholars who were to be the founders of the ABH – Dora Mbuwayesango, Justin Ukpong (of blessed memory), Musa Dube and Gerald West – started the unit called African Biblical Hermeneutics. I personally want to commend these and other scholars who have served as section coordinators/co-chairs. I also want to personally commend not only those who are officials of the section, but all those who have lent their support by presenting papers in ABH SBL Section. Since then, the struggle to forge ahead and make sure that the ABH section continues, has been on and I am very pleased to know that it is still bubbling.

Many people, and not only scholars, have big ideas in their heads and carry those ideas around, but do not use the common sense to commit those ideas into writing. What is most commendable is not just forming the African Biblical Hermeneutics unit of the Society of Biblical Literature and making it work, but the idea of publishing the papers presented in the sessions of the ABH for a wider audience to enjoy, criticise, and appreciate. As I have said in one of my papers, one of the ways to make African Biblical Hermeneutic(s) global is by publishing our ideas and discoveries for the world to consume. Many will certainly appreciate what we are doing and hopefully come to understand us better.

The present book titled, *Navigating African Biblical Hermeneutics: Themes and Trends from our Pots and Calabashes*, is a welcome book that takes seriously the life situation(s) of African people. The book discusses themes that are very relevant to African experiences. One of the distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutics is that the Bible is interpreted with life interest and African identity. The chapters in this book deal very well with what is relevant to life interests and issues of survival in Africa. The book engages methodology in African biblical interpretation, including explorations of methodologies that seek to dismantle patriarchal ideology, wealth and spirituality, the concept of Ubuntu as a socio-epistemological and moral and hermeneutical lens, issues of sexuality, masculinity and HIV and AIDS, as well as interpretive responses to issues

of global crises of war and mass violence. In quintessential mode of modern African biblical interpretation, these scholarly pieces individually and collectively engage the Bible and African lived realities as co-constitutive “canonical” texts for critical, deconstructive, and constructive analyses.

Again, this book is a welcome endeavour and the culture of academic publishing by African biblical scholars should continue. As already argued, it is not enough to present papers at the African Hermeneutics section of SBL without publishing them. Through publication, African Biblical Hermeneutics can be globalized and our African identities better expressed.

Thanks. I feel honoured to be invited to write this preface.

The Rev Prof. David Tuesday Adamo  
Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria  
30/3/2017

## INTRODUCTION

# WHAT COMES OUT OF THE AFRICAN POTS AND CALABASHES?

MADIPOANE MASENYA  
(NGWAN' A MPH AHLELE)

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

AND KENNETH NGWA

DREW UNIVERSITY THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

### **1. Brief Historical Framework of African Biblical Hermeneutics**

Since its formalised and historicised inception in the early 1930s (Ukpong 2000), with its primary and fundamental goal of making Africa not just the context for interpretation but also an invaluable resource in biblical interpretation, African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) has travelled a richly contested road. It has not only emerged from the margins of political and interpretive alienation and erasure but also increasingly taken shape within centres of cosmopolitan, academic and governing power. In fact, ABH has forged its identity and methodology not just in resistance to the punctual acts and enduring legacies of colonialism, cultural imperialism, global capitalism and *apartheid*; it has also forged its identity and methodology in conjunction with its own cultural and technological renaissance, its vibrant and demographically youthful continent, its endangered populations and landscapes, its religious revitalisation and even indigenisation; and it has critically explored African cosmologies and embodiment, engaged with African health and healthcare systems and beliefs, African literature and art, proverbial wisdom and customs and political governance as well as war and peace, among other such pressing epistemological and interdisciplinary issues.

A proliferation of methodological insights, perspectives and trends has helped to define the project, its task and journey – for example, from comparative and inculturation-evaluative methodologies around African religion and culture to Black liberation hermeneutics (Ukpong 2000; 2012; Manus 2003; Adamo 2015; West 2005; 2016); from African (male) theologies to Circle of Concerned African Women’s Theologies/Biblical Hermeneutics (Fabella and Oduyoye 1989; Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1989; Okure 2003) and HIV and AIDS theologies/biblical hermeneutics (Phiri, Haddad and Masenya [ngwan’a Mphahlele] 2003; Dube and Kanyoro 2004; Masenya [ngwan’a Mphahlele] 2005; 2006; Mbuwayesango 2007; Hinga, Kubai, Mwaura and Ayanga 2008; Lefa 2009); from rainbow and *Ubuntu* to postcolonial and anticolonial (Dube 2000; Cloete 2004; Punt 2004; Niang 2009; Mbuvi, Dube and Mbuwayesango 2012; Wafula 2015); from reconstruction to postwar (Mugambi 1995; Ngwa 2015); from Bosadi to Afro-feminist-womanist (Masenya (ngwan’a Mphahlele) 2010; Yafeh-Deigh 2015); and from psychological to Pentecostal (Madubuko 2015; Asamoah-Gyadu 2012), among many others. Indeed, there has been such an explosion of methodological insights and perspectives that Katho (2010) laments the lack of a thoroughgoing, full-blown African biblical theology akin to those produced by western scholars such as Walter Brueggemann (1997) and Bruce Waltke (2007).

The methodological toolbox /kitchen that fuels the production of this volume contains theoretical insights and ingredients ranging from historical-critical to literary and social-scientific analyses, from political theory to rhetoric and semiotics, from trauma theory to cultural memory, from philological-exegetical to typology-analogical, from divination, storytelling and reading with ordinary readers to embodiment and materiality and from place/space theory to diasporic studies, among others.

After several decades of labouring on these issues and more, ABH has become fairly well established and is growing even as new trends continue to emerge within its borders. Every vibrant and viable discipline no matter how well established, must continue to re(interrogate) and re(define) itself in order to remain relevant and useful to the ever-changing epistemological and geopolitical markers and concerns that define and animate its changing constituencies. Like any vibrant organism, keen on maintaining its own identity, relevance, survival and ability to flourish, ABH has traversed cultural and ethnic/racial borders. It has transcended colonial nation-state boundaries and critiqued entrenched patriarchal ideologies and tendencies in African traditions and practices. ABH has also decried global capitalism and the extraction of indigenous resources, advocated for the care of and revitalisation of the environment and developed a healthy allergic reaction

to violent totalising universalisation of meaning, interpretive space, trends and methods. ABH scholars have focused on these issues being ideologically motivated towards a deep and lasting transformation and liberation of African-descended people (Gunda 2009; Asamoah-Gyadu 2012; Adamo 2015; Ngwa 2015, 2016). Practitioners of ABH include professionally trained biblical scholars, theologians and religious studies scholars, professionals in other fields of the humanities, clergy and church members.

In his recent panoramic survey of the developing field of African Biblical Study (or Hermeneutics), Andrew Mbuvi argues that African Biblical Hermeneutics “refuses to deal with the Bible simply as an ancient text and demands that it be engaged to deal with present concerns, addressing issues that resonate with African (and world) realities.” (Mbuvi 2017, 154). This methodological focus on the lived realities of contemporary Africa, placed side by side with the larger ancient Mediterranean world from which the biblical text emerged, makes the African biblical interpreter as much interested in questions of history and geography and genealogy as in questions of politics, economics, culture, language, agency and governance. The methodological focus and the accompanying thematic analyses also make the African biblical interpreter a product of *specific* her/histories and geographies, genealogies, governing structures and cultures. Like every interpreter, the African biblical interpreter is not a disinterested reader of the Bible. ABH thus seeks to situate (and in a narrow sense, historicize) not only the interpretive project, but also the interpreters’ contexts.

Several questions inform the deliberations in this volume: What is African biblical hermeneutics? Who does African biblical hermeneutics do? Who is an African and on whose behalf is African biblical hermeneutics done? Do practitioners of African biblical hermeneutics have a common agreement on what it is that they do? Is it primarily a dialogical process that puts the biblical text in critical conversation with African socio-political, cultural, economic, religious, gendered and environmental realities? To problematise, deconstruct or even displace the predominance and prioritisation of methodologies fixated on the biblical text and its ancient contexts (histories) is certainly a major shift that allows African biblical interpreters to redress the interpretive erasure of Africa by the colonial and imperial missionary enterprise. However, there is more to the process and product of ABH than simply interpretive dialogism between text and context. The interpretive pendulum has swung to pressing issues about what the Bible *does* to Africans in the political, religious, cultural and economic spheres and what Africans in turn *do* with the Bible. Here, there is a strange mix of suspicion and trust of the Bible (West 2001; 2009). The biblical text

and the African interpreter stand not just in dialogic relationship with but also oftentimes in real confrontation with each other. Such confrontational encounters happen because African biblical hermeneutics is driven by a theological-ideological impetus toward personal and societal transformation aimed at enhancing the quality of life of individuals and communities – a commitment that is not always self-evident in plain readings of certain biblical texts or of some African practices.

The questions of methodological definition and identity and of thematic inquiry and exploration taken up in this volume emerge from an African space where the real need to survive and thrive is central. Questions of modern trends and interpretive methodology, political, military and cultural power, gender inequality and patriarchy as well as economic exploitation and disparity continue to inform why and how Africans read and relate to the Bible. The reason is that the Bible has become an African document, even an African contested icon (West 2016), which must not become an African idol. Since the purpose of ABH pursued in this volume is primarily to advocate transformation and improvement of the quality of life for real bodies and communities rather than simply advance theory, the task is both analytical and prescriptive (cf. Adamo 2015). Accordingly, the essays press the case about how the Bible has to be at home with and within Africa; how the Bible itself ought to become an African document, not simply a foreign object eternally alien to the continent and its readers while permanently residing there as a colonising and imperialising tool. The critical lens of method demystifies and historicizes foundational oppressive binaries, opening up new vectors of social existence and covenanting commitments; and the attentive ear of method and the mapping of some trends amplify the muted voices that have been marginalised or silenced. The methods and trends in ABH around colonial, linguistic, cultural, religious, economic, gendered and political analyses merge in decisive and transformative ways (cf. Dube and Wafula 2017).

As part of this interpretive re-engagement with the alienated and erased Africa, ABH extends itself beyond the continent. Its anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist fervour inevitably compels it to re-engage with Europe, the originating site of colonial trauma. Masiwa R. Gunda and Joachim Kügler's edited volume *The Bible and Politics in Africa* (2012) grew out of intentional collaborative work between African biblical scholars and their European counterparts. The publication of *The Africana Bible* (eds. Page et al. 2010) also constituted part of that endeavour, linking contemporary continental African theologies and hermeneutics with the historic and contemporary African Diaspora. The enormity of the endeavour – in method, content and genre of analysis – crisscrossed several “canonical”



boundaries such as textual, geographical, cultural, methodological, gendered, theological, *et cetera*. In relation to the field of ABH, the Africana Bible represents a textual form of Pan-Africanism, an African biblical hermeneutic that is a communal endeavour and product. It is not just the aggregation of authors that makes the work distinctive and instructive; it is the underlying premise of an Africana identity, dispersed yet connected, that gives the work its place in the ongoing history of ABH. This genre of inter-generational and inter-regional storytelling–interdisciplinary, inter-regional, intercultural, inter-gendered–is particularly useful on/for a continent as immense and diverse as Africa where there is as much postcolonial intracontinental as intercontinental diaspora, both theorised in relation to political governance and corresponding academic ideology (Rugwiji 2014; Ngwa 2015).

## **2. Origins and Contents of our “Pots and Calabashes”**

Three contextual variables inform the preceding analyses and define the ensuing reflections, from which our current engagement with the Bible unfolds. First, widening and deepening the experiences of liberation. The turn of the 21st century represented an important interpretive juncture and context because for the first time in several centuries, all of Africa could officially claim independence and self-determination. This was a watershed reality. Would ABH also fully claim its independence from western methods and priorities? Did the liberation struggles serve more than political ends? Have these struggles also defined the very character and process of ABH? Can we identify new trends in doing ABH? How much more liberation work and methodological refining still need to be done? What about issues of governance? How would ABH change in response to Africa’s self-governance? For one thing, the critical eye and ear of the African biblical interpreter, hitherto directed at colonial ideologies and systems, have now also turned inward to examine the governing infrastructure and ideology of African elites. Urgent matters of communal life – for example, around gender, sexuality and patriarchy – which had been wittingly or unwittingly marginalised during the movements around cultural and political nationalism began to gain much deserved momentum and public recognition. Haunted by memories of the unholy alliance between colonialists, African patriarchy and certain forms of missionary Christianity, and motivated by work on African women’s experiences and priorities (launched by the “Circle” in 1989), ABH entered another phase of its self-definition, purpose and methodological priorities.

A second contextual factor worth considering is the organizational global space of ABH, which emerged with the creation of an ABH section at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). Thereafter, the African biblical and theological intelligentsia had another space (a biblical and institutional space) to gather and debate about Africa – its people, histories, cultures, religions, politics, economics, *et cetera* – and the place of the Bible in that space. As will be explained later, the present volume is a product of sessions from the 2014 SBL meeting in San Diego, California. The SBL's International Meetings have largely taken place outside of the African continent (besides the 2000 meeting in South Africa), but along with the annual meetings, they have attracted significant number of continental and diaspora Africans interested in producing new knowledge on methods and theories of biblical interpretation. These gatherings mean that the context for ABH has expanded – Africa includes its Diaspora, understood not as an interpretive trope signalling endless dispersal but as an embodied presence and reality that contributes to the cultural and intellectual resource and parameters of African identity and interpretive praxis (Wafula and Duggan 2016). This point raises important questions about African home-diaspora (or diaspora-home) epistemologies and dialogues in ABH, about institutional or structural resourcing necessary to enrich and strengthen ABH and equally important, how professionalised and highly technical forms of biblical interpretation and storytelling intersect with what “ordinary” readers of the Bible do (West 2001; 2009; Ukpogong 2002).

Associated with these developments is a third factor – demographic changes. There has been a rapid increase in African migration to Europe, North America and the Middle East in the last few decades. According to a recent Pew Research finding, there were 2.1 million Africans living in the USA in 2015, up from 881,000 in the year 2000 and substantially up from 80,000 in 1970. Thus, in 2015, foreign-born Africans in the United States made up 4.8% of the total population, up from 0.8% in the 1970s. The top ten sending countries are Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Somalia, Morocco, Liberia and Cameroon, in that order.<sup>1</sup> As these migrants maintain strong religious, cultural, political and economic bonds with their sending countries, they constitute a new and rapidly growing segment of African diaspora with deep connections to academic and church institutions. The implications of these developments for ABH are still unfolding and need further theorising. In a way, this demographic shift

---

<sup>1</sup> Online: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/14/african-immigrant-population-in-u-s-steadily-climbs/>.

provides growing empirical evidence for inter-cultural and inter-contextual studies where the theory and praxis of multiple belonging is communally embodied and articulated as part of Africana biblical hermeneutics.

The discussion of context in the preceding paragraphs serves not only as a summarising framework of the trends, themes and methods of ABH in the past two decades, but also as a space in which to situate the contents of the present volume.

The aroma from these interpretive African pots and calabashes attracted Cambridge Scholars Press. Varied in size and content and material make-up and flavour, African pots and calabashes have historically and contemporaneously produced, prepared, served and preserved food and drink to keep its local and global constituents alive and healthy in the midst of enormous financial, political, cultural and methodological challenges. There is always more to the generative artistry, process and content of ABH as well as to its emergence and flourishing across different geographical and institutional spaces. Andrew Mbuvi points out this innovative side of African Biblical Studies which “...refuses to be confined by the methodologies, ancient concerns, and principles that govern biblical studies in the ‘west’...and instead charts a course that is more interested in making biblical interpretation relevant to present realities” (Mbuvi 2017, 1).

In the context of the SBL and in particular of its annual meetings, the Program Unit which came to be known as African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) is fairly new having been formed at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Some of its rich scholarly productions include *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (SBL Publication, edited by Musa W. Dube, 2001) and *Postcolonial Perspectives on Biblical Interpretations* (SBL Publication, edited by Musa W. Dube, Andrew Mbuvi and Dora R. Mbuwayesango, 2012).

*Navigating African Biblical Hermeneutics: Themes and Trends from Our Pots and Calabashes*, continues in the tradition of bringing African interpretive form and content to bear on biblical scholarship. As mentioned above, the form and contents of this volume were thus initially formulated for the 2014 annual meeting of the SBL held in San Diego, CA, U.S.A. Cambridge Scholars Publishing House expressed interest in publishing papers read in the ABH sessions. Four sessions were hosted solely by the ABH and one session was co-hosted with the Pauline Epistles Program Unit. Two of the chapters (by Elna Mouton in Part 3 and Shelly Ashdown in Part 4) emerged from that joint session and reflect the interdisciplinary ethos of ABH.

In this monograph, African scholars from both the African continent and its Diaspora decided in the spirit of African hospitality and communality to

be generous to both their local and global communities. They worked hard to prepare (“cook”) the material in various African pots. Once they were certain that the food was ready for consumption, they dished them accordingly in different calabashes. Cambridge Scholars Press became a willing server (distributor) of the end product - the thoughts and views of Africana scholars on the present methods, trends and themes about African biblical hermeneutics.

ABH recognises that knowledge is not produced in a vacuum or in an objective manner. As an academic quest for meaning, it is able to house all who approach the biblical text with their own unique experiences. ABH seeks to uncover reading practices that include otherwise marginalised and excluded (African) voices, and to argue why such voices should be heard. It is a hermeneutic that seeks to empower the powerless by allowing their unique contributions, which come from unique locations, to count as legitimate while at the same time showing why they are indeed legitimate.<sup>2</sup>

According to David T. Adamo, “African biblical hermeneutic(s) is the principle of the interpretation of the Bible for transformation in Africa” (Adamo 2015, 32). As already noted, it is also clear from the preceding statement that for African biblical scholars, the context(s) of the reading communities become very central in meaning making. Deliberate efforts are thus made to address issues arising from the encounter between the Bible and the culture of its readers (Loba-Mkole 2008:1359). Persuaded that they do not have the luxury to engage with the biblical text from a vacuum (or supposedly neutral stance), the scholars in this volume deliberately bring the experiences, challenges and ingenuities of African people to bear on their theory and praxis of biblical hermeneutics. The words of Teresa Okure come to mind here:

Our contemporary life experiences are not only a valid standpoint for understanding the biblical text. They are the only standpoint we have. Experience is the primary context for doing theology and reading the Bible. Experience here is not feeling, but total emersion in life, being seasoned by life (Okure 2000, 202).

The trends in the volume can be discerned by the reader’s deliberate engagement with the contents of each chapter. The biblical text is thus approached variously by the different authors empirically, socio-rhetorically,

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hans J.M. Van Deventer 2012, “God in Africa, Lost and Found, Lost Again and Found Anew: The Bible in Andre Brink’s *Praying Mantis*,” in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, edited by Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi and Dora R. Mbuwayesango (Atlanta, GA: SBL), 133-153.

gender-sensitively, post-colonially *et cetera*. Various pertinent themes relevant to various African contexts are examined in a deliberate and purposeful way.

The chapters fall within a broad spectrum of methodological approaches and concerns ranging from colonial and postcolonial to gender to socio-rhetorical to cultural to narrative criticisms and more. The chapters are organised and structured into five sections: (1) Methodologies in African Biblical Interpretations; (2) Bible, Power and Wealth in Africa; (3) Sexuality, Masculinities, HIV and AIDS and the Bible in Africa; (4) African Biblical Responses to Global Crises of War and Mass Violence; and (5) Responses to Part 3 and Part 4. Although we are aware of the overlap between the themes addressed in some of the chapters, we have elected to stay with the spirit of the initial grouping in order to achieve the original synergy and unity within the different papers and in particular the main themes within which the specific topics were allocated. In the same vein, we have chosen to keep the sequence and themes from the original presentations in San Diego.

The general thread which ties together the different parts and chapters in this volume is the preoccupation in each scholar's unique way with the Christian Bible and how it is used or can be ethically used to impact issues of major concern to the African peoples. The methodological approaches, attuned to historical and cultural vectors, are nevertheless intentionally contextual and contemporaneous in a twofold manner: The African continent –and her concerns– function as the “space” and as a critical “resource” for engaging with and interpreting the Christian Bible.

### **3. Part 1: Methodologies in African Biblical Interpretations**

In many a context both within and outside of continental Africa where Biblical Studies continues to be offered as a subject in higher education institutions like universities and seminaries, Eurocentric methodologies remain not only entrenched but also celebrated as the norm. Could this prevailing scenario be a reflection of the comfort enjoyed by some African biblical scholars who distance themselves from their African selves? Realising the need for methodologies that would be relevant within various African contexts, methodologies which will enable scholars to teach Biblical Studies and /or Religious Studies in a more efficient and relevant way, ABH is very conscious of the need to develop African-conscious methodologies within the various contexts of Bible interpretation on (and about) the African continent. Hence, ABH has continued efforts to uphold

the tradition of foregrounding methodologies and approaches relevant to showing how Africa's contextual concerns interact with the Bible. Some of the themes addressed in the first section of this book include the need to critique imperialism, but also and more importantly to diagnose and critique both biblical and African patriarchies, while developing epistemological groundings for life-enhancing biblical hermeneutics.

Gender criticism, especially its deliberate foregrounding of African women's experiences, is the focal point of **Chapter 1**. Alice Yafeh-Deigh's "Rethinking Paul's Sexual Ethics within the Context of HIV and AIDS: A Postcolonial Afro-Feminist-Womanist Perspective" explores ways in which the text of 1 Corinthians 7, the paradigmatic and most extended biblical discourse on Christian marriage, sex and sexual ethics could serve as a theological and hermeneutical starting point for thinking about women's susceptibility to the global HIV and AIDS pandemic and issues surrounding women's struggle for health and well-being. In **Chapter 2** "A Gender-sensitive Methodology in African Biblical Interpretation: Insights from the Book of Proverbs," Funlola Olojede shows that the book of Proverbs is commonly regarded as "female friendly" by many feminist biblical scholars. However, she exposes strong undercurrents of masculinities in the Proverbs material, arguing that such undercurrents are also embedded within the African communal view of gender. In **Chapter 3** "The African Bantu Concept of Ubuntu in the Theology and Practice of Bishop Desmond Tutu and Its Implications for African Biblical Hermeneutics," Aloo Mojola explores the African concept of *Ubuntu* as used by the Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. Mojola argues that *Ubuntu* may be employed to respond to urgent and important issues of sexuality, masculinities and HIV and AIDS in varying African contexts.

## **4. Part 2: Bible, Power and Wealth in Africa**

African Christianities and African believers have always grappled with and are fascinated by the link between the Bible, power and (material) wealth. Within African Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianities in particular, it appears that the era is gone when the interaction between the believer, the Bible and the Sacred Other is viewed mainly in terms of the nourishment and the flourishing of the believer's spirit. Prosperity gospel seems to be the order of the day in many African settings. In the process of the search for material power (wealth) through particular biblical hermeneutics, many an unsuspecting victim especially among the poor becomes trapped while the teachers and preachers of such a gospel move

from one level of material power (wealth) to another. Three chapters highlight these issues in this section.

In **Chapter 4**, Robert Wafawanaka's essay "The Bible, Power and Wealth in Africa: A Critique of the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa" highlights the danger of Prosperity Gospel in impoverished and developing contexts in Africa. Wafawanaka portrays Prosperity Gospel as counter to true biblical teaching on material wealth which he understands as holistic wealth initially rooted in an agrarian community but nevertheless applicable to modern urban settings.

In **Chapter 5** "Power, Wealth and the Torah in an African Liberationist Perspective – A Response to Robert Wafawanaka," Ndikho Mtshiselwa responds critically to Wafawanaka's essay. He argues that Exodus 35:4-9, Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 14:28-29 among other Torah texts advocate for the sharing of economic resources between the Levites and the poor. The preceding texts, argues Mtshiselwa, bear liberating possibilities for the poor particularly when read in the context of the economic disparities between wealthy clergy and poor congregants in South Africa.

A few months before the papers in this volume were read in San Diego, a tragedy happened in one of the biggest charismatic churches/ministries, that is, the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN) under the leadership of Prophet T.B. Joshua in Lagos, Nigeria. More than 100 attendees, many of whom visited the church for holistic health and wellbeing (including material prosperity), perished when the building collapsed. In **Chapter 6** titled "From the Blood of Abel to the Blood of Zechariah to the Blood of Victims Who Died at SCOAN: A Critical Reflection," Hulisani Ramantswana, committed to reading the Hebrew Bible ethically, argues that the blood of those who died at SCOAN calls African biblical and religion scholars to examine critically the calamity at SCOAN as a way of granting justice to the innocent who perished in Lagos.

### **5. Part 3: Sexuality, Masculinities, HIV and AIDS and the Bible in Africa**

The pandemic of HIV and AIDS continues to claim many lives on the African continent, particularly south of the Sahara. That the Christian Bible continues to be held in high esteem in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot be disputed. Within various African contexts, the themes of sexuality, masculinities and HIV and AIDS need to be critically addressed by concerned African biblical scholars. The themes in this section focus on the critical intersection of the Bible, sexuality, masculinities and HIV and AIDS in various African institutional and social contexts.

In **Chapter 7** “What of the Problematic Norm? Rereading the Book of Ruth within the Mongo Women’s Context,” Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan’a Mphahlele) and Marthe Maleke Kondemo probe certain problematic ideologies that are embedded in the book of Ruth in relation to the African context (in particular the Mongo Congolese context) which is plagued by HIV and AIDS, hetero-patriarchy and dangerous masculinities. Unsettled by the apparent normativity of heterosexual marriage in the book of Ruth and the harsh reality that in many contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa, heterosexual marriage has become risky in the era of HIV and AIDS, the authors use the experiences of marginalised African women to critically examine the theme of marriage in both the book of Ruth and the Mongo Congolese context.

In **Chapter 8** “Roots of Ensconced Homophobia in Sub-Saharan Africa: Case Studies of the Baganda and Bagisu Communities in Uganda,” Robert Kuloba Wabyanga engages with the controversial topic not only of whether homosexuality is un-African but also of the role of the Bible in the homophobic tendencies prevalent in many African churches and communities. To that end, Wabyanga Kuloba raises the following critical questions: If homosexuality has always been in Africa and in the biblical world, what then is ‘unafican’ and ‘unbiblical’ about homosexuality? How should the African reader of the Bible today respond to the reality of homosexuality and the concepts of inalienable rights in a globalised and hybridised African society?

In **Chapter 9** “Reimagining Household Ethos (in Africa) in Light of the Implied Rhetorical Effect of Ephesians 5:21-33,” Elna Mouton notes that there is a belief that ancient texts have the potential to continue to (re)shape people’s memory, imagination, language and “gender” behaviour in present-day contexts. Such potential is made possible through the transformative encounter between the living God and people (of faith). Thus, the author explores the dynamics in ancient households and in the New Testament household codes in particular, as well as their relevance to faith communities (in Africa) today. Mouton focuses on the proposed world opened up and mediated by the reconfigured household code of Ephesians 5:21-6:9, a text representing a network of relations among household members which ancient (and African) audiences were/are invited to adopt.

## **6. Part 4: African Biblical Responses to Global Crises of War and Mass Violence**

How have historical and contemporary conceptualisations, narrative ideologies, manifestations of and responses to war and violence impacted



biblical scholarship in general and African biblical hermeneutics in particular? Pervasive violence typifies war-ridden contexts on the globe. Parts of the African continent (cf. Nigeria, Egypt, Sudan and Somali, among others) are currently affected by wars. Some of these wars are supported by violent ideologies embedded within various sacred texts, including the Christian Bible. Biblical interpretation emerges in the wake of such violence and includes traumatised survivors of violence.

In **Chapter 10** “Bible after Gunshots: African Biblical Hermeneutics as Postwar Hermeneutics?” Kenneth Ngwa examines the Christian Bible and the gun as twin symbols of power and identity formation in colonial and postcolonial Africa. These twin symbols enable those who employ and deploy them to participate in African necropolitics. That is, users of these tools claim and deploy particular forms of authority to critique, determine or regulate human life itself. Such a life is lived out, argues Ngwa, within histories, cultures and policies that have identifiable economic, political and spiritual practices and legacies that are founded on and related to violence and war. He illustrates this hermeneutic by reading portions of the Exodus story.

In **Chapter 11** “Violence and Lessons that We Never Learn: A Postcolonial Reading of Genesis 18-19,” Robert Wafula asks the following critical questions: Which methodological tools can assist us in appropriating biblical texts to address ethnic violence? Is there any correlative relationship between ethnic violence and biblical texts? Reading Genesis 18-19 through the lens of Edward Said’s orientalism theory, Wafula addresses the preceding questions and argues that crimes against humanity committed through ethnic violence have their basis in ethnic identity construction which feeds on the idea of differentiation to justify violence—an idea rooted in biblical texts.

**Chapter 12** presents Thema Bryant-Davis and Katurah-Cooper’s gender criticism of the Liberian military context. In “Running Head: Sexual Assault in the Liberian Civil War,” these authors utilise feminist theology and feminist psychology as a framework for understanding the experiences of sexual assault survivors in Liberia and feminist cross-border collaborations in West Africa. Employing an empirical study, they successfully enable the readers to have a glimpse of the nature of trauma by the Liberian postwar female victims.

In **Chapter 13**, “The Armour of God (Ephesians 6) in the Worldview of Ndorobo,” Shelley Ashdown contextualises the text of Ephesians 5 on the armour of God within the Ndorobo worldview, asking certain critical questions. What can an audience-centred approach championed in African biblical hermeneutics reveal about Ndorobo’s understanding of spiritual

warfare, a warfare that is consequently lived out in the everyday lives of the Ndorobo people in Tanzania/Kenya? Ashdown argues that behind the tangible articles of swords and shields lies the depth of African wisdom connecting the physical with the non-physical eventually presenting her readers with a unique African reading of the text of Ephesians 6.

## 7. Part 5: Responses to Part 3 and Part 4

This volume forges two kinds of responses –intra-sectional and inter-sectional. The intra-sectional responses unfold in Part 2 where the authors engage with the theme of power, wealth and the Bible in Africa. The inter-sectional response is structured around the themes of gender and sexuality and war and violence and constitute chapters 14 and 15 of this volume. In her response to four essays on gender, sexuality, masculinities and HIV and AIDS within African contexts, in **Chapter 14**, Dorothy Akoto attempts to identify these scholarly endeavours as “hybridized,” “transplanted,” “indigenised” “transactional” and “re-imaging” among others. She also wonders whether these four chapters as well as several other writings that address the themes of Sexuality, Masculinities HIV and AIDS and the Bible in Africa are not mere endorsements of the ideas embedded in the Bible, a book which has since time immemorial been accepted as the “norm.” In responding to the chapters on war and violence, Gilbert Ojwang (**Chapter 15**) examines the role of biblical interpretation in social transformations in Africa. He argues that while religion/biblical interpretation may have contributed to some of the failures of fledgling African democracies, as the authors claim, an interdisciplinary approach which utilises other theories such as political theory is indispensable in accounting for Africa’s struggles or in the case of feminist theology and feminist psychology, in bringing healing to victims of social and political upheavals.

## 8. Conclusion

It matters what Africans read and how they read the Bible. In terms of trends and themes, this volume addresses some of the pressing social, economic, military/violent and religious issues of the day, deploying both analytical and prescriptive skills to interrogate the biblical text, African cultures and practices. The first set of issues rotate around economics and prosperity gospel, gender, sexuality, HIV and AIDS, marriage and masculinity. The second set of issues revolves around governance and politics. At the core of these essays is a deep commitment to wrestling with

the biblical text in search of communal reading strategies that empower the marginalised and seek liberation and overall well-being.

## Bibliography

- Adamo, David Tuesday. 2015. "The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutic(s)." *Old Testament Essays* 28 (1): 31-52.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, Kwabena J. 2012. "Learning to Prosper by Wrestling and by Negotiation: Jacob and Esau in Contemporary African Pentecostal Hermeneutics." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 21: 64-86.
- Brueggemann, Walter. 1997. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.
- Cloete, Daan G. 2004. "Rainbow Hermeneutics on the African Horizon. Relevance of the Epistle to the Galatians." Pages 157-182 in *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics*. Edited by Jesse N. K. Mugambi and Jannie A. Smith. Nairobi: Acton.
- Dube, Musa W. 2000. *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- Dube, Musa W. and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, eds. 2004. *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Dube, Musa W. and R. S. Wafula. 2017. *Postcoloniality, Translation, and the Bible in Africa*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.
- Fabella, Virginia and Oduyoye, Mercy A., eds. 1989. *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Gunda, Masiwa Raiges. 2009. "African Theology of Reconstruction: Painful Realities and Practical Options." *Exchange* 38: 84-102.
- Gunda, Masiwa Raiges and Joachim Kügler, eds. 2012. *The Bible and Politics in Africa*. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press.
- Hinga, Teresia, Anne N. Kubai, Philomena Mwaura and Hazel Ayanga, eds. 2008. *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.
- Katho, Bungishabaku. 2010. "Faire la Theologie de L'Ancien Testament en Afrique Aujourd'hui: Défis et Perspective." *Old Testament Essays* 23 (1): 82-102.
- Lefa, Mapula. 2009. "Reading the Bible amidst the HIV and AIDS Pandemic in Botswana." Pages 285-30 in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest for a Shared Meaning*. Edited by Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.

- Loba-Mkole, Jean. C. 2008. "Rise of Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa." *HTS Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 64: 1347-1364.
- Madubuko, Chijioke John. 2015. *The "Pauline" Spirit World in Eph 3:10 in the Context of Igbo Worldview: A Psychological-hermeneutical Appraisal*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Manus, Chris U. 2003. *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches*. Nairobi: Acton.
- Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), Madipoane. 2005. "The Optimism of the Wise in Africa and in Israel: How Helpful in the Time of HIV/AIDS?" *Old Testament Essays* 18 (2): 296-308.
- . 2006. "Killed by AIDS and Buried by Religion: African Female Bodies in Crisis." *Old Testament Essays* 19 (2): 486-99.
- . 2010. "All from the Same Source? Deconstructing a (Male) Anthropocentric Reading of Job (3) through an Eco-bosadi Lens." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 137: 46-60.
- Mbuvi, Andrew. 2017. "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline." *Currents in Biblical Research* 15 (2): 149-178.
- Mbuwayesango, Dora. R. 2007. "Levirate Marriage and HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe: The Story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38)." *Journal of Constructive Theology* 13 (2): 5-15.
- Mugambi, Jesse N. K. 1995. *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Ngwa, Kenneth. 2015. "The Making of Gershom's Story: A Cameroonian Postwar Hermeneutical Reading of Exodus 2." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134 (2): 899-920.
- Niang, Aliou C. 2009. *Faith and Freedom in Galatia and Senegal: The Apostle Paul, Colonists, and Sending Gods*. Leiden: Brill.
- Oduyoye, Mercy A., and Kanyoro, Musimbi R. A., eds. 1992. *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Okure, Teresa. 2003. "Invitation to African Women's Hermeneutical Concerns." *African Journal of Biblical Studies* 14 (2): 71-95.
- Page, Hugh R. Jr. et al., eds. 2010. *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.
- Phiri, Isabel A. Haddad, Beverly and Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele), Madipoane, eds. 2003. *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.

- Punt, Jeremy. 2004. "Value of Ubuntu for Reading the Bible." Pages 83-111 in *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics*. Edited by Jesse N. K. Mugambi and Jannie A. Smith. Nairobi: Acton.
- Rugwiji, Temba. 2014. "Towards the Quest for Transforming Old Testament Scholarship: The Impact of Political and Socio-Economic Crises on Scholarship in Zimbabwe." *OTE* 27 (3): 1009-1034.
- Ukpong, Justin. 2000. "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108: 3-18.
- . 2002. "Reading the Bible in a Global Village: Issues and Challenges from African Readings." Pages 9-39 in *Reading the Bible in the Global Village*. Edited by Justin S. Ukpong et al. Atlanta, GA: SBL.
- . 2012. "The Parable of the Talents (Matt 25: 14-30): Commendation or Critique of Exploitation: A Socio-Historical and Theological Reading." *Neotestamentica* 46 (1): 190-207.
- Van Deventer, Hans J.M. 2012. "God in Africa, Lost and Found, Lost Again and Found Anew: The Bible in Andre Brink's *Praying Mantis*." Pages 133-153 in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*. Edited by Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi and Dora R. Mbuwayesango. Atlanta, GA: SBL.
- Wafula, R. S. 2015. *Biblical Representations of Moab: A Kenyan Postcolonial Reading*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Wafula, R. S., and Joseph Duggan. 2016. *Knowledge Activism beyond Theory: A Worldwide Call to Action*. Alameda, CA: Borderless Press.
- Waltke, Bruce. 2007. *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- West, Gerald. O. 2001. "Mapping African Biblical Interpretation: A Tentative Sketch." Pages 29-53 in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*. Edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube. Leiden: Brill.
- West, Gerald O. 2005. "Shifting Perspectives on the Comparative Paradigm in (South) African Biblical Scholarship." *Religion & Theology* 12 (1): 48-72.
- . 2009. "Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship." Pages 37-64 in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest for a Shared Meaning*. Edited by Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- . 2016. *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*. Leiden: Brill.

Yafeh-Deigh, Alice. 2015. *Paul's Sexual and Marital Ethics in 1 Corinthians 7: An African-Cameroonian Perspective*. Bible and Theology in Africa 22. New York: Peter Lang.