

**DECOLONIZING AFRICAN BIBLICAL STUDIES**  
**The 7<sup>th</sup> INAUGURAL LECTURES OF**  
**DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY, ABRAKA**

**DELIVERED BY**  
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*The Vice- Chancellor*  
*The Principal Officers*  
*Deans of Faculties*  
*Professors*  
*Archbishops and Bishops*  
*Men and Women of God*  
*The Military Officers*  
*Hon. Commissioners*  
*The Royal Highnesses*  
*The Counselors*  
*Members of Academia,*  
*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen*

**INTRODUCTION**

I give thanks to God for the opportunity to deliver the first inaugural lecture from the Department of Religious Studies, the second in the Faculty of Arts, and the 7<sup>th</sup> in Delta State University, Abraka. I know that the Lord has been good to me because I thought I would have been buried long time ago. I say, חַסְדֵּי יְהוָה כִּי לְעוֹלָם “His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 136).

This title looks ‘some how’ but I deliberately chose it because of my experience during my training and my practice of scholarship. I have chosen this topic as a result of a close examination of my theological training in Nigeria and the United

States. I felt that all the theological training that I received in those universities have great elements of colonization. I felt dissatisfied with the colonization of my thought and the thought of my people and the methods of biblical interpretation imposed on us. During the period of my training, I struggled with this fact and tried to find out ways to make a difference in decolonizing biblical studies in Africa. The process of this did not start until I was at the final stage of my doctoral training. I insisted, despite all threats and rejection, on doing my doctoral research on Africa and Africans in the Old Testament and Its Environment. In my academic career, I have been trying to pursue this aim of decolonizing African biblical studies in Africa.

In this paper therefore, my aim is to demonstrate the ways in which the study of the Bible in Africa has been colonized and various ways of decolonizing African biblical studies. My purpose is also to work out some proposal of how African biblical studies can be decolonized. I also hope to challenge my academic colleagues on the necessity of decolonizing African biblical studies.

## WHAT IS AFRICAN BIBLICAL STUDIES?

Is there any thing that can be distinctively called African Biblical Studies? If so, what is African Biblical Studies? An African biblical study is the biblical interpretation that makes “African social cultural context a subject of interpretation.”<sup>1</sup> It means that an Africa biblical study is contextual since interpretation is always done in a particular context. Specifically, it means that analysis of the text is done from the perspective of African world-view and culture.<sup>2</sup> It is the rereading of the Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Africentric perspective. The purpose is not only to understand the Bible and God in our African experience and culture, but also to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that Eurocentric biblical scholars have long enjoyed.<sup>3</sup> This is a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical tradition and African world-view, culture, and life experience with the purpose of “correcting the effect of the cultural ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected.”<sup>4</sup>

A casual glance at the history of biblical hermeneutics will reveal that there has never been an interpretation that has been

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<sup>1</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2001); Adamo, “African Cultural Hermeneutics,” *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, ed. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 5. Justin Ukpong, “Inculturation Hermeneutics: An African Approach to Biblical Interpretation,” *The Bible in A World Context: An Experiment in Contextual Hermeneutics*, eds. Walter Dietrich and Ulrich Luz (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 17-32.

<sup>2</sup> Adamo, *Explorations in African Biblical Studies* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2001), 6

<sup>3</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, *Explorations in African Biblical Studies*. Yorke calls this “Afrocentric Hermeneutics” which is very legitimate since all interpretations and theologies are perspectival. Gosnell L. Yorke, “Biblical Hermeneutics: an Afrocentric Perspective,” *Journal of Religion and Theology*, vol 2, no 2(1995), 145-158.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

without references to or dependent on a particular cultural code, thought patterns, or social location of the interpreter.<sup>5</sup> There is no individual who is completely detached from everything in his or her environment or experience and culture so as to be able to render one hundred percent objectivity in everything done. The fact is that every interpreter is biased in some ways.<sup>6</sup> What I am trying to say is that there is an African biblical study because persons who are born and raised in African culture will normally interpret scriptures in ways that are unique to them and different from western interpreters. Therefore, to talk of uniform, unconditional, universal, and absolute interpretation or hermeneutics is unrealistic. Such does not exist anywhere in this world. One who interprets tends to bring his or her own bias to bear, consciously or unconsciously, on the way in which the message is perceived.

Like the Third World biblical Hermeneutics, African biblical studies have two main characteristics: It is “liberational, and culturally sensitive.” It also has some other methodological characteristics such as narration, orality, theopoetic, and imagination. What it does is that it uses liberation as a crucial hermeneutics and mobilizes indigenous cultural materials for theological enterprises.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the Eurocentric interpreters’ claims to universality, the African biblical study is “postmodern, post colonial in its aim to celebrate the local,” and challenge the reigning imported western theories. The African biblical studies, using African cultural hermeneutics, is hardly known, heard and acceptable in western academies because such African modes of interpretation “seek to acquire and celebrate their God-giving identity by delving into their indigenous resources and rejecting the

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<sup>5</sup>George Mulrain, “Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context,” *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, 116-132.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>R.S.Sugirtharajah, “Vernacular Resurrections: An Introduction,” *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, (ed.) R.S Sugirtharajah,, 11.

superintending tendencies of western intellectual tradition.”<sup>8</sup> This is not popular in western tradition, not because it is incomprehensible, untranslatable to indigenous languages, but because they employ the ground rules, which differ from the normal western rules set by the Eurocentric academy. They address issues closer home to their own people.<sup>9</sup> What they did was that they “learnt and borrowed ideas and techniques from external resources but reshaped them, often added their own indigenous texture, to meet their local needs.”<sup>10</sup>

In African biblical studies, God is not considered a one-way track God. His mode of revelation to the world cannot be limited. God is perceived differently, depending on who you are and where you are. We are made differently. What makes sense to one person may not make sense to another. The real issue therefore, is how to use our finite human knowledge and experience, and communication to speak about God who is all embracing. The fact is that no one has yet been able to invent such language to encapsulate God’s completeness.<sup>11</sup> It looks like an impossible task, but we must keep on trying.

In African biblical studies, the Christian Bible is crucial, since this is the book or collection of books that contributes towards a disclosure about the nature of God. The fact of different translations, and versions within these translations illustrates that there are differences of interpretations as far as biblical studies and message are concerned.<sup>12</sup> The contention is that in Africa, some distinctive interpretation of scripture has emerged and is emerging. This is called African cultural hermeneutics.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. “Thinking about Vernacular Hermeneutics Sitting in a Metropolitan Study,” *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, 108

<sup>11</sup>George Mulrain, “Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context, *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, 117-121.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Most African biblical scholars are trained in the West. Those who are even trained in African higher institutions are trained and are still being trained in the Western tradition. After going back to Africa those of us who were trained in the western tradition soon discovered that the very western methodological tradition to which we were well schooled did not satisfy the need in Africa. The result of this is to find other satisfactory ways or methodologies that will meet the need and the understanding of African people at home and abroad. It is therefore very remarkable that African biblical scholars have tried to “forge a biblical interpretation strategy that is significantly different from that of the western interpretation.”<sup>13</sup> This concerns relating specific biblical issues to the situation in Africa.<sup>14</sup> This method is different from the western methodology in that the particular focus is not only the historical and literary context of the passage read, but also African context. Although western critical tools and training are used, the context and the conclusion arrived at are always different from that of the western scholarship.

In these African biblical methods, there are various methods employed to achieve this purpose. These methods are “Comparative studies, Evaluative studies, African presence in the Bible, Inculturation, Liberation, Black theology, and Feminist Hermeneutics.”<sup>15</sup> Several terms then appear synonymous to the method of African biblical studies: inculturation Hermeneutics,<sup>16</sup> liberation hermeneutics,<sup>17</sup> contextual hermeneutics,<sup>18</sup> Africentric

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<sup>13</sup>Justin S. Ukpong, “Can African Old Testament Scholarship escape the historical critical approach?” *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship*, Knut Holter (ed.), no 7, (1999), 2.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>16</sup> Justin Ukpong, “Re-reading the Bible,” 6.

<sup>17</sup> Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation- Model of Reading the Bible in South African Context*, monograph Series no.1, (Pietermaritzburgh, South Africa, Cluster Publications, 1991).

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

hermeneutics,<sup>19</sup> and vernacular hermeneutics.<sup>20</sup> From the above, African biblical studies is not done in absolute exclusion of western biblical methodology. It can be complimentary.

### **Conditions for African Biblical Studies**

In my book, *Exploration in African Biblical Studies*, I suggested five main conditions for practicing African biblical studies successfully.<sup>21</sup>

1. The interpreter must be an insider. This means that the would-be interpreter must either be an African or live and experience all aspects of African life in Africa. It is difficult to do African biblical studies without living in Africa and going through, the joy, problems of poverty, ethnicity, hunger, communalism and other palatable and unpalatable aspects of the African culture.

2. He or she must be immersed in the content of the Bible. It is not enough just to know the contents; it is absolutely necessary to believe the stories and the event of the Bible as a life of faith. In other words, the biblical events are reflections of our own present individual and communal life. The interpreter must be a person of faith. There must be a firm belief in the power of God's word.

3. Understanding African indigenous culture is absolutely important in doing African biblical studies. This is because African culture is part and parcel of African cultural hermeneutics. Despite the semblance in the biblical and African cultures, there are still some distinct aspects of African culture. These distinctive aspects of African culture influence or dominate the interpretation of the Bible.

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<sup>19</sup> Yorke, "Biblical Hermeneutics..," 142-158

<sup>20</sup> R.S Sugirtharajah, (ed) *Vernacular Hermeneutics*.

<sup>21</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, *Exploration in African Biblical Studies* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock Publishers, 2001).

4. Faith in God who is all-powerful is an important condition for African biblical studies. This faith in God is not only in his existence but also in his absolute power to do and to undo. He is in control and he performs miracles at will. This God can use any means to heal, protect, and bring success in all life's endeavour.

5. Ability to read or memorize the words of the Bible is important. The interpreter may not necessarily be a scholar of the Bible. Some of the evangelists in Africa are illiterate, yet they use the word of God to perform miracles and wonders in Africa. Some blind evangelists have the ability and good memories to memorize the Bible. They have also used the words of God to achieve great things in Africa.

#### **COLONIZATION OF AFRICAN BIBLICAL STUDIES**

Whenever one thinks of colonization, what come to mind are the partition of Africa and the eventual physical conquest of the continent. Modern imperialism has to do with market inequality among the Third World people and the Western people, foreign aid as weapon for colonization, debt domination, political repression and state terror, globalization and others.<sup>22</sup> As far as I understand, colonialism is not limited to the partition of Africa and the eventual domination of the entire continent by the European nations; it includes the colonization of our thought and the entirety of our way of life.

Our concern however, is the discussion of how African biblical studies has also been colonized in various ways

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Parenti, *Against Empire* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995), 18-35.

R.S Sugirtharajah<sup>23</sup> listed and discussed various marks of colonial biblical interpretation.

1. Inculcation, that is, “the use of the Bible as a vehicle for inculcating European manners.”
2. Encroachment, that is, “the introduction to the ‘other’ of alien values, under the guise of biblicalization,” in order to repudiate the local culture which is considered incapable of transmitting Christian truths.
3. Displacement, that is, the displacement of local culture.
4. Analogies and implication, that is, the juxtaposition of biblical and secular history as weapon against those who resisted colonial intervention. The Bible stories were read to justify the cruelty and suffering caused by violent invasion of the Europeans.
5. The textualization of the Word of God, that is, the idea that no religious teaching was any value except it is in written form. This is in order to discredit the oral tradition of the local people.
6. The Historicization of faith, that is, the affirmation of biblical religion as a historical faith.

Although I believe that whatever mistakes the early missionaries have made, God has used them to bless Africa, it seems to me that one of the ways by which African biblical studies was colonized is through the establishment of Bible colleges and Seminaries throughout the continent of Africa.

My candid opinion is that colonization of biblical studies began with the establishment of Bible Colleges and seminaries, the establishment of universities in Africa by the missionaries. These Bible Colleges and Seminaries became places where priests, pastors, and evangelist were trained. During the early period the teachers in these colleges were missionaries from the Western world. Their methods of teaching were western. In their enthusiasm to teach students how to communicate the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, they also taught western culture and ways of

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<sup>23</sup> *The Bible and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 61-73.

life. All students must learn how to interpret the Christian scripture the way it is interpreted in the West. African culture and religion were not important and therefore were not taught to the students. I will like to illustrate this fact with my eight years' experience in the Bible College and Seminary in Nigeria between 1968 and 1977.

Throughout my years in the Bible College and Seminary in Nigeria I cannot remember courses in African culture and religion. The only course in African indigenous religion was taught with the main purpose of showing how heathenistic and useless the African religion and cultures are. When I first entered the Bible college in 1968 I was taught how to sit on the toilet cosmos, how to use toilet papers, how to dress like Americans and even how to use spoons and forks on the dining table. But not any atom of the value of African culture was taught. By the time I graduated, I had learned to interpret the Bible the American way. I preach the Bible the American ways, and in fact tried to talk, walk, eat and do everything the American way. More importantly I learned how to condemn African culture and religion perfectly well because I was taught that they were not valuable.

In Africa, and right from the beginning, the interpretation of the Bible took place in the "religious room." Up till today, the Bible is read and interpreted within the institutionalized realms of synagogues, churches, and mostly interpreted in such a way related to the agenda of a particular denomination that directly or indirectly are still being controlled by the West.<sup>24</sup>

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Bible has been read and interpreted in seminaries and universities with departments of religious studies in the tradition of western scholarship. Even in our universities,

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Getui, Knut Holter, and Victor Zinkuratire, "The Current State of Old Testament Scholarship in Africa: Where Are We at the Turn of the Century?" in *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 32. See also, Holter, *Yahweh in Africa: Issues in Africa and the Old Testament* (New York, Washington, Peter Lang, 2000).

especially the Departments of Religious Studies in Africa, our curriculum betrays us as still being slaves to the tradition of western biblical scholarship. In other words, in our interpretative mode, we are still colonized. Throughout my eight years in Bible College and seminary in Africa, no one taught me the fact that Africans were present in the Bible.

In 1960, there were only six universities and very few seminaries in the whole continent of Africa.<sup>25</sup> Edward G. Newing conducted a survey of how Old Testament research was conducted at this period throughout Africa and found that most institutions employed the method of higher critical approaches developed in the western tradition.<sup>26</sup> The universities and theological institutions at that time were parallel to those of the West. Most of these universities and seminaries did not offer postgraduate level training in religious studies. To pursue postgraduate work at that time meant, in most cases, going to Europe and USA. As a result, most African scholars between 1960s and 70s got their masters and Ph.D degrees in Western institutions. University of Ibadan, Ibadan, and University of Nigeria, Nsukka, were the first universities that initiated a postgraduate programme in religious studies. The first Ph.D in biblical studies was awarded in early 1980s. (see Holter for the analysis of the Ph.Ds). Although by the 1980s and 1990s the establishment of universities and theological institutions increased (more than one hundred universities and one thousand seminaries by the end of 1990s), yet most of these universities and seminaries have no postgraduate programmes in biblical studies and that is why much of the training continued to take place in Europe and America.<sup>27</sup> Still it is interesting to know that the overseas training of African biblical intellectuals overseas followed ecclesiastical (Catholic students go to Rome,

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<sup>25</sup> Knut Holter, *Yahweh in Africa: Essays on Africa and the Old Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> E.G Newing “ A study of Old Testament Curricula in Eastern and Central Africa,” *Africa Theological Journal* 3 (1970), 80-98.

<sup>27</sup> Knut Holter, *Yahweh in Africa*, 15.

Evangelicals to USA and Britain), historical and politico-colonial lines (Great Britain, France, Belgium, and USA who are former colonial and neo-colonial masters).<sup>28</sup>

In fact, it is unfortunate that up till now there has not been any outstanding center for biblical studies to boast of in Black Africa. The bitter truth is that the training of African scholars in a context that is both culturally and scholarly non-African is gradually becoming a problem. A non-African colleague, Professor Knut Holter, points out these problems:

.....it is increasingly being experienced as a problem that the training is given in a context that both culturally and scholarly is non-African. One result of this is that questions emerging from cultural and social concerns in African only to some extent are allowed into the interpretation of the OT. As a consequence, there is a gap between the needs of ordinary African Christians for modes of reading the OT, and the modes provided by scholars trained in the western tradition of biblical scholarship. Another result of the location of the training outside Africa is a feeling, at least in some cases, of inferiority vis-à-vis the massive western tradition. This might eventually lead some scholars to neglect their African context, and instead see '[...] themselves as ambassadors of Cambridge, Oxford, [the] Tübingen school etc.'<sup>29</sup>

With the above situation what appears to be the only available alternative is to send the would-be scholars to universities and seminaries in the West for biblical training. The majority of eminent African biblical scholars that we have today are trained in the western institutions where they were trained in Eurocentric approach to biblical studies.

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<sup>28</sup> Knut Holter, *Yahweh in Africa*, 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> Knut Holter, *Yahweh in Africa*, 16; see J.S Ukpog, "Rereading the Bible with African Eyes," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995) 3-14; see also S.O Abogunrin, "Biblical Research in Africa," *Africa Journal of Biblical Studies* 1/1 (1986) 13.

Although one appreciates the opportunity to study in many of these great western universities and seminaries, one thing is certain, the overseas training in biblical studies and theology is one of the ways by which African biblical scholars have been colonized. By the time we graduated we became expert Eurocentric interpreters of the Bible. By the time we came back to our institutions at home, we spread the good news of Eurocentric biblical interpretation. They taught pastors, priests and other leaders in the church the Eurocentric method and these pastors, priests and leaders passed them to their congregations. All the pastors, priests, their congregations, other leaders and biblical teachers became colonized with Eurocentric methods of biblical interpretation. (I am one of the beneficiaries of these colonizations but I am grateful to God and to the missionaries).

Consciously and unconsciously, the establishment of churches became another means of colonizing Africans. As discussed above, the African biblical scholars who are immersed in Eurocentric approach to biblical interpretation and therefore colonized, passed on the colonization to pastors and priests and other leaders. They then passed it on to their congregations who look for converts not only to Christianity but also to Eurocentric Christianity. That is why the congregation method of Bible studies remain Eurocentric. One should not be surprised that immediately one teaches a different method of biblical studies, such as Africentric methodology in biblical studies, one is labeled an infidel. Such Africentric method is out rightly rejected. To think and interpret Africentrically has become a problem because we have been thoroughly Eurocentrically schooled.

Another major means of colonization of African biblical studies is the absolute domination of the field of biblical studies by Eurocentric scholars. Eurocentric scholars who write Eurocentrically write most of the commentaries, Bible Introductions, Bible Atlases, History of Ancient Israel, and Major Bible Translations that we use in universities and seminaries all over the world. Not only are they Eurocentric in their approach to

biblical scholarship, they feverishly attempt to deAfricanize the Bible. Yet, that is what we read and consume in our universities and seminaries. (see *Stony the Road we Trod*). These authors write with scholastic prejudice and hold tenaciously to the conception that the Eurocentric methods of biblical interpretation are “the interpretation.” It is therefore superior and universal. This also has led to using Eurocentric criteria as a yardstick for judging all Africentric materials. As a result, the major publishers in religion in the western world rejected our manuscripts for publication. They also rejected most of our manuscript with the pretence that there will be no market for them when published. For example, in 1989, I sent an article on African Presence in the Bible to a reputable journal, and in return, I was accused of trying to “smuggle Africa and Africans into the Bible.” Also in 2001, a reputable publisher refused to publish my book manuscripts for the reason that there will be no market for it in the western world and that Africans do not buy many books. Perhaps many of you will have similar stories to tell. I have deliberately invited Faith Victory Church choir (Bishop C. Diolu, Pastor) to sing a decolonized song. Before we go further, let us listen to another decolonized song by my congregation (DELSU Interdenominational Chapel), who gives me the opportunity to minister to them every Sunday.

## **DECOLONIZING AFRICAN BIBLICAL STUDIES**

Having discussed above what African biblical studies is and the various means by which African biblical studies have been colonized, let us discuss the more important section of this paper-DECOLONIZATION. Admittedly, there is what we call African biblical studies, and African biblical study has been colonized. How then do we decolonize African biblical studies?

First, African Biblical scholars must continue to write and publish despite the rejection that we constantly face. We must attend conferences at home and abroad. Second, and more

importantly, we should in our African biblical studies, employ African cultural hermeneutics, or inculturation hermeneutics which include all the various approaches to African biblical studies, namely, African comparative, evaluative, African-in-the-Bible, the Bible as power, African bibliographical, and contextual/reading with the ordinary people approaches.<sup>30</sup>

### *African Comparative Approach*

What is African comparative approach to biblical studies? African comparative approach to biblical studies is the comparison of the Old and New Testament with African culture and religion. The field of Eurocentric comparative biblical studies has been dominated by the comparison of biblical materials with the culture and religion of Ancient Near East. While African biblical studies include a comparison of the biblical materials from the Ancient Near East, emphasis and concentration is on African culture and religion, such as African literature, archaeology, and the entirety of African tradition. It includes some element of critical evaluation of both African culture and the Old Testament. Real hermeneutics of suspicion is at work. After comparing African culture and Christianity or the Old and New Testaments, the relevance of African culture to the study of the Bible or the relevance of the Bible to African culture is added to the comparison. I have done some substantial writing using the African comparative approach. In 1989 I wrote, “Understanding Genesis Creation Account in An African Background,” and “Deuteronomic Conception of God According to Deuteronomy 6:4 in an African Context.”<sup>31</sup> In 1997 I also published “Peace in the Old Testament and in the African

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<sup>30</sup> Adamo, “The Historical Development of Old Testament Interpretation in Africa,” *Old Testament Essay* 16/1 (2003), 9-33.

<sup>31</sup> *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 10 no 2 (Sept. 1989), 17-25; *Bible Bashayam* (1992), 55-64).

Heritage.”<sup>32</sup> There are also few other examples of African comparative studies, which were only presented in theses and dissertations but were not vigorously pursued thereafter.<sup>33</sup>

### ***African Bibliographical Studies***

African bibliographical study is the study of collection of published and unpublished articles, books, and monographs, dissertations that deal with African contextual studies. Prof. Samuel Abogunrin of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan lamented, “As late as 1987, there is no center of Biblical Studies in Africa South of the Sahara,” and of course, up till today, there is still none, not to talk of a center for African Biblical Studies. Non African Africanist biblical scholars, Prof. Knut Holter and Grant LeMarguand of the School of Theology, Stavanger, Norway, and Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania, USA, did most of the few bibliographical studies in the area of biblical studies respectively. As far as I know Prof. Holter was the first scholar to publish extensive studies on African Bibliographical Studies. He published, *Tropical Africa and the Old Testament: A Selected and*

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<sup>32</sup> In *The Bible in African Christianity* eds. Hannah Kinoti and John Waliggo (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Press, 1997), 99-111.

<sup>33</sup> Samson Njuguna Gitau wrote in 1994, “A comparative Study of the Transmission, Actualization and Stabilization of Oral Traditions: An Examination of Traditions of Circumcision in Africa and Ancient Israel.” John Ademola Aworinde wrote in 1997 “A Comparative Analysis of Destiny in the Old Testament and in Yoruba Philosophy of Life.” Robert Wafawanaka, “Perspectives on the Problem of Poverty in traditional Africa and in Ancient Israel.” Raphael Winston Kawale also wrote “God and Nature in Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Chewa Cosmogony.” Edwin Zulu, “A Ngoni assessment of the Role of Ancestors within Israelite World-views and Religion in Genesis 11:28–50:26.” Shola Ademiluka, wrote a doctoral thesis in 1998, “The Genesis Accounts of Creation and the Fall in an African Setting.”

*Annotated Bibliography and Old Testament Research for Africa.* Grant LeMarquand also published an outstanding bibliographical work (containing 167 pages) in *The Bible in Africa* with the title, "A Bibliography of the Bible in Africa."<sup>34</sup>

### ***Evaluative Approach***

Evaluative approach refers to essays on books produced by Africans or non-African biblical scholars for the purpose of criticizing the work of African Old Testament scholars. This criticism may be constructive, negative, or both. Somebody said that if one does not want to be criticized such a person should not publish. For progress, correction, and readjustment in African biblical scholarship, there is a need for evaluation of our work. Some scholars stand out in their evaluation and criticism of the work of African Old Testament scholars. Dr. Knut Holter and his student Marta Holland seem to be at the forefront of such work. He discussed the thematic, institutional, and contextual perspectives in African Old Testament Studies, he also decried the marginalization of African Old Testament scholars. He emphasized that Western Old Testament scholars have something to learn from African Old Testament scholars.<sup>35</sup> In the process of appraising my work, he believes that I am the "most productive" African Old Testament scholar in sub-sahara Africa. He criticized my rendering Cush as

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<sup>34</sup> *The Bible in Africa*, 633-800

<sup>35</sup> See his articles, "The Current State of Old Testament Scholarship in Africa: Where Are We at the Turn of the Century?" in Knut Holter, Mary Getui, and Victor Zinkuratire, Eds, *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 27-39; Knut Holter, "Old Testament Scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa," "It's not Only a Question of Money! African Old Testament Scholarship between the Myths and Meanings of the South and the Money and Methods of the South," "The Institutional Context of Old Testament Scholarship in Africa," and "Popular and Academic Contexts for Biblical Interpretation in Africa," in *Yahweh in Africa*.

Africa. Like other Western biblical scholars, he thinks that some Cush passages should not be translated as Africa.<sup>36</sup>

Marta Hoyland Lavik, is not less critical of any other work either. She wrote a critique of my publications for her master's dissertation (unfortunately I could not read the thesis since it was written in Norwegian language). However, she wrote some articles "The 'African' Texts of the Old Testament and Their African Interpretations,"<sup>37</sup> and "An African Presence in the Old Testament? David Tuesday Adamo's interpretation of the Old Testament *Cush* passages."<sup>38</sup>

After summarizing and presenting the work of "four contrasting scholars"- E. Mveng, G.A Mikre-Selassie, Sempore and David Adamo and crediting me with the honor of "probably being the African scholar who has made the single most important contribution to the field" of African presence in the Old Testament, she saw the possible "danger in" my interpreting some biblical texts existentially since it "may potentially divorce us from the original historical setting of the text."<sup>39</sup> She thinks that there should be more emphasis on the negative roles of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup>

These criticisms are valuable in that they call our attention to opinions of other scholars. These criticisms do not only help us to know the area for further research, they assist us to know how

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<sup>36</sup> Knut Holter, "Should Old Testament Cush Be Rendered 'Africa'?" in *Yahweh in Africa*, 107-114. Despite his criticism, I certainly believe that his interest in African Old Testament scholarship, and his publication has done more service to African Old Testament, especially as he spends his energy in bringing African Old Testament scholarship to the attention of the Old Testament Scholars in the Western World.

<sup>37</sup> *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, 43-54.

<sup>38</sup> *Old Testament Essays*, 11 (1998), 50-58.

<sup>39</sup> Marta Hoyland Lavik, "The 'African' Texts of the Old Testament and their African Interpretations" *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, 50. She is a doctoral student at School of Mission and Theology, at Stavanger, Norway.

<sup>40</sup> *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, 50.

other Western Old Testament scholars who are concerned about African Old Testament scholarship, understand us.

***“Reading with the Ordinary Readers” Approach.***

This is one of the latest approaches to African Biblical Studies championed by two African biblical scholars-Professors Gerald West, a South African, and Justin Ukpong, a Nigerian. They advocate doing biblical studies with the ordinary people. By ordinary people, they mean, the poor, the oppressed, the underprivileged, and the untrained in the art of biblical interpretation. Professor Ukpong calls this reading “Inculturation Hermeneutics.”<sup>41</sup> Gerald West calls this a “contextual Bible reading.”<sup>42</sup> This hermeneutics is contextual in nature and it “seeks to make any community of ordinary people and their socio-cultural context the *subject* of interpretation of the Bible.”<sup>43</sup> What this means is those biblical scholars sit down with untrained biblical scholars and study the Bible without directing the reading. It means that the reading agenda becomes that of the community. The trained biblical scholars do not control the reading process.<sup>44</sup> Instead, the trained biblical scholars read as part of the community. They only facilitate the reading process. These hermeneutical tools include African socioreligious and cultural institutions, thought system, and practices, African oral narrative genre, and African arts and symbols. The interpretation therefore, reflects their concerns, values, and interests. One of the advantages of this reading is that it does not only create critical reading masses but

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<sup>41</sup> “Inculturation Hermeneutics: An African Approach to Biblical Interpretation, Walter Dietrich and Ulrich Luz, *The Bible in a World Context: An Experiment in Contextual Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids:Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 17-32.

<sup>42</sup> *The Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Ukpong, *The Bible in the World Context*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Ukpong, *The Bible in the World Context*, 21.

also builds “the community of faith that reads the Bible critically.”<sup>45</sup>

This approach is one of the hermeneutics that Western readers can also learn from their African counterpart. This is because many ordinary people read the Bible more than the scholars. If the Western academic readers refuse to learn this African method, the Bible would eventually become meaningless for the ordinary people, as it now seems to be in most part of Europe and North America.

### ***The Bible As Power Approach***

One of the most important ways of decolonizing African biblical studies is the use of the Bible as power approach in our research. This is an important development in African Cultural Hermeneutics. This is an “existential” and “reflective” approach to the interpretation of the Bible. Unlike the Eurocentric conservative biblical scholars who were preoccupied with the subject of inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, African Christians believe and respect the Bible without any attempt to defend it and apologize for it. The Bible, to African Christians, is the Word of God and is powerful. Such is its claims in Hebrew 4:12:

Ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐνεργῆς καὶ  
τομώτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον καὶ  
διϊκνούμενος ἄχρι μερισμοῦ ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος,  
ἄρμῶν τε καὶ μυελῶν, καὶ κριτικὸς ἐνθυμήσεων καὶ  
ἐννοιῶν καρδίας

#### *Translation*

For the word of God is QUICK, and POWERFUL,  
and SHARPER than any two-edged sword, piercing

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<sup>45</sup> Ukpog, *The Bible in the World Context*, 22.

even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the hearts.

The Bible is not only powerful; its power is relevant to everyday life of Africans.<sup>46</sup> The Bible is used as a means of protection, healing and success. This method is mostly prevalent among the African Indigenous Churches in Africa and the Diaspora. They recognize that many of the Eurocentric biblical interpretation and theologies nourished in the Western biblical intellectualist context had no root in the life of Africans. They, therefore, had to find their own African indigenous churches that would meet the needs of the African community. They made the Bible relevant to the African communities by employing African culture in their interpretation of the Bible. Our studies have revealed that African Indigenous churches have used the Bible as the WORD OF GOD and recognized the power inherent in it.

Scholars, include myself, have employed these methods in their interpretation of the Bible,<sup>47</sup> I have published the following articles and books that reflect such studies. “African Cultural Hermeneutics,”<sup>48</sup> “The Use of Psalms in African Indigenous

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<sup>46</sup> Zabulum Nthaburi and Douglas Waruta, “Biblical Hermeneutics in African Instituted Churches,” in *The Bible in African Christianity* edited by Hanna Kinoti and John Waliggo (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Press, 1997), 40-57. See also D.T. Adamo, “The Use of Psalms in African Indigenous Churches, *The Bible in Africa; Reading and Intepreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches*; “The Distinctive Use of Psalms in Africa,” *Malenesian Journal of Theology*, vol. 9:2 (1993), 94-111.

<sup>47</sup> Musa Gaiya published an article “The Bible in Aladura Churches” in 1991. Shola Ademiluka also wrote an article in 1995 titled, “The Use of Therapeutic Psalms in Inculturating Christianity in Africa.” In 1997 Nahashon Ndungu wrote, “The Bible in an African Independent Church,” Zablon Nthamburi and Douglas Waruta also I have made some important contribution in this area of the Use of the Bible as power. My emphasis is the existential use of the Bible to solve everyday problems, namely for healing, protection, and success in life.

<sup>48</sup> *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, edited by Surgitherajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 67-91.

Churches in Nigeria,”<sup>49</sup> and “The Use of Medicine in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria,”<sup>50</sup> and Distinctive Use of Psalms in African Independent Churches in Nigeria.<sup>51</sup> I have also published *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches*,<sup>52</sup> and *Exploration in African Biblical Studies*,<sup>53</sup> and “Psalms,” Global Bible Commentary.<sup>54</sup>

At this point I want to demonstrate how the Bible is used as power. The Africentric interpretation of the book of Psalms will be used in this example. The book of Psalms is classified as protective, therapeutic, and success Psalms.

### **Protective Use of Psalms.**

#### ***Protection in African Indigenous Culture.***

The existence of evil ones is painfully real in African indigenous tradition. Witches, sorcerers, wizards, evil spirits and all ill wishers are considered enemies. The consciousness of the existence of these enemies is a major source of fear and anxiety in the African indigenous society. Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, there is a belief that every person has an enemy, known or unknown. The activities of such enemies can be deadly. Let me share with you a confession of one enemy call witch:

We drink human blood in the day or  
night....  
We can prevent a sore from healing;  
We can make a person to loose a large sum  
of money;

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<sup>49</sup> *The Bible in Africa*, 336-349.

<sup>50</sup> *Journal of Urgent Anthropological Research*, Vienna, Austria, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, Vol.9 No 2 (1993), 94-111.

<sup>52</sup> (Eugene, OR: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> (Eurgene, OR.: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> (Abingdon Press, 2004).

We can reduce a great man to nothing;  
We can send a small child to heaven  
suddenly;  
We can cause a woman to bear born-to-die  
children (*abiku*).<sup>55</sup>

The belief in enemies as the main sources of all evil and bad occurrences is so strong that nothing happens naturally without a spiritual force behind it. The African ways of dealing with such enemies is to learn some “potent words” (the so-called incantation) and/or medicine to deal with such enemies. There is a strong belief in the power of words if spoken correctly, in the correct place at the correct time. Such words in Yoruba tradition are called *ogede*. A perfect example of the type of “potent words” used among the Yoruba society to make a sorcerer lose his or her senses is stated below:

Igbagbe se oro ko lewe (3times)  
Igbagbe se afomo ko legbo (3 times)  
Igbagbe se Olodumare ko ranti la ese pepeye (3 times)  
Nijo ti pepeye ba daran egba igbe hoho ni imu bo 'nu  
Ki igbagbe se lagbaja omo lagbaja ko maa wogbo lo  
Tori t 'odo ba nsan ki iwo ehin moo

### *Translation*

Due to forgetfulness the oro (cactus) plant  
has no leaves (3 times)  
Due to forgetfulness the *Afomo*  
(mistletoes) plant has no roots (3 times)  
Due to forgetfulness god did not  
remember to separate the toes of the duck  
(3 times).  
When the duck is beaten it cries, hoho

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<sup>55</sup> P.A Dopamu, *Esu: The Invisible Foe of Man* (Ijebu-Ode: Shebiotimo Publications, 1986), 57.

May forgetfulness come upon (name the enemy), the son/daughter of (name the mother); that is, may he lose his senses.  
That he or she may enter into the bush  
Because a flowing river does not flow backward.

The above “potent words” are “performative words” that can be repeated two, three or more times without any addition. They attain the desired effect.

### ***Identification of Protective Psalms***

African Indigenous Christians sought vigorously for those hidden treasures in the missionary religion that was hidden from them. They sought it in the Bible in their own way and in their own culture. Using African cultural hermeneutics to interpret the Bible, they found that there are secret powers in the Bible, especially in the book of Psalms. As African Christians sought the Bible to find potent words for protection against perennial problem of witches and all forces of evil, they suddenly discovered some words in the book of Psalms that resemble the ones used in African tradition against enemies. They discovered that the words of these Psalms are not only potent, they are also performative, they lent themselves to imprecatory use like that of African tradition. They identified Psalms 5, 6, 28, 35, 37, 54, 55, 83, 109 as protective Psalms. Some of them are imprecatory by contents:

Make them bear their guilt O God;  
Let them fall by their own counsels,  
because of their many transgressions  
.....All my enemies shall be shamed  
and sorely troubled; they shall turn  
back and be put to shame in a moment (RSV. 5.10).

Sometimes the Psalmists invoke death to come upon their enemies. Psalm 55:15, 23 say:

Let death come upon them;  
Let them go down to Sheol alive;  
Let them go away in terror into their grave....  
(they) shall not live out half their days (RSV).

They regarded these Psalms as Psalms for protection against enemies since the recitation make them “die by their own evil deeds.”<sup>56</sup> This Psalm should be read everyday. The holy name of God *Jah* should also be pronounced after each reading of the Psalm. The belief in God's saving grace is important as one reads this Psalm. It will protect a person against the plan of enemies. They will perish by their own evil deeds.

In African context, Psalm 35 is used to drive away evil plans of enemies and especially witches and evil men. Read this Psalm in conjunction with prayers between midnight and three O'clock in the night in the open air while the reader is naked. As in Yoruba tradition, Psalms are also made into amulets to be worn around the neck or around the body. Some prophets of the indigenous churches prescribed some Psalms for protection; prevention of flood catastrophes, fire disasters, protection of soldiers in the battlefield, police officers, and hunters. Psalm 60 is one of the Psalms prescribed for such people and should be read with the name *Jah*.<sup>57</sup>

### **Therapeutic Use of Psalms.**

Before the advent of Christianity and western medicine, Africans had developed certain effective ways of rescuing

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<sup>56</sup> Chief J,O Ogunfuye, *The Secrets of the Uses of Psalms* (Ibadan: Ogunfuye Publication, n.d), 37

<sup>57</sup>J.A Bolarinwa, *Potency and Efficacy of Psalms* (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press, n.d), 8. See also David T Adamo, “The Use of Psalms in Africa,” *The Bible in Africa*.

themselves from various types of diseases. These ways include the use of herbs, powerful, mysterious or potent words, animal parts, living and non-living things, water, fasting, praying, laying of hands, and other rituals for restoration of the disharmony among people and the environment. There are various examples of potent words or performative words for healing in African tradition. One example is:

Oorun lode l'alamu wonu,  
Oorun kuju alaamu jade (7 times)

*Translation:*

When the sun is hot the female lizard  
disappears (7 times).  
When the sun softens, the female lizard appears.<sup>58</sup>

These are potent words for headaches. Important potent words for a pregnant woman for a safe delivery are:

Kankan l'ewe ina njomo  
Kan kan ni ki lagbaja omo lagbaja  
bi mo re loni  
Konu koho ki roju ti fifi aso re toro  
Ki lagbaja omo lagbaja a ma  
roju ti ofi bi omo re loni.

*Translation*

The leave of *ina* burns in haste  
(name the labouring woman)  
the daughter of (name her mother)  
should deliver her child in haste today  
The *Konu koho* tree does not hesitate  
to give off its cloth bark (name the labouring woman)  
The daughter of (name the mother)  
should not hesitate to deliver her child today  
Because the snake sheds its skin easily.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ademiluka, "The Use of Psalms in African Context," 80

### ***Identification of Therapeutic Psalms***<sup>60</sup>

As stated above, when western missionaries came to West Africa, they concluded that indigenous therapeutic methods were barbaric, and even abominable for converts but they did not provide any substitute. With the total devotion of missionaries who left their beautiful countries to the African jungle, and with the emphasis on the importance of the Christian book, the converts believed that there must be something equally potent that could be used for healing in the Bible.

Psalms 1, 2, and 3 are special Psalms for stomach pain. For these Psalms to be effective, one should mix fried oil, potash, small salt and egg into water. Then Psalms 1, 2, 3 should be read into it for drinking.<sup>61</sup>

For swollen stomach, Psalms 20 and 40 are recommended. One should get water from a flowing river into a new pot. Put together a complete palm frond and three new grown up Palm leaf in the pot.

### ***Success Psalms***<sup>62</sup>

The examination of the classification of some Psalms into success Psalms will be more understood and intelligible with the discussion of the use of medicine and potent words to enhance success in all walks of life in African indigenous tradition.

Success in all walks of life is an important aspect of the Nigerian Society. Lack of success is viewed with all seriousness. Medicine or potent words are employed for success in academic life (especially passing exams), in business, in a journey, and in securing love from a person. Such medicine, among the Yoruba

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<sup>59</sup> *Secrets*, 72-73.

<sup>60</sup> Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible*.

<sup>61</sup> *Saint Michael Prayer Book* (Lagos: Neye Ade & Sons, 1988), 21.

<sup>62</sup> Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible*.

people of Nigeria, is called *isoye*. *Isoye* in Yoruba practically means "quicken the memory or intelligence."<sup>63</sup> It refers to any medicine that can help to quicken memory.

Another important way by which African indigenous people try to bring success to themselves is the use of medicine called *awure* in Yoruba. It literally means the thing that activates success or what uncovers success in Yoruba. This type of medicine that brings good luck may be in the form of potent words, soap, or a mixture of herbs and other ingredients to make a concoction. Whenever an important venture is being embarked upon, in African indigenous tradition, a strong awareness that enemies (man or spirits, seen and unseen) who are struggling to bring bad luck to people abound despite all ability to succeed. This thought is indisputable in a typical African traditional society. Hence, when an important venture like business, building houses, marriage, hunting for a new job, or attending an interview, a medicine-man is often consulted to narrow down the chances of failure and increase success. Unfortunately, the missionaries did not provide a substitute for securing success when they condemn the African indigenous tradition.

### ***Identification of Success Psalms***

But, African Christians identified some Psalms as success Psalms. They are Psalms believed by the African Indigenous Christians to have the power to bring success if used with faith, rituals, prayer, fasting, and rehearsal of some specific symbols, and a combination of other animate or inanimate materials. Christians in Africa who were no longer comfortable in using pure indigenous ways of obtaining success mostly because of the condemnation by the western orthodox Christians and missionaries, had no choice but to find the alternative method of achieving success. They

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<sup>63</sup> Ademiluka, "The Use of Psalms," 88. Adamo, African Cultural Hermeneutics, *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

turned to the Christian Bible, and found, in the book of Psalms, the equivalent powers, that they had discarded.

### **Success in Examination**

For success in examination or studies, Psalms 4,8.1-9,9,23,24,27,46,51,119.9-16,134 are identified. For students who want to improve their memory and be sure of success in all their examination Psalms 4 should be used with some special instruction.

For success to secure the love of a woman or man Psalm 133 is recommended.<sup>64</sup>

### **Success in Court Cases**

For success or good luck in winning court cases Psalms 13, 35, 46, 51, 77, 83,87, 91, 110, 121, and 148 with specific instructions are recommended.

### **For success in Business**

Psalm 4, 108, and 114 are special Psalms for success in any venture that one embarks upon such as laying the foundation of a house, promotion in government work, and embarking on a business trip.

### ***Africa and Africans in the Bible Approach***<sup>65</sup>

Throughout my eight years at ECWA Bible College and Seminary (1968-1977), dedicated evangelical educators taught me. But none of them gave me a hint that there was any Africa and

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<sup>64</sup> *Secrets*, 88-89

<sup>65</sup> Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament, and the materials are in this book.*

African presence in the pages of the Old and New Testament Bible. Throughout my education at the University of the State of New York, Southern Methodist University, Indiana Christian University, and Baylor University, all in the United States of America, there was no reference to African presence in the Bible. Most of the textbooks that I read Eurocentric scholars wrote most of the books that I read and they were full of deAfricanization of the Bible. It took me an archaeological trip to Israel to be awakened to the possibility of the presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible. In 1981, I was the only black person in the team that went for archaeological excavation at Tel 'Ira, at the Negev, Israel. Because of my black skin Israeli kids pointed at me and called me *Kush! Kush!* (כּוּשׁ כּוּשׁ). Then I remembered that word in my translation of the Hebrew Bible and sought the scripture after knowing that it literally meant black. I discovered later that Africa and Africans were mentioned more than any other foreign nations and peoples in the Bible. They were mentioned in every strand of biblical literature. They made economic, religious, military, social, and political contributions in ancient Israel. In fact, Africa and Africans were mentioned in the pages of the Old and New Testament about 867 times. (In fact, I mean that no other nations, except Israel, were mentioned so frequently in the Bible). But unfortunately, this aspect of biblical studies is neglected. The most of unfortunate thing is that ordinary Bible readers cannot identify Africa and Africans in the Bible unless they are literate in the biblical languages (Greek and Hebrew).

Let me examine in outline form the presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible. In order to do this successfully it is imperative to extend the boundaries of African history to include African Diaspora during the Old and New Testament times. This is necessary because this method of expanding the boundaries of Africa and Africans has been so neglected by historians and biblical scholars. No nation's achievement has been attributed to other nations like that of Africa. I feel that this is an important issue that biblical scholars must tackle so that the problem of attributing the

contribution of Africa and African to other nations can be reduced, if not totally eradicated. I therefore, regard all people of African descent as “Africans,” regardless whether they are Jews and live in Africa or not.

### ***The Garden of Eden (Gen. 2-3)***

The biblical records, recent Archaeological discoveries, and modern science support the idea that the location of the biblical garden of Eden is possibly located in Africa.<sup>66</sup> The biblical tradition derived the civilization of Asshur from Nimrod who was the son of Kush; the Greeks believed that Africans were the first of all men,<sup>67</sup> and the recent scientific study by Allan Wilson of the University of California, claims that humanity’s family tree was traced to an ancient African Mum.<sup>68</sup> In 1984 American Shuttle (NASA) was able to penetrate beyond the earth land surface while in the space and discovered “an old river system complete with valley and channel and gravel and sand bar that had been covered with sand sheet in the southern portion of Egypt. In cooperation with the Geological Survey of Egypt and US Agency for International Development, the USGS Scientists have dug test pits in the ancient river and streams beds and found that there was a prehistoric people who migrated to Europe from that area of the river in Egypt.<sup>69</sup>

### ***The African (Cushite) Wife of Moses (Num. 12:1).***

וְתַדְבֵּר מִרִּים

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<sup>66</sup> Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament* (San Francisco:Christian University Press, 1998), reprinted WIPF Stock and Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2001).

<sup>67</sup> Diodorus Sicilus, 3.11;3.2-3.7.

<sup>68</sup> Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the OT* and *Dallas Times Herald* Dec. 31, 1986.

<sup>69</sup> Adamo, *Africa and Africans*, NASA, Lost River Stystems, Aeronautics and Space Report, 4:30 Sept. 1984.

וַאֲהֲרֹן בְּמוֹשֶׁה עַל־אֲדוֹת הָאִשָּׁה  
הַכַּשִּׁית אֲשֶׁר לָקַח כִּי־אִשָּׁה  
כַּשִּׁית לָקַח:

**Translation:**

And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. (Num. 12:1).

Many Eurocentric biblical scholars (Ibn Ezra, J.J Owen, E. Binns, Martin Noth and others) consider this woman as a Midianite and not an African. However, my examination of this passage shows that the Cushite woman was not Zipporah, but one of the nameless women identified for the black colour of her skin and ethnic origin. A comparison of the this passage with other passages in the Bible where the Word CUSH and *Cushit* occur shows that this woman is a black woman of African descent who assisted in the leadership of the most celebrated leader Moses. This woman must have made great contrition to the life of Moses-as the saying, behind every successful man, there is a woman.

***Ebed-Melech who delivered Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 38:7-13)***

וַיִּשְׁמַע עֶבֶד־מֶלֶךְ הַכּוּשִׁי אִישׁ  
כִּי־נָתְנוּ אֶת־יִרְמְיָהוּ  
אֶל־הַבְּסָרִים וְהוּא בְּבַיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ  
וַיִּצְוֶה הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת עֶבֶד־מֶלֶךְ  
הַכּוּשִׁי לֵאמֹר קַח בְּיָדְךָ מִזֶּה

שְׁלֹשִׁים אֲנָשִׁים וַהֲעֵלִיתָ  
אֶת־יִרְמְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא מִן־הַבּוֹר  
בְּטָרָם יָמוּת:

וַיֹּאמֶר עֲבַד־מֶלֶךְ הַכּוּשִׁי  
אֶל־יִרְמְיָהוּ שִׁים נָא בְּלוֹאֵי  
הַסִּתְּבוֹת וְהַמְּלָחִים תַּחַת  
אֲצִלּוֹת יָדֶיךָ מִתַּחַת לַחֲבָלִים  
וַיַּעַשׂ יִרְמְיָהוּ כֵן:

וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ אֶת־יִרְמְיָהוּ בַּחֲבָלִים  
וַיַּעֲלוּ אֹתוֹ מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיָּשָׁב  
יִרְמְיָהוּ בַּחֲצַר הַמְּטָרָה: ס

Now when Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king sitting in the gate of Benjamin.

Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee and take up Jeremiah the Prophet out.

And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, put here these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. (13) So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

What I am trying to bring to your attention is the fact that, Ebed-Melech was an African. He was referred to as an African frequently in the same passage- (vss 7,10, 12). Of all the princes in King Zedekiah's court, he was the only one who had the moral courage to challenge the king of the princess wrongdoing. An African man delivered one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament

***African Military Men Delivered Israel from the Powerful  
Assyrians (II Kings 19: 9).***

Jerusalem would have been destroyed 100 years before 587 BCE. But African military men defended the children of Israel in the Battle Eltekeh, Asdod, and Jerusalem (II Kings 19:9).

***Africa as the Place of Refuge for the Infant Jesus (Matt. 2:13-19).***

The fact that Jesus was brought to Africa for refuge is not a surprise. In ancient biblical period, Africa is noted for refuge. Africa was a place of refuge for Abraham (Gen. 12), Joseph and Jacob (Gen. 41:45), and when Jeroboam rebelled against his father, he took refuge in Africa (I King 11: 40). The Samaritans found refuge in Africa during the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. During the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, Jeremiah and other Jews found refuge in Africa (Egypt). The most important thing is that if Jesus had been killed during his infancy, salvation through Christ would probably have eluded the Christian world.

***Simon of Cyrene, the Compassionate African ( Mark 15:21; Matt.  
27:32; Luke 23:26).***

Because the man called Simon came from a place called Cyrene in the Northern part of Africa, he was identified as Simon of Cyrene in the Bible. He was an African who was kind enough to carry the Cross for Christ. He carried the symbol of salvation.

***The Ethiopian Eunuch – African Finance Minister (Acts 8:26-40).***

And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopian, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had

come to Jerusalem for worship. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest (Acts. 8.27,30).

On his way to Jerusalem, the African finance minister found his conversion to Christianity. He was a highly educated African because he was reading a passage of the book of Isaiah that was in Hebrew. Before the New Testament was ever written, and when Europe was still in darkness, this African man was already in possession of the Bible in Hebrew.

#### ***African Prophets and Teachers in Rome (Acts 13:1).***

The book of Acts recorded the presence of African prophets and teachers in Antioch preaching and spreading the gospel of Christ. These African men were Simeon, called Niger (black), and Lucius of Cyrene in Africa, whom Paul met in Antioch.

#### ***Rufus, the African Pastor in Rome (Rom. 16:13)***

Of all the books of the Epistles, the book of Romans was the only book where reference to African was mentioned. Among those whom Paul greeted in the Roman church was Rufus and his mother. To me it is remarkable that among those singled out as active in the service of the Lord, Rufus' mother was one (I Cor. 16:16, I Thes. 5:12). It is also remarkable that among those whom Paul sent salutation, only Rufus was described as "chosen in the Lord." There is no doubt that this Rufus was related to and was the son of Simon who carried the cross of Christ to Golgotha.<sup>70</sup> It is unfortunate that some Eurocentric biblical scholars see this Rufus as one of the slaves in Rome and that the passages are not genuine.

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<sup>70</sup> D.G Gunn, Romans, 900.

## CONCLUSION

The approach to the Bible as power is one of the most valuable means of decolonizing African biblical Studies. I consider it so because “it analyzes an interpretation that is more free of western influence than what is normally the case in the traditional mainstream interpretation.”<sup>71</sup> It assists us to avoid the pitfall in Eurocentric interpretation of the Bible which does biblical interpretation for scholarship’s sake and thus and makes the Word of God loose its power. There is a tendency for the Eurocentric biblical scholars to treat the Bible more as a book of the past than as a book that speaks to the present. This makes the Bible lacks power.<sup>72</sup> Through this approach, African biblical scholars will be able to provide something that Eurocentric biblical scholars could not provide in their biblical scholarship. Prof. Samuel Abogunrin correctly remarks:

The [African] Biblical scholar requires a spiritual perception that will allow him to translate the Bible in such a way that the Word will become incarnate once again in the language and life of the peoples of Africa. O. Imasogie correctly remarks that by the time Christianity was introduced into Black Africa, the worldview of Western Christian theologians only retained a veneer of Biblical worldview. The missionary worldview had by then become what he called quasi-scientific. Consequently, although the missionaries still talked about God, heaven, angels, Satan, Holy Spirit and evil forces, they were no more than cultural crutches that lacked the existential dynamism they once had before and during the medieval period. Under this type of influence, the theologian thinks it necessary to re-interpret Biblical references to angels, demon

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<sup>71</sup> Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches* (Oregon: WIPF Stock and Publishers, 2001).

<sup>72</sup>Prof. Samuel Abogunrin, *Biblical Research in Africa: The Task Ahead*,” *African Journal of Biblical Studies* 1:/1 (1986) 14.

possession and spiritual forces. As a result, Christian missionaries emphasized the power of Jesus to save from the power of sin but Christ's power which destroys the power of the devil was not enthusiastically preached.<sup>73</sup>

This approach affirms that the Word of God is quick, powerful and sharper than twoedged sword (Hebrews 4:12). It affirms the word, the biblical truth in Isaiah 55:11:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:11).

Psalms 107:20 confirms the power inherent in the word of God to heal all diseases. It says:

He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.

I strongly believe that African biblical scholars must not repeat the mistakes of the West in emptying Jesus of his power. I will like to remark that this approach should not be misunderstood as if it encourages laziness. It does not encourage anyone to be lazy because faith without work is indeed a useless faith. We should do our best and leave the rest for God to exercise his power.

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid. 14 Cf. Osadolor Imasogie: "[W]e conclude that by the time Christianity was introduced into Black Africa in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century the world view of the Christian theologian retained only a veneer of the biblical world view... [T]he theologian found it necessary to reinterpret [spiritual forces] at best as symbols without ontic content or, at worst, as figments of the imagination of a primitive age under the influence of an ancient world view. By virtue of such a reinterpretation of the Bible, Christians could talk of Christ's power to save from sin but not enthusiastically of his power to destroy the works of the Devil and to save, to the utmost, those who are committed to him." (*Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa* (Ibadan: University Press, 1986), 52).

The Africa and Africans in the Bible Approach is also another important method that reflects our Africentric understanding of the Bible. What is the implication of Africa and Africans in Bible? Although this approach does not attempt to present the theological importance of Africa and Africans in the Bible, it is an important study that demonstrates the importance and influence of Africa and Africans in the Old and New Testaments scriptures (I have already remarked that they appear 867 times). It also demonstrates that the Bible is not only an ancient Jewish document, it is also an African document. It shows that there is no record of prejudice against blacks people or Africa and Africans in the Bible.<sup>74</sup> Africa and Africans were held in high esteem.<sup>75</sup> Above all, Christianity is not a foreign religion. The Bible would have not been what it is now without the presence of Africans who participated in the drama of redemption. The Bible deliberately identified Africans as black (Kush). This identification is not without a purpose. It is to express their influence, importance, contribution, their power, wisdom, and participation in the drama of redemption.

### ***The Future of African Biblical Studies***

We should not conclude this research without asking ourselves what is the future of African biblical studies?

Before discussing what I consider the future of African biblical studies, I will like to mention the actual problems facing African biblical studies in Africa.

First, oppressive government policies in African countries constitute one of the problems that African biblical scholars face. Military rulers who have little education become leaders of most African countries. They have no regard for education and

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<sup>74</sup> The present prejudice is a modern invention.

<sup>75</sup> See Grant Lemarquand, "A Bibliography of the Bible in Africa," *The Bible in Africa*, 662-667 for the list of African American contribution in this important area of research.

research.<sup>76</sup> They cry about researches in the sciences, but do not provide the means for such researches. Most universities in Africa are dilapidated and manpower is inadequate because most competent biblical scholars have migrated to Western countries for survival. I am here today because I consider myself a homeboy and refused to migrate despite the attractive greener pastures. This is my home, this is my country, and I have to bless my people since God has used Delta State University to bless me so much.

Second, is the lack of current journals and books from the outside world. Very few of us have access to current journals and books in biblical studies. Most African biblical scholars do not have the fund to attend international conferences because their universities are not able to sponsor them as it is done in the civilized world.

Third, the extensive reliance on the West for our training is another problem. The truth is that due to our limited facilities in the field of biblical studies, the majority of our churches, theological seminaries and universities still rely very heavily on the Western scholars for training. The result is that we remain colonized in our scholarship.

Fourth, is the incompetent scholars in the field of biblical scholarship supervising few students who are being trained in African institutions. Scholars with specialization in church history, African Indigenous Religion, Philosophy of Religion, Sociology of Religion and others claim competence in training people for biblical studies. As long as I am here our department will try to avoid this kind of scholarship.

Fifth, because of the above problems, there are few African biblical scholars (Old Testament scholars are few) in Africa. This is compounded by the fact that very few students have interest in studying religion at all because they think there is no future

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<sup>76</sup> Nigerian is an example of these African countries. Since independence in 1960, the majority of the rulers were military dictators who had no regard for human values and the rule of law. They did not care for education and research. The Nigerian treasury was frequently looted.

prospect for students of religion. Most of them believe that only those who want to be pastors are the ones who supposed to study religion. Few students who are forced to go for religious studies, especially at the undergraduate level, refuse to undertake biblical Studies, especially Old Testament Studies in their research because of the fear of languages involved.<sup>77</sup> They prefer other courses in church history, theology, and philosophy and African Indigenous religion.

Sixth, is the marginalisation of African biblical scholars by the West? Without taking into special consideration the condition under which we do research in Africa, whatever article and books written by African scholars in Africa are regarded as inferior. This is based on the Eurocentric culture and standard of scholarship, which they claim to be the universal standard. The Old missionary idea that African culture is barbaric, fetish, paganistic, magical, and as such of no value, still influences modern Eurocentric biblical scholars. Our works are not published in reputable journals of Eurocentric biblical scholars or publishers. Therefore, any of our articles written in Africa by African biblical scholars are published locally. And most Western biblical scholars do not bother themselves to glance through African biblical essays and books to read what we are saying.

Seventh, is the refusal of our colleagues to accept Africentric approach to religious studies. In other words, most of our colleagues refuse to be decolonised or to decolonize our courses because they believe that Eurocentric approach to religion is final and superior. Let me give you an example of my struggle to decolonize religious studies in the department of Religious Studies of Delta State University.

Under my guidance as a Professor in the department, we introduced two main courses, Africa and Africans in the Biblical Periods and African Cultural Hermeneutics. When we started the

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<sup>77</sup>David Adamo, "Doing Old Testament Research in Africa," *Bulletin of African Old Testament Scholarship*, vol. 3 (1997), 8-11.

PG programme we agreed unanimously that these two courses form the distinctiveness of our department, therefore, we made it compulsory for all PG students. They enthusiastically received them because they are new approaches to religious studies, which represent the current trend in religious scholarship world wide. But, in my attempt to decolonize the department of Religious Studies and reduced Eurocentricism, I have constantly faced great opposition. In 1998, I went on sabbatical/leave of absence. By the time I came back in 2001, these two courses had been removed from the programme. Further more, last year when we tried to review our PG programme at the Faculty of Arts, I defended Africentricism vehemently by arguing for those two courses to be restored as core courses, in order to decolonize our department. But somebody in English Department challenged me to bring my cv at a faculty meeting if I thought I know religion so much. Another person who was the Ag. HOD of our department, and had a specialty in African Indigenous Religion, also boasted that he would beat me in an Old Testament examination if we were to take the same Old Testament exam. In other words, to them , the decolonization of our department is not necessary. Interestingly, this went on without anyone calling them to order at that meeting. I am happy however, that the senate in its wisdom threw out that programme.

With African biblical scholars grappling with so many problems as outlined above, is there any future for African biblical studies? Going through the history of African biblical scholarship, I believe that there is hope for African biblical studies. The story of African biblical scholarship from the time of the biblical/post-biblical periods to the present is evidence that there is hope in the future.

Certainly, the future is also bright for African biblical scholarship if our colleagues in the Western world would relieve themselves of the scholastic prejudice against African biblical scholarship and accept the fact that their methodology is not universal or the only recognized hermeneutics in the world. They

need to recognize that “African cultural hermeneutic” or “inculturation hermeneutic” or “contextual hermeneutic” is equally a legitimate method in biblical studies. Even though African cultural hermeneutic does not claim universality, it is a legitimate hermeneutics and there is much that the Western and the world biblical scholars can learn.

The future of African biblical scholarship is bright if most Department of Religious studies will attempt to decolonize their studies. I am pleased to inform you that so far the Department of Religious Studies of Delta State University is the only Department of Religious Studies in Nigeria with such a unique programme of decolonisation. The future is bright for African biblical studies if this administration and the subsequent ones encourage the department with its programme of decolonization. It is my opinion that African biblical scholars should not be willing simply to mimic the academic traditions of the Eurocentric scholars.

Finally, the future is brighter if the Department of Religious Studies and Delta State University, which are fortunate to have a reputable international scholar of biblical studies with a vision of decolonisation, would be ready to find a centre for African Biblical Studies. It will be unique and will be the first in Nigeria if not in African.

The struggle continues because we need to decolonize in all areas of life and will shall not give up.

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