Developing Teaching & Learning in Africa

Decolonising Perspectives

EDITOR
Vuyisile Msila

Chapter Thirteen

Western Thought and African Presence in Biblical Interpretation

Joseph A. Agbogun

Introduction

The Synoptic Gospels usually have similarities in most of the narratives of Jesus' life and ministry. The cumulative result and conclusion of the life and ministry of Jesus are suffering, death, and resurrection, which translated into the completion of salvation and redemption for humankind according to the Bible. Complexity of content and the antiquity nature of the Bible, coupled with the fact that the Bible came from a particular culture and written in ancient and foreign language later translated, calls for necessity of interpretation. The interpretation of the New Testament commenced long ago under certain cultures that dominated it. Without doubt, the culture, history, and experiences of the interpreter matter a lot in arriving at an acceptable and valid conclusion. Those who brought Christianity to Africa came along with biblical interpretation centred around their socio-cultural lifestyle, which never put biblical events in their proper perspectives. The Eurocentric and American biblical interpretations are unfair to Africa and Africans in that they look down on Africans in matters of ancient historical and biblical events.

The task, among others, confronting African biblical scholars is refuting the bias interpretations of passages against Africa and Africans. The New Testament passages must be placed in their appropriate perspectives to mirror them with African culture, history, and experiences. This will permit adequate contextualisation, which will bring about their meaningfulness and relevance to Africans, making Africans at home with Christianity. Africa has had her own culture from ancient times and had been participating in ancient civilisations. This study points out how Western thought has misled people in biblical interpretation; defining Africa and Africans in the New Testament; Simon of Cyrene; and the role of African interpreters in teaching and learning the Bible.

How Western Thought Misled People in Bible Interpretation

Western imposition of thoughts can be seen in every facet of African life and activities. Metan (2015) decries this as concerned democracy when he said that Western imperialism has always been sold under the pretext of spreading freedom and democracy. Obviously, there are several ways by which Western thought has misled people in historical texts such as the Bible. One such way is the 'de-Africanisation' of the Bible. This concerns the mindset of the Eurocentric Biblical scholars to reduce Africa and Africans to slavery when they admit their presence at all or much earlier deny the entire presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible.

According to Adamo (2005:4), "this denial of African presence and influence is so strong because for the past centuries, the thrust of biblical scholarship has been in the hands of Western scholars." An examination of various books on introduction to the Old Testament, histories of Ancient Israel, and Bible Atlases show that American and European scholars dominate the field of biblical studies. Whenever they made any submission against Africa and Africans, there is no reply in defence of Africa.

Perhaps, de-Africanisation is foundational to the concept of slave trade and colonisation. Several movements to remove African presence from the Bible can be pointed out in Speiser's commentary on Genesis, the moment he called the identification of 'Kush' with Africa a mistaken identity (Speiser, 1979). Though Speiser did not specifically locate Kush with a particular region geographically, he totally condemned the idea of identifying it with Africa. This gave room for other scholars to search for possible alternatives about the locality of Kush in the world. Accordingly, George Raulison and Claus Westernman argue that instead of locating Kush (in Genesis) in Africa, it should be located in Mesopotamia. Western civilisation originating from Greece, Rome, and Palestine was the prevailing tendency at the beginning of the development of science history. Again, Aalders (2018) is an example of Western scholars who were out to de-Africanise the Bible by his denial of the possibility of African location Kush.

There are other scholars who accepted the presence of Africans in the Bible but vehemently denied or reduced their worth and influence. Adamo (2005:2) claims, "Everywhere the presence of Africans is identified in a text; such personality is reduced to nothing but a slave. Thus, Ricardo and Kalouche (2002) identify the

Kushite man in King David's army as a Negro slave". Hammershaimt (2018) in his commentary on Amos says that the dark-skinned people from Africa were held in contempt by the Israelites. Israelites regarded Africans as slaves.

These submissions by different Eurocentric scholars are aimed at dehumanising the entire Africa nations. To Adamo, (2005) there are several reasons why Africans are to challenge biblical and other kinds of academic racism, neo-colonisation, and the policy of de-Africanisation of the Bible as practiced by the majority of Eurocentric scholars. Challenging and reputing the Eurocentric scholars' inhuman actions in academic world was neglected or made impossible because perhaps the Africans were lagging behind in the examination of texts.

The situation became worse as all Africans in diaspora were never allowed to participate in literacy and intellectual development process. Adamo (2005) points out: "I believe that the situation of de-Africanisation would have improved if Africans in the Diaspora have been taught how to read and write very easily. Unfortunately when they were taught and given the opportunity to be educated, they were given inferior education." Let me illustrate this as far as Africans in their homeland are concerned. In the late 60s and 70s, some Africans were allowed to go to one of the universities in Europe. They were given the so-called special education and given special degrees and diploma in a few years. On the degrees/diploma/certificates were written, "For work in Africa only".

This means that even when Africans were given some education, they were given inferior education. The slave owners were aware that some enslaved people were intelligent and were deliberately denied and excluded from successful and worthwhile living. The white men then knew that if the enslaved people had been taught how to read and write or allowed into the higher institutions very early, they would have dominated as scholars and intellectuals globally. To this end, Joseph Enuwosa (2017) states that it is the duty of modern biblical scholars to rise to break Western domination in biblical interpretation. By implication, supposing the early African Americans had been allowed into the major seminaries and divinity institutions very early, the domination of the biblical scholarship by the Eurocentric scholars would have been impossible.

Although the Hebrew Bible is primary the record of and a witness to the revelation of the act of God within a particular nation (Israel), it also recognises God's involvement with other nations, such as Africans (Ethiopians), Africans, Babylonians, Edomites, Syrians, and others. This is because ancient Israel interacted with these nations. The New Testament, like the Old Testament, is also a record of God's

revelation concerning the great redemption He has accomplished through a particular group of people (Jews). However, the New Testament is not limited to the Jews, but extended to other nations. God did not only use the Jews, but also other nations for the spread of the Gospel of redemption.

While the role played by many nations has been examined and articulated, those of Africa and Africans have not been adequately researched. Although there is research on Egypt in the Old and New Testaments by Western scholars, it was actually done with the presupposition that Egypt is not part of Africa and presumably the idea that nothing good can come from Africa, especially the South of the Sahara. This makes documents handed down to modern biblical scholars imbalanced, thus undergoing criticism. The kind of education impacted into Africans during the colonial period was the kind that made them feel inferior. Adamo (2005) asserts that even those who studied abroad at the dawn of postcolonialism were given what was not useful for the future development of Africa. Accordingly, Imam (2012) posits that in the colonial era, the British educational policy did not address the aspirations of Africans leading to frequent clamour for change in the post-independence era. Additionally, Umez (2016:7) argues:

[...] those I looked up to, namely, my mentors, educators, and leaders were busy teaching me and other youths, probably inadvertently, to feel inferior and remain inferior. Essentially, I was taught, just as many youths in Nigeria are being taught today, to feel inferior and develop low self-esteem. Here are few examples. I was thoughtlessly taught (and children are still being thoughtlessly taught today), that *oyibo bu ndi muo*, (white men are naturally spirits), *oyibo bu agbara*, (white men are wizards by nature), and *America ilu oba* (which suggests that white man's country is naturally the land of kings). Similar phrases such as *dan bature*, (which implies that white men are by nature civilized), and 'or buter' (which symbolises the natural lead of white men) are very common all over Nigeria. I was thoughtlessly taught (as children are still being thoughtlessly taught today) that almost anything 'black' is inherently evil. In fact, to our 'educators', it is perfectly okay to use the word, 'black' (the ascribed name to people with African decent), to describe evil. In accordance with this teaching, a bad person is the 'black sheep of the family', and should be 'black listed.' In accordance with this teaching, illegal market is 'black market' (as if only black people do business in such market). In according with this teaching, Satan (no one has ever seen) is 'black' in colour. In fact, to our 'educated' teachers, frequent use of 'black' to describe evil demonstrates a mastery of the 'Queen's English,' deserving an 'A' in English essay composition. What an education! It is a pity! Indeed, Nigerian African children and the public are being taught, directly or indirectly, self-hatred and how to develop a sense of low self-esteem. Without question, there are deadly consequences resulting from this kind of miseducation, and to them, I now turn.

The British curricula that brought about miseducation is difficult to wipe out of Africa. Even if Africans try hard to change it theoretically, in practice, it undoubtedly lives on. Therefore, a conscious and concerted effort must be made continuously to reorient all Africans.

Umez (2016:36) did not mince words pointing out the consequences of making do with the wrong education. He further states the reasons why Africans accepted such miseducation from the colonial educators and the possible solutions, thus:

There are grave consequences in the inferior miseducation given to Africans. We often agree that the mind is a terrible thing to waste. I must add that the mind is a terrible thing to pollute. The minds of so many African children and that of the general public have been grossly polluted and destroyed by a powerful force largely unseen by naked eyes. That powerful force is inferiority complex (also called 'mental slavery'). Here is a brief illustration of the destruction caused by inferiority complex/lack of self-confidence in Africa and among Africans: we prefer anything made in the Global North; we respect or honour the white; most African leaders are very proud to invest African money and resources in non-African countries. Why? In their miseducated minds, Africa is 'unsafe heaven', while America is the 'safe heaven'; and almost making them lords.

In his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney (1973) traces the plunder of colonialism and ways colonialism affected the mind of the African. Colonialism was a philosophy based on miseducation and it was convenient for this philosophy to make the African believe in his/her inferiority. For centuries European scholarship supported numerous misleading notions when it comes to indigenous epistemologies versus western epistemologies. Rodney (1973:25) writes about how European scholars supported the myth that underdevelopment of Africa was ordained by God and making all believe that Western countries are more developed because westerners are "innately superior, and that the responsibility for the economic backwardness of Africa lies in the generic backwardness of the race of black Africans".

From the above, all corrupt practices that bring about underdevelopment are inherent in this miseducation. Effective and critical education liberates the mind. Unfortunately, many Africans are consumed by colonialism and may not always realise what is wrong with the Western education meant for Africans. Ignorance makes them to take pride in attaining the kind of education. Only a liberated mind is capable of liberating others. Decolonising of African minds should be a more lasting struggle for all.

Defining African and Africans in the New Testament

The word 'African' is not mentioned in the Testament as such. Its wild usage is recent. According to Enuwosa the Greeks referred to the African continent as *Libya* and the Romans called it *Africa* in antiquity. Perhaps African is derived from the Latin word *African* meaning 'sunny' or the Greek *Aphrike* meaning 'without cold'. It was mainly applied to the Northern coast of the African continent, which was regarded as the Southern extension of Europe.

Africa is also the Arabic transliteration of the word *Ifriqiyah*. Africa was known in antiquity under the name *Libya* and this referred to that portion opposite the coast of Greece and west of Egypt. Old Testament Hebrews were very familiar with Egypt in Africa and referred to Libya as *Lehabim* (Gen. 10:13) and *Lubim* (2 Chron. 12:3). Other parts of Africa known to Old Testament Hebrews were 'Cush or Ethiopia and put' whose inhabitants were regarded as the Hamitic stock. In this way, we use the term Africa as the land of the blacks and Africans for the citizens of the black continent as was known to the ancient Greeks, Hebrews and the Romans. Thus, at the time of the New Testament, Africa was well known to the Jews, Greeks, and Romans. The Hebrews called Africa by the various names of tribal groups. These names, as found in the New Testament, are *Aiguptoj/Aiguptiej* (Egypt/Egyptians, Matt. 2:13-19; Acts 2:10), *Aiqioy* (Ethiopian, Acts 8:27), and *Niger* (Niger, Acts 13:1).

Aigu,ptoj (Egypt/Egyptians)

Aigu, ptoj (Egypt) is one of the terms used in the New Testament for Africa and Africans (Matt. 2:13-19, Acts 2:10; 7:9-10; 13:17; 21:38, Heb. 3:16; 8:9; 11:26-29; Jude 5; Rev. 11:8). While Egypt appears 24 times in the New Testament, Egyptian surfaced five times. According to Brown (1974), the Greek word *aigu,ptoj* is derived from the Egyptian *hwtkpth* which is pronounced *ha-ku-ptah*. It was the term ancient capital of Egypt opposite modern Cairo. Brown (1974:52) says that the term was later used for both the country as well as its capital.

Josephus and the Old Testament treat Egypt as the land of Ham (Josephus, Antiquities 1, vi, 2; Gen. 10; Ps. 78:51; 105:23; 27; 106:21) Josephus described the Egyptians as following: "for the four son of Ham. Time as not hurt the name Chus; for the Ethiopians over whom he reigned are even at this date, both by

themselves and by all men in Asia are called Chushites. The memory also of the Mesraites is preserved in their name for all that inhabit Judea call Egypt/Egyptians Mestre/Mestreans”.

Some scholars agreed that Ham was the ancestor of the Egyptians and Egypt was the land of Ham. According to Walter Arthur McCray, the name ‘Ham’ means ‘hot, heat’ and by implication ‘black’. This implies that the Cushites, Egyptians Putites and Canaanites were Africans because they were sons Ham. In the New Testament era, Egypt played host to not fewer than a million Jews. They became very prosperous, influential and well cultured in Egypt especially in the city of Alexandria where some Jews held important state officials under the Ptolemies.

Libuhj (Libya)

One of the terms also used in the New Testament to refer to Africa and Africans is Libya (Acts 2:10). Libya or Libyans are translated from three distinct Hebrews words as follows:

- o *Kub*: the King James Version has ‘Chub’ and LXX translated it Libues.
- o *Lubim*: this is the translation in King James Version AV and RSV (Libues, Phual).
- o *Put*: LXX has Phout, KJV Phut and RSV Put.

Put is identified in Genesis 10:6 as one of the sons of Ham and the brother of Cush, Egypt and Canaan. J.E. Harris stated, “Put was the founder of Libya. He called the inhabitant ‘Putites’”. Old Testament references to Libya links it with Egypt, Ethiopia (2 Chron. 12:3; 16:8; Ezek. 30:5; Dan. 11:13; Nahum. 3:9).

The New Testament also links Libyan cities in antiquity with a large Jewish colony almost like that of Alexandria. Greek and Roman historians and poets used the word Libyes to refer to the inhabitants of North Africa. C.O.G. Ndubukwu said that Herodotus (480-425 BCE) used Libya for the whole continent of Africa. Diodorus (60-30 BCE) employed the term Libya to denote Africa of the Nile as far as Egypt.

The New Testament mentions some Cyrenians of Libya such as Simon of Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26; Acts 13:1) We also have Cyrenius who was the governor of Syria and might have been an African from Cyrene.

Aiqioy (Ethiopia/Ethiopians)

Ethiopia is another term used in the New Testament (Acts 8:27). It references to the black people inhabiting the lands south of the Mediterranean coast of Africa. Homer in his poem was the first Greek writer to use the term Ethiopian.

Ethiopia was a Greek word derived from Aethiops who was the son of Vulcan, the Greek god of metal work and fire. It was the Greek counterpart of the Ethiopian god Bes. Aethiops means 'the Glowing' or 'the Black'. D.T. Adamo applied the term for people considered to be burnt or 'black' and of African origin both at home and in diaspora. Following the environment theory, Copher (2018) says "that the dark colour of their skin where as a result of the intense heat of the south sun." He also cites an inscription discovered by A.H. Sayce and G.C. Griffith in 1914. It reveals that the Ethiopians described their land as the land of Qeys, Kesh. This is not identified with the Egyptian word *Kesh* and the Hebrew word *Cush* which where designations applied to Ethiopians by Egyptians and the Old Testament for thousands of years.

The ancient Egyptians knew Ethiopia and its people under a variety of names. The earliest known record is the inscription on the **Palermo** stone (ca. 3000 BCE) in it, the region immediately south of Egypt was designated as, "There were other names with which Ethiopia was known in Egypt". This includes the Egyptian words *Khent* (border land) *Ta-sti* (land of the bow) and *Nub* (gold). This indicates that Ethiopia was known as the land of bowmen, the land of gold, as well as of blacks.

Hebrew and Asian sources have indicated that the term Cush and Cushites which also used for Ethiopians. The Old Testament identifies Cush as one of the four son of Ham (Gen. 10:6-8; 1 Chron. 1:8-10; Ps.7). Harris cites Josephus who said that "Of the four sons of Ham, time has not at all hurt the name of Chus: for the Ethiopians over whom he reigned, are even at this day both by themselves and by all men in Asia called Cushites." In the light of this evidence, it appears conclusive that Ethiopia both in the Old and New Testament as well as classical literature to Africans South of Egypt.

Niger (Niger)

Another term used in the New Testament for African is *Niger* (Niger). The word is only used once in the New Testament (Acts 13:1). According to J.H.Thayer, the word Niger is a Latin name meaning black. Thayer considers Niger in Acts 13:1

as the surname of Simeon, whereas S.F. Pfeiffer (2018) regards it as the Latin name of Simeon. In the Old Testament, the most frequently used words with colour significance for the black person is *Cushite* (Cush). The Greek equivalence is *Aethiops*, whereas the Roman equivalence is Niger. Hence C.B. Copher (2018) said that Greek and Latin terms were used to translate the Hebrew word Cush and related terms in the Old Testament terms for blacks.

Thus Niger translates the Old Testament word in the New Testament. In the New Testament, for the Hebrew term Cush and the Greek word Ethiopia. These terms were used by biblical and classical writers to describe Africans on account of their black colour and Negro characteristics. Lucius in Acts 13:1 used the word to describe the African prophet who was probably Simon of Cyrene.

Simon of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32, Mark 14:21, Luke 23:26)

The story of Simon of Cyrene who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus is one of the passion narratives that are common to the three synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. Source criticism maintains that stories which are common to the three gospels were drawn from Mark. For this reason, Mark is considered to be the first written gospel. They argued that Matthew and Luke improved on the work of Mark. Hence the synoptic gospels have common and similar works. However, three different people writing on the biography of one person in the same environment, age, period, and faith are bound to be identical. From the tradition of the early church, Mark was regarded as an interpreter of Peter from whom he collected his materials. This tradition is said to have been derived from three centres: Antioch, Rome, and Alexandria. The story appearing in the three gospels confirm that it was one of the popular stories told in the Christian communities of the early Church.

A careful examination of the facts surrounding Simon of Cyrene reveals that he was an African, not a Jew. According to Enuwosa and Edoisang, citing J. Strong, the name Simon or Simeon derived from the Hebrew word, *Shimone* or *Shawmah* which means 'to hear'. For J.H. Thayer, Simon was a Greek name meaning 'flat-nose'. Black dark skin, flat-nose, wooly hair, and thick lips are some the physical characteristics of Africans long recognised by scholars and classical writers. What we discover from the above point is that Simon might have been the Greek name of this African which indicates his black nationality and traits however the name was borne by Jew and non-Jews alike.

According to Isiorhovoja (2017) there is a strong reason to think of Simon the cross bearer as the same Simon, the evangelist, in Acts 13:1 because of the Latin name *Niger* which means 'Black'. Although W. Barclay considers him a Jew who moved in Roman circles, K.L. Barker and J.R. Hohlenberger, according to Barclay, consider him to be native of Cyrene in Africa. The term *Niger* (black) and, Simon (thick flat-nose) given to Simon in the gospel and the Acts confirms that he was an African and both the gospel and the Acts refer to the same person.

Another reason to think that Simon, the cross bearer, was an African is the very act of conscription. In ancient Roman society, a person of low status or who had strange somatic appearances, were given a contemptuous treatment such as thrashing. According to Onibere (2015), because of African early great civilisation and religiosity, Africans participated so much in early Christianity. Simon therefore might have been a proselyte with black appearance among the white Jewish population. It can be suggested that this combined with his low status might have made the Roman soldiers to conscript him. Pfeiffer (2018) related how Judaism attracted particularly the lower class, including women, as did Christianity in the beginning. This class of people was often ridiculed and denounced by people of high education breeding and wealth. Simon is one of those in the class of Jewish converts. Cyrene had a population that made up peasant, traders, Roman soldiers, and Jews.

Cyrene was a Greek colony in Libya that was founded in 630 BC. Libya, like Egypt, fell to raiders, invader settlers, as well as Greek and Roman influences and imperialism in the classical era. Nevertheless, despite the cross breeding due to inter-marriage, the Negroid characteristic of the native Libya have not been erased until date. Libya is descendant of Ham, the father of Africans. They are intrinsically linked with Egyptians and Ethiopians in biblical narratives (2 Chron. 12:3; 16:8; 14:9-15; Ezek. 27:10; 30:1-9; Neh. 3:9).

The New Testament shows that Simon was a native of Cyrene in Libya in North Africa. The King James Version refers to him in Mark as 'Simon a Cyrenian'. Phillip Modern English Bible used 'Simon a native of Cyrene in Africa'. Revised Standard Version and New international Bible have it as 'Simon of Cyrene' which indicates that he was an African (Matt. 21:32; Luke 23:26; Mark 15:13). Had he been a Jew, the gospel writers would not have hesitated to append the word, 'a Jew from Cyrene'. This was the pattern adopted by the gospel writers and Paul when they described person outside their native land. For example, the Samaritan woman in Samaria (John 4:9) identified Jesus as a Jew. If Simon was therefore a Jew, the gospel writers would have mentioned it.

The description of Simon in Mark 15:21 show that he was known to the church. It is probable to think that this African who was compelled to carry Jesus' cross by the Romans, must have followed up what befell the man he shared his last suffering with until resurrection. Furthermore, he might have followed the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion and discovered that he was an innocent great man.

The transformation received by Simon turned him to a popular black evangelist known by the gospel writers and other first century Christians like Luke. He witnessed Pentecost as one of the Libyans or Cyrenians who were present in the cut pouring of the spirit (Acts) Simon probably came to Jerusalem together with other proselytes from Cyrene and other parts of Libya. This Simon and his children Alexander and Rushs were Africans. He aided Jesus at a critical moment when no Jew wanted to help. Though he was compelled to carry the cross by the Roman authority, he did not resist or refuse to assist Jesus. The word compel translated to Greek is *avngareuvw*. It originated in Persia and was adopted in Latin and Greek languages. It was used for somebody conscripted by a King to go on a journey, bear a burden or to perform any other service. This African, therefore, bore the burden of humankind with Jesus.

Simon later became the preacher of the suffering and resurrection of Jesus to the word. He identified Jesus as the messiah and preached to his children into believing in the saviour of humankind. He evangelised both Jesus and gentile of his days. There could be no greater contribution to the Christian faith then that made by Simon of Cyrene, the African.

The Role of African Interpreters in Teaching and Learning the Bible

Teaching the truth from the Bible to influence practical living must come from an individual with sound understanding of the Bible. Sadly, it seems that Christianity has no strict method and system of indoctrinating their young ones, except few orthodox denominations. African interpreters who have a good foundation of African culture and are thinking in such lines are very rare. Even what such Africans write and say are seen to be scholastic and are not embraced with open mind by Christian teachers and learners.

The interpreter of the Bible is first the learner before being a teacher of little truth. In discussing some basic qualifications of a Bible interpreter, Nihinlola (2008) opines that the following are the basic qualifications, attitudes, and requirements for a Bible interpreter: experience of regeneration, dependence on the Holy Spirit,

open mindedness, diligence, and prayer. As the interpreter of the Bible depends on the Holy Spirit, so must one approach the Bible with an open mind, a willingness to learn from God through reading, meditating, and studying. Without this, the interpreter may fall into the error of reading his/her own preconceived ideas into the meaning of the scriptures.

Therefore, Isiorhovoja (2017) contends: “since the Bible is God’s word, the thing for us to do is to open our minds to it and let us say to us what it will”. This sincerity of heart as we engage in Bible interpretation is required because a basic task “is to discover the meaning of the text in its proper setting; to draw from Scripture rather than reading one’s presuppositions into it”. To Ejenobo (2016), this open mindedness helps the philosopher or interpreter to lay hand on what other interpreters have postulated about the concept under discussion. It becomes almost imperative here for the interpreter to consult Bible dictionaries, commentaries, among others. Unfortunately, European interpreters carried out most of these works.

To throw a light on the role of African interpreters, Adamo (2005) defines African Cultural Hermeneutics, thus that African Cultural Hermeneutics in biblical studies is an approach to biblical interpretation, which makes Africa socio-cultural context a subject of interpretation. It means that African cultural hermeneutics, like any other third world hermeneutics, is contextual hermeneutics since it is always done in the perspective of a particular context. It means that the analysis of the text is done from the perspective of African worldview, and culture African cultural hermeneutics is re-reading the scriptures from a premeditatedly African centred perspective with the purpose of not only understanding the Bible and God in our African experiences and culture, but also with the hope of breaking the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that Eurocentric biblical scholars have long enjoyed in their interpretation of the Bible. This is a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical tradition and African worldview, culture, and life experience with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected.

By this submission, every African biblical scholar owes it a duty to understand the socio-cultural worldview of Africa; clearly differentiating from that of the European Bible and any other, bringing home the message of any Bible text. It is obvious that the history and total experiences of the interpreter should influence the interpretation, thus all African teachers of Christian religion should have the

method and tool of African cultural hermeneutics, if decolonising Bible reading will be possible. The advantages the Eurocentric interpreters have over Africans are based on their culture and experiences, which they imposed on Africans.

Furthermore, there was no consideration of African cultural heritage by the colonialists when they came. There was even neglect of the biblical culture, or still being replaced by the westerners as they interpreted and taught biblical truth. This brings about the reiteration by Adamo (2005:11) that “understanding African indigenous culture is absolutely important in doing African cultural hermeneutics. This is because African culture is part of African cultural hermeneutics. Despite the resemblance of the biblical and African cultures, there are still some distinct aspects of African culture. This distinctive African culture influences or dominates the interpretation of the Bible”. This is one of the conditions for African cultural Hermeneutics given by Adamo. The neglect of culture brings about the misleading of people about the Bible truth by Western thought. Anyone who does not hold firm to his culture may be for lack of understanding or flexibility tends to abandon it for another. African scholastic interpreters of the Bible or Christian philosophers are expected to have deep knowledge of African culture so that everyone reading the Bible can be contextualised.

The contribution and value of African theology to the decolonisation of African thought and mind cannot be overemphasised. This is because theology as science is grounded on God’s revelation in Christ and based on deep, thorough knowledge of human beings and the factors that conditioned their lives. It is in considering this that Tshibangu (2016) in his article titled, *The Task of African Theologians*, presented four obligations of African theologians which is applicable to all African teachers.

First, African theologians must be fully aware of the fact that their Catholic work calls for real spiritual commitment. There can be no theological effort without commitment. One must raise questions about one’s own life and about the spiritual destiny of the people with whom one is associated. This presumes a real ability to ask fundamental questions. The theologian must be a person of deep faith and a solidly metaphysical life. The theologian cannot do any useful, worthwhile or relevant work unless he or she accepts personal involvement in the theory and practice of life while making every effort to maintain intellectual and moral sincerity and scientific objectivity. The example of great theologians in the past and present day are Lubac and Tillich who became great theologians because they tackled deep metaphysical questions and committed themselves wholly to

their task. They accepted the demands of thought and action imposed by their own concrete situation. African theologians must be aware of this obligation to commit themselves to the situation and the issues of their time and milieu.

Second, the African theologian must be equally conscious of the intellectual demands imposed by theological work. As I pointed out above, theology is a scientific discipline grounded on knowledge of revelation and its content and based on knowledge of the reality of human beings and the universe. This means, first, that the theologian must possess theological knowledge in the strict and formal sense. According to Nihinlola, Emiola (2008:31), Vatican I defined it thus: "Reason illumined by faith which, with the help of God, seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the mysteries. He does this by learning all it can by way of analogy from nature, by exploring the relationship between the different mysteries themselves, and by considering the ultimate end of humanity". It also means that the theologian must strive to possess the deepest and most accurate scientific knowledge of humanity and the factors that condition it. If African theologians want to be rigorous and to be taken seriously, they must be fully conscious of these intellectual obligations. They must be able to go beyond simple commitment. If the latter is correct, it may be intuitive and difficult to formulate. Theologians must be able to propose matters in a valid and convincing way to other human minds.

Third, African theologians have social commitment. They cannot live as beings apart because they must bear responsibility for their own personal destiny and that of others. They must be involved in their community and their social participation must be as active as possible. This participation will put them in a position to gain a deeper grasp of the cultural issues posed by their community and the living conditions of their contemporaries. Isiorhovoja (2017) opines that the social obligation of African interpreters will help them to pay due attention to the questions raised by the appearance of new values in a given society. Also, its characteristic perception and conception of things and events and by the facts and events related to its socio-cultural evolution and development are to be considered. If Christian thinkers are not wholly involved in the on-going process of their society, they can hardly claim to be authentic African theologians.

Closely associated with this overall commitment is the fourth obligation of ecclesial involvement. Ejenobo (2016) affirms that African theologians must live in fidelity to ecclesial truth. They must of course possess discernment so that they can know exactly what is defined as certain truth by the church. However, they must equally cultivate courage and take risks in exploring, pondering, and expressing the

theological conclusions that derive from their authentic research. The churches of which African theologians are members also have a role to play. They must have confidence in their theologians unless there is good reason to feel otherwise. They must support them on the intellectual level and the level of religious practice, encouraging their research, avoiding hasty condemnations, and being careful not to voice fear and reservations for purely a priori reasons. If the above conditions are met, African theologians can undertake the research that faces us with a real chance of handling it successfully.

In attempt to decolonise Bible reading, every African Christian religion teacher should come to the awareness that his/her culture deserves to be at the centre, like Western epistemologies. On discussing the relationship between African and Biblical cultures, Umukoro (1978:366) submits: "African theologies have set about demonstrating that the African religious experience and heritage were not illusory and that they should have formed the vehicle for conveying the Gospel varieties to Africa". They showed that many of Africa's religious insights had a real affinity with those of the Bible.

On many respects, the African was much more on the wavelength of the Bible than the accidental ever was. The African understood more easily in his bones, as it were, the meaning of corporate personality, for instance than the individualistic westerners. In the view of Onibere (2016), it was shown time and time again that the African sense of the numinous, his awareness of the proximity of the spiritual, his attitude to death and diseases, in all these ways, he was far closer to the biblical thought patterns than the westerners could ever hope to be. Here, recognizing the closeness of African culture to that of the Bible people is to make sure that Africans contextualised the Bible's contents meaningfully. Though Adamo states that there are distinct between African and biblical cultures, but their affinity makes the Bible and its messages more relevant in Africa than as it was introduced by the colonialists. The areas of the Bible message that makes no sense to the westerners make most sense to the Africans when taught and applied appropriately.

Conclusion

Looking at the study generally, it is overt that Africa and Africans played vital roles in redemption work of Jesus Christ through his life and ministry as reflected in the Bible. Simon of Cyrene is unarguably an African who demonstrated African virtues – being one's keeper and hospitality. The fact that Simon of Cyrene did not hesitate when called to give a helping hand to Jesus goes a long way to say

that Simon must have had compassion on the suffering and tortured Son of Man. Unfortunately, these facts and virtues of the African have never been mentioned or commended by the European and American interpreters before now.

Reference

- Aalders, G.D. (2018). Commentaries on Mathew 27 in *Austin, Precept's Commentary*. [Online]. Available: <https://bit.ly/3d5fsEq>
- Adamo, D.T. 2005. *Exploration in African Biblical Studies*. Benin-City, Nigeria: Justice Jeco Press and Publishers Ltd.
- Ejenobo, D.T. 2016. *Insights into African Biblical Interpretation*. Effurun: Okiemute Publishing House and Press.
- Enuwosa, J. 2017. *Toward Evaluation and Breaking of Western Hegemony in Biblical Interpretation*. Abraka: Delta State University Press.
- Enuwosa, J. & Udoisang, F.P. 2002. Africa and Africans in the Synoptic Gospels. In: D.T. Adamo (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspectives*. New York: University Press of America.
- Copher, C.B. 2018. Commentary on Luke 23:26. In *Austin, Precept's Commentary*. [Online]. Available: <https://bit.ly/3d5fsEq>
- Ejenobo, D.T. 2016. An African Interpretation of Paul's Understanding of The Holly Spirit. *European Scientific Journal*, 12 (32):426.
- Hammershaimt, O.J. 2018. Commentary on Mark 15:21. In *Austin, Precept's Commentary*. [Online]. Available: <https://bit.ly/3d5fsEq>
- Imam, H. 2012. Educational Policy in Nigeria from the Colonial Era to the Post-Independence Period. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1(2):181-204.
- Isiorhovoja, O.U. 2017. *Africans Biblical Interpretation in Contemporary Nigeria*. Sapele: MorningStar Publishers.
- McCray, W.A. 1990. *The Black Presence in the Bible and the Table of Nations*. Chicago: Black Light Fellowship.
- Metan, T. 2015. *Decolonizing Democracy from Western Cognitive Imperialism*. Langaa, Cameroun: RPCIG. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh9vw57>
- Ndubokwu, CO.G. 2002. *Egyptian Cult of Isis: The Mother Goddess*. Ughelli: Oputovu Books.
- Nihinlola, E. 2008. *The Task of Bible Interpretation*. Ogbomoso: Scepter Prints Nig. Ltd.
- Onibere, S.G.A. 2015. *An Evaluation of Africans' participation in New Testament Events*. Emevor-Isoko: Pentecost Christian Press.
- Pfeiffer, S. F. 2018. Commentary on Luke 14:27. [Online]. Available: <https://bit.ly/3d5fsEq>
- Ricardo R.L. & Kalouche, F. 2002. *Africa and other Civilizations: Conquest and Counter-Conquest: The Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui*, Vol. 2. Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press.
- Rodney, W. 1973. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Abuja/Lagos/Pretoria: Panaf Publishing.
- Speiser, E.A. 1979. *Genesis: The Anchor Bible*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company.
- Thayer, J.H. 2017. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Tshibangu, T.B. 2016. The Task of African Theologian. In: N. Mushete (ed.), *History of African Theology*, 5(7):74-76.
- Umez, B.N. 2006. *Educated to Feel Inferior: Harsh Realities of Low Self Esteem*. Baytown, Texas: GBS Publishers.