



Title:
Biblical exegesis and African beliefs and practices

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ABSTRACT

Biblical exegesis and African religious practice have remained an ongoing exercise in academic disciplines, particularly in biblical studies. The effort towards African hermeneutics is not exhausted. There are still a lot to unveil in this aspect. In the contemporary African Christianity, biblical exegesis and African hermeneutics are highly indispensable in understanding of the Christian Scripture and suitable application of biblical text among African users of the Bible. The major aim of this study is to evaluate the relationship between African religious and cultural practices and biblical interpretation. The inability of daily users of the Bible, especially ordained priests and their equivalents to engage in biblical exegesis is a big challenge to Africans in the 21st century. One of the dangers of this problem is misunderstanding and misinterpretation of biblical text as well as deception of Christian followers in great number. The mass ignorance of the daily users of the Bible, and poor knowledge and historical development of African belief and practice is an issue that needs urgent attention. It is not exaggeration that family crisis and social chaos are part of Africans' life as a result of poor interpretation and application of biblical texts. The researcher posits that adequate knowledge of biblical exegesis is required for suitable application of biblical texts in different aspects of human endeavour in relation to African religious practices in African milieu. The Methodology used in this work is historical-critical method of biblical exegesis. Data are collected and analysed qualitatively.

Key words: Bible, Exegesis, African Religion, Belief, Practice

A. INTRODUCTION

Afro-biblical hermeneutics is needed for biblical interpretations done in Africa especially by Africans. Exegesis of the biblical text is not only a crucial and interesting exercise in biblical studies, but an indispensable effort towards understanding a biblical text under investigation. Reading and comprehending the Bible is different from reading an article or letter from a friend or organization. This is why Hayes and Holladay (1934 p.14) posit that "biblical exegesis belongs to the category of specialized exegesis. It cannot be treated as a recent novel or contemporary magazine which usually considers contemporary readers." Studying the Biblical text(s) from its original context is a herculean task which requires much effort. Biblical exegesis is an effort towards giving a balanced understanding of a biblical pericope for suitable application in a certain milieu. A proper understanding of any biblical text is impossible until its exegetical study is carefully undertaken. Barr (1992) avers that exegesis is a crucial aspect of biblical studies, as it enables readers to grasp the original meaning of the text, which is essential for accurate interpretation and application.

Exegesis is incomplete if it is not applied in a particular setting for absorption for numerous purposes. The essence of biblical exegesis is usually for human development and sustenance of community or society growth and development. It is on this note that hermeneutics becomes a very vital aspect of biblical exegesis. Africa is one of the social settings for biblical hermeneutics. For decades, biblical scholars have applied the exegetical findings of their investigated biblical texts in African soil.

African belief(s) and practice(s) predominantly encompass the way of life and behaviour of Africans which are influenced by their faith in the Supreme Being, and in accordance with perennial custom(s). Biblical exegesis is more interesting when it finds itself in addressing human need in the contemporary dispensation. Nthamburi and Waruta (1997 p.40) contend that “unless an African is enabled to understand Scripture in his/her own cultural patterns, the Scripture will not only lose its validity but its authoritative relevance as well.” In addition, Kuwornu-Adjaottor (2012 p.10) opines that good Biblical exegesis is required and Afrobiblical hermeneutics is needed for biblical interpretations done in Africa especially by African(s).

The thrust of this paper is to examine the nexus between biblical exegesis and African religious belief and practice. In this study, biblical exegesis is explored in relation to its hermeneutics in African soil. This study intends to contend that proper biblical exegesis has a lot to contribute to Africans and towards a better Africa and African(s). While library research is used in this paper, qualitative method is used to collect and analyse data for this study. The sources of data collection is mainly from secondary sources such as online articles, journal articles, textbooks, published and unpublished materials and so on.

B. UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

It is necessary to examine what the term “exegesis” implies before taking a study on biblical exegesis. According to Hayes and Holladay (1934), the term “exegesis” itself comes from the Greek word *exegeomai* which basically meant “to lead out of.” When applied to texts, it denoted the “reading out” of the meaning. The noun, therefore, could refer to “interpretation” or “explanation. The Greek meaning of the word indicates the process of drawing out the meaning from the text rather than imposing one's own interpretations onto it. Exegesis is a crucial aspect of biblical studies, as it seeks to uncover the author's intended meaning, the historical and cultural background, and the relevance of the text to contemporary readers.

Exegesis involves a range of methods and techniques, including philological analysis, historical research, literary criticism, and theological reflection. Philological analysis involves examining the language, grammar, and syntax of the text to understand its original meaning. Historical research involves studying the historical context in which the text was written, including the social, cultural, and political background. Literary criticism involves analysing the text's literary structure, style, and genre to understand its literary significance.

Theological reflection involves considering the text's theological themes, motifs, and implications for Christian doctrine and practice. According to Bultmann (1941), a prominent biblical scholar, exegesis involves a “demythologization” of the text, stripping away its mythological and magical elements to reveal its historical and cultural significance. This process is essential to understanding the text's original meaning and its relevance to contemporary readers.

Biblical exegesis is the critical analysis and interpretation of the biblical text, aiming to understand its original meaning and significance. It involves a thorough examination of the text's linguistic, historical, cultural, and literary context, as well as its theological and philosophical implications.

In the world of the Bible, Barr (1961 p.5) opines that exegesis is “the interpretation of the Bible as a product of its own time and culture, and as a document which has a message for our own time and culture”. Similarly Jacobs notes that “the Bible is not a monoculture book.” (p. 6). By engaging in biblical exegesis, scholars and readers can gain a deeper understanding of the text's meaning, significance, and

relevance to their lives. Pobee says it simply: “the Church is never welded to any particular culture, even if it is rooted in every culture in order to be able to speak to those who share in this. Consequently, theology, whether African or European, has the task of thinking revelation anew in each cultural situation” (p. 57) and “the Bible itself is not a-cultural” (p. 153).

Biblical exegesis refers to the critical interpretation and explanation of biblical texts, encompassing various methodologies and approaches that have evolved over time. This practice is essential for understanding the meanings and implications of Scripture within its historical, literary, and theological contexts. One of the foundational approaches to biblical exegesis is the *peshat*, which emphasizes the plain or literal meaning of the text. It is argued that this method requires a thorough examination of the linguistic and grammatical aspects of the scripture, followed by an analysis of its literary and historical contexts (Vargon, 2001).

This approach is crucial for establishing a baseline understanding of the text before exploring deeper or more allegorical interpretations. In addition to *peshat*, other forms of exegesis include *midrash*, which is a traditional Jewish interpretive method that seeks to make biblical texts relevant to contemporary issues and contexts (Kern-Ulmer, 2008).

Midrashic interpretations often involve creative storytelling and can provide insights into the moral and ethical dimensions of the scriptures. Similarly, inner-biblical exegesis, as discussed by Tjin (2022), involves interpreting one biblical text in light of another, highlighting the interconnectedness of the biblical narrative and its reception within different historical contexts. Theological interpretation also plays a significant role in biblical exegesis, particularly within Christian traditions.

According to Dunn (2007), scholars like Raymond Brown have explored the concept of *sensus plenior*, or “fuller sense,” which posits that biblical texts can convey deeper meanings when viewed through the lens of Christological understanding. This method reflects the belief that the scriptures are not merely historical documents but are also divinely inspired texts that reveal God’s ongoing revelation to humanity.

Moreover, the evolution of biblical exegesis has been influenced by various historical and cultural factors. For instance, the Carolingian Renaissance saw a shift towards more fluid and anthological commentaries, which integrated patristic models and adapted them to contemporary theological concerns (Matis, 2022).

This transformation illustrates how exegesis is not static but rather a dynamic process that responds to the needs and contexts of its interpreters. In contemporary scholarship, there is a growing recognition of the importance of integrating ethical considerations into biblical exegesis. In his work, Niditch (2023) emphasizes the relevance of biblical texts to modern ethical dilemmas, thereby bridging the gap between ancient scripture and contemporary moral discourse. This approach underscores the ongoing significance of biblical exegesis in addressing pressing social and ethical issues today.

Conclusively, biblical exegesis encompasses a variety of interpretive strategies that aim to uncover the meanings of scripture within its historical, literary, and theological contexts. From the literal interpretations of *peshat* to the more nuanced readings of *midrash* and theological interpretation, exegesis remains a vital practice for understanding the complexities of biblical texts and their relevance to both ancient and modern audiences.

C. DOING BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Embarking on the task of analysing a biblical text from its original context is engrossing but arduous. Biblical exegesis is a multi-step process that involves a thorough analysis of the biblical text. The following are the steps involved in doing biblical exegesis:

1. Textual Analysis: The first step in biblical exegesis is to examine the text itself, paying attention to its language, grammar, syntax, and literary structure. This involves analysing the text's words, phrases, and sentences to understand their meaning and significance. According to Hubbard (1989), a biblical scholar, the first step in exegesis is to read the biblical text carefully and accurately, with a view to understanding its literal meaning.

Redaction criticism is another effort towards understanding the literary content of a biblical text. Redaction criticism is an effort towards determining the difference between the first draft or original manuscript and edited version(s). Redaction criticism is a method of biblical criticism that focuses on the relationship between the text and its editing history. It involves analysing the text to determine how it was edited and compiled, and what this reveals about the intentions and goals of the editor(s).

The major parts in redaction criticism include redactor, redaction, redactional layer and redactional seams. The redactor is the editor or compiler of the text. They are responsible for selecting, arranging, and editing the material(s). Redaction is the process of editing and compiling the text. Redactional layer is the layer of the text that reflects the redactor's editorial decisions. Redactional seam(s) is the points in the text where the redactor has made significant changes or insertions (Ebeling, 1964).

2. Historical Contextualization: The second step in biblical exegesis is to place the text in its historical context. This involves studying the social, cultural, and political background of the time period in which the text was written. This helps to understand the author's intentions, the audience's assumptions, and the historical events that influenced the text.

According to Wrede (1901 p.9), a German biblical scholar, "the historical context is the basis of the interpretation of the text".

3. Cultural Analysis: The third step in biblical exegesis is to analyse the cultural context of the text. This involves studying the cultural values, customs, and traditions that are reflected in the text. This helps to understand the text's cultural significance and its relevance to contemporary readers.

According to Geertz (1973), culture is a system of meaning that is shared by a group of people and is transmitted from one generation to the next. In some cases, the cultural analysis of the text is explained using another nomenclature called "Sitz-im-Leben". "Sitz-im-Leben" is a German term used to designate situation in life of a biblical text. It studies the socio-cultural practice(s) prevalent at the time of the events that took place in the text. Socio-cultural analysis of a biblical text helps an exegete to decide suitable setting for application of the findings of his or her exegesis.

4. Literary Analysis: The fourth step in biblical exegesis is to analyse the literary structure and style of the text. This involves examining the text's genre, tone, and literary devices, such as metaphors, similes, and allusions. This helps to understand the text's literary significance and its intended meaning.

As noted by Frye (1957), the literary structure of a text is a reflection of its meaning and significance. In addition, literary criticism of a text offers the opportunity to refer to the original

manuscript of the text to determine the actual genre of the selected *pericope*. It gives the exegete the opportunity to discover if the literary unit is an imperative or a plea, including other elements.

5. Theological Reflection: The final step in biblical exegesis is to reflect on the text's theological themes and implications. This involves considering the text's relevance to Christian doctrine and practice, as well as its significance for contemporary readers.

According to his theological view, Barth (1934) avers that the Bible is a theological text that is meant to be interpreted theologically. It is very crucial at this juncture to infer that theological interpretation of a biblical text is entirely different from personal position of a pulpit preacher.

Theological reflection is never the same with faith based interpretation of a biblical text. Theological reflection of a biblical text considers objectively, the implication of the study text in relation to human relationship with God. In other words, theological reflection of the text considers the relevance of the study text to man and his understanding of God. It can either enhance or totally change man's perception or idea of God on certain issues or realities, depending on the exegetical discoveries from the text.

African theologians such as Ukpong (2000) advocates "reading with the eyes of the poor," integrating African cultural symbols (e.g., communality, ancestral veneration) into exegesis. Oduyoye (2001) attempts close reading of texts like Hagar's story (Gen 16) through Ghanaian Akan concepts. Dube (2000) reads Matthew 15:21–28 (Canaanite woman) as resistance to missionary paternalism. The theological reflection either gives elements of support or directly opposes already existing Church doctrine and traditional practices.

6. Close Reading: A very important part of biblical exegesis that must be given maximum attention while doing the exegesis of biblical text is the close reading. Close reading of the text involves details explanation of the selected literary unit. Reading the chosen text closely must take into consideration, analysis of the text from its original context. In this regard, proficiency in the original language of the text is essentially required.

It is compulsory that the exegete must have at least basic knowledge of biblical language(s). Proficiency in Hebrew and Greek languages is the prerequisite for study of any given biblical passage(s). If a study is taken on selected text from the Old Testament, the researcher who is the exegete must be familiar with Hebrew language; if it is selected text from the New Testament, the researcher (the exegete) must be familiar with Greek language.

The only eligibility for reading any biblical text closely is at least basic knowledge of Hebrew and Greek languages. Anyone who does have knowledge of these two languages is automatically disqualified from attempting a close reading of any biblical text. This contention is based on the reality that most translations of the Bible to other languages and dialects are from Hebrew and Greek Bibles respectively.

In the close reading, meticulous attention is given to Hebrew words if the study text is from the Old Testament or Greek words if the study text is from the New Testament. It is here that the researcher proves his or her expertise in biblical exegesis. The contextual meaning and implication of the Hebrew words or Greek words are extensively analysed. The findings of the exegesis are usually emerged from close reading of the text. Without the close reading of the text, it is likely that there could be no new discovery from the study text.

D. AFRICAN RELIGION/AFRICAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PRACTICE

Traditional Religion is often used to designate that type of religion that is built upon the belief and cultural practice of people of a given locality. The practices of this kind of religion are usually based on what is handed down to subsequent generations by their forebears.

Traditional religious practices have been a well-known religion among people of different continents of the world. The influence of traditional based religion is often common and perennial tradition of a particular group of people over certain period of time.

However, there has been an ongoing debate about the suitable nomenclature for this type of religion. Whereas some scholars object that it should properly described as Traditional Religion and African Traditional Religion when referring to Africans, some contend that it is better called Indigenous Religion and African Indigenous Religion when referring to Africans. Adamo (2011 p.2) gives an interrogation regarding this debate thus: “Is there anything called African Traditional Religion(s) (ATR) at all?”

During the early days of missionaries, travellers, anthropologists and historians, there was no acceptance of any existence of anything called African history and ATR(s), despite the fact that they struggled with the adherents of this religion and tried to condemn what they thought never existed. Consequently, the one without history cannot have religion (Fage 1970 p.1) and (Denis 2006 p.312).

According to Mercado (2004/2005), some anthropologists posit that “untutored” Africans cannot know God as the idea of God is philosophical. The missionaries surmised that in the early days, Africans were not fully human; they prohibited polygamy, initiation rites, ancestor worship and other indigenous practices. For them, Africans could not have known God since they were not fully human as the missionaries thought.

Moreover, during the postcolonial era, it has come to be established that there is what may be call ATR(s); however, there is no unanimous agreement as to whether it is religions in the plural or religion in the singular. Mbiti (1970) proposes that it should be religions in the plural. His reason is that Africans are notoriously religious and there are different beliefs and tradition according to ethnic groups. There are so many ethnic groups as there are many traditional religions. Furthermore, he argues that AIR does not have one origin or one historic movement and that the beliefs amongst the different communities differ greatly.

In contradiction to the foregoing, Idowu (1973) argues for the singular use, because of the common racial origin of the Africans and the similarities of their culture and religious beliefs. Because the real cohesive factor in religion in Africa is the living God, it is should be African religion instead of religions. Shorter (1975) in Adamo (2011) proposes that African religion can be spoken in the singular, because of the basic unity of African religious systems: Although they (African religious systems) were separate and self-contained systems, they interact with one another and influenced one another to different degrees. This justifies our using the term African Traditional Religion in the singular to refer to the whole African religious phenomena, even if we are, in fact, dealing with multiplicity of theologies.

African traditional religious practice is believed and practiced through oral transmission. Bonsu (2016) avers that African traditional religion relies on the oral transmission. Thus, doctrine tends to be more flexible than it is in text-based religions like Christianity and Islam, and it changes according to the immediate needs of its followers. Awolalu (1975 p.2) states that African traditional religion “is not written on paper but in people’s hearts, minds, oral history, rituals, shrines and religious functions”.

E. TENETS OF AFRICAN RELIGION

Tenets of ATR/AIR encompass series of beliefs and practices advocated in Africa among Africans. Some major tenets of African religious practice include the following:

1. Belief in Supreme Being: Africans anchor their belief in the existence of the Supreme Being. This Supreme Being is regarded as the “Creator or God the Creator” in African thought. This Supreme Being is considered the ultimate source of all things including life, power and wisdom.

2. Ancestor Veneration: Ancestors in African religion are believed to play active role in the lives of their living generations. Idowu (1973) posits that ancestors are highly revered in African cultures, and their spirits are believed to continue to play an active role in the lives of their descendants. Ancestors are departed members of the living. They are often called “the living dead”. They offer services such as protection, guidance, wisdom, wealth and so on to the living.

3. Spirits and Spiritual Beings: In ATR/AIR, there is a wide belief in the existence of spiritual beings including spirits and other supernatural entities. These spiritual beings possess power and other capable qualities beyond human control.

4. Ritual and Sacrifices: Ritual and sacrifices are elements used in ATR to interact with divine beings. Rituals and sacrifices are used as votive offering to appease deity/deities. Africans use them in some cases to honour ancestors, and to seek favour such as blessing of various sorts, protection and healing from divinity.

5. Community and Interconnectedness: Man does not live in isolation, hence inter-personal relationship is inevitable in African religion and culture. Individual members of human society in Africa relate in various ways in the family, clan, and tribe and so on.

6. Respect for Nature and the Environment: It is recognized that Africans have regard for nature and natural environment. The essence of dwelling in harmony with natural world is emphasized in African religious practice. Similarly, Hallen (2003) avers that African religions often emphasize the interconnectedness of all things, and the need to live in harmony with nature and the environment.

7. Cyclical View of Time: Cyclical view of time in African religion and practice is demonstrated in such a way that events and experience are taken as part of larger cycle of birth, growth, decay and rebirth. According to Parrinder (1967), African cultures often have a cyclical view of life and death, with death seen as a natural part of the cycle of life.

8. Importance of Elders and Tradition: Elders in African religious practice are believed to be the custodians of tradition, culture and spiritual knowledge. Mbiti (1969) asserts that elders are highly respected in African cultures, and their wisdom and experience are sought after.

9. Holistic View of Health and Wellness: African religion adopts the holistic view of health and wellness. ATR/AIR recognizes the connection between physical emotions and spiritual wellbeing.

10. Emphasis on Harmony and Balance: Harmonious living among people living in society is highly maintained in African religion. It emphasizes the relevance of keeping mutual relationship and balance in all aspects of life. The mutual relationship is between and among individuals, communities and the natural environment.

F. WESTERN INFLUENCE ON AFRICAN RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND PRACTICES

Influence of western culture on ATR began at the time of European colonization in African land. Many African countries including Nigeria were greatly influenced to accept foreign religion at the expense of their indigenous religious practices.

During the colonial era, European colonizers sought to impose their own religious beliefs and practices on the indigenous populations of Africa. This led to the suppression of traditional African religions and the imposition of Christianity and Islam. Many African leaders and intellectuals were forced to convert to Christianity or Islam, and traditional African religious practices were seen as “pagan” and “heathen.”

The Western influence on African religious belief and practices had a profound impact on traditional African religions. Many traditional African religions were suppressed, and their practices were seen as "pagan" and "heathen."

The imposition of Christianity and Islam led to the loss of traditional African religious practices and the suppression of indigenous cultural identity. Few Examples of the western influence on African culture and belief are examined using the following tribes in Africa.

Igbo people

The arrival of Western colonizers and Christian missionaries in the 19th century brought significant changes to Igbo religious and cultural practices. Upon arrival of these people with exploitative mind, they suppressed traditional Igbo practices, labelling them as “heathen” and “backward”.

The adoption of Western culture led to loss of Igbo cultural heritage including rich Igbo language and decent dressing code. The Igbos continue to struggle to reconcile their valued traditional practices with modern influences. Perpetual division between the elites and unsophisticated is as a result of western urbanization that came with Christianity.

The arrival of Christianity, facilitated by European missionaries, led to the rejection of some Igbo traditional beliefs, which were labelled as “pagan” or “devilish”. Missionaries strived to end practices like human sacrifice. Many Igbo people converted to Christianity, although traditional religious practices persist. Christianity took over many functions of sacred specialists in Igbo traditional religion (Uchendu, 1965).

Today, many African societies are grappling with the legacy of Western influence on their religious belief and practices. Many people are seeking to reclaim their traditional spiritual practices and cultural identity, while others are embracing Christianity and Islam as a way of life. The blending of traditional African religions with Christianity and Islam has created a unique cultural syncretism that is characteristic of many African societies.

Western education, introduced by missionaries, attracted many Igbo due to the establishment of schools offering free education and healthcare. Western education was seen as a means of destroying indigenous Igbo ways of life. English became the language of instruction in schools, sometimes leading to the banning of Igbo in homes.

Modernity, driven by Christianity, education, urbanization, and industrialization, has altered Igbo cultural values. Traditional values like community life, hospitality, and human relations have been affected. Western culture is sometimes regarded as a superior civilization, leading to the perception that Igbo customs are primitive.

In addition, colonialism has had a detrimental effect on the social, political, and economic status of traditional Igbo women. The British used Igbo people as tools for territorial growth, which overturned the centuries-standing democracy of Igbo culture, replacing local leaders with chieftaincies, challenging Igbo leadership and organization (Nzegwu, 2006).

Yoruba People

In terms of religious practice of the Yoruba, missionaries associated it with “idol” worship without considering its moral values. Some view Western religion positively, crediting it with ending immoral practices like human sacrifices and the killing of twins. Many Yoruba are now Christians or Muslims, but aspects of their traditional religion still exist.

Modernization, essentially imitating Western culture, has significantly impacted Yoruba music, dance, and language. There's a growing tendency to prioritize the English language, potentially endangering the Yoruba language. Western culture has influenced moral laxity among contemporary Yoruba. Western education has affected traditional and cultural beliefs (Idowu, 1962).

However, there are few positive Influences of Westernization on the Yoruba socio-cultural practice. Western religion is seen by some as a tool to reintegrate Yoruba youths affected by social destabilization. The universal moral attitude of Western religion has transcendental ethical values that create social solidarity among the Yoruba.

Hausa People

Islam has been a significant influence in Hausa society since as early as the 14th century, brought by traders and missionaries from the West and elites converting from the east. The merging of religions has been characteristic of Hausa society for centuries, with a climate of tolerance and respect for religious diversity. Some Hausa groups still engage in Animist rituals, and some minorities have recently embraced Christianity.

During the colonial era, Western education was limited in the north because Christian mission work was prohibited there. There was a mistrust of Western education and the values associated with it. The Boko script, a Latin alphabet, was implemented by British and French colonial authorities and made the official Hausa alphabet in 1930. Today, millions of Hausa-speaking people who can only read and write in Ajami (Arabic script) are considered illiterate by the Nigerian government (Last, 1967).

The British colonial rule led to an uneven distribution of Western education between the North and South. Colonialism is blamed for the backwardness of the Hausa people in society. Fulani and Hausa cultural similarities have allowed for significant integration between the two groups and are often classified as “Hausa-Fulani”. Many Fulani living in Hausa regions cannot speak Fulfulde and speak Hausa as their first language (Hountondji, 2002).

G. INTERPLAY BETWEEN BIBLICAL EXEGESIS AND AFRICAN CULTURAL PRACTICES

Biblical exegesis within the African context has evolved to incorporate indigenous beliefs and practices, creating a rich tapestry of interpretation that reflects the unique cultural and spiritual landscapes of the continent. This intercultural exegesis allows for a more profound engagement with biblical texts, as

African scholars and theologians seek to understand scripture through the lens of their own traditions and experiences.

One significant aspect of this development is the rise of intercultural biblical exegesis, which emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Scholars such as Loba-Mkole (2007) argue that African contexts are not merely settings for applying exegetical conclusions but are integral to the interpretation process itself, providing epistemological privilege to local perspectives.

Loba-Mkole (2008) posits that this approach aligns with the inculturation hermeneutic, which seeks to bridge the gap between biblical texts and African cultural expressions, thereby making the scriptures more relevant to contemporary African believers. Moreover, the integration of African traditional beliefs into biblical interpretation has led to a re-evaluation of concepts such as salvation and eschatology.

For instance, Kibaara (2022) discusses how African traditional rituals influence the understanding of salvation among African Christians, suggesting that these rituals subconsciously shape their worldview and interpretation of biblical narratives.

Similarly, Agboada (2023) highlights the parallels between eschatological themes in African traditional religions and Christian eschatology, indicating that these indigenous perspectives can enrich theological scholarship in Africa. The dialogue between African traditional beliefs and biblical texts is further exemplified in the work of Gharbin (2023), who employs dialogic hermeneutics to explore the concepts of love in both Johannine literature and Akan culture.

This comparative approach not only enhances the understanding of biblical love but also affirms the value of African cultural insights in theological discussions. Such intercultural engagements demonstrate that African biblical hermeneutics is not a mere adaptation of Western methodologies but a distinct and vital field of study that contributes to the global discourse on the Christian Scripture.

Furthermore, the post-colonial context of African biblical scholarship has prompted a critical examination of the historical and ideological frameworks that have shaped biblical interpretation on the continent. West (2009) notes that African biblical hermeneutics often operates in opposition to missionary-colonial narratives, advocating for interpretations that reflect the lived realities and spiritual heritage of African communities. This critical stance is essential for developing a more inclusive and collaborative approach to biblical scholarship that honours both the text and the cultural contexts from which it is read.

Biblical exegesis in Africa is characterized by a dynamic interplay between scripture and indigenous beliefs, resulting in a rich and contextually relevant interpretation of biblical texts. By embracing intercultural exegesis and recognizing the significance of local traditions, African scholars are not only enhancing their understanding of the Bible but also contributing to a broader theological discourse that respects and incorporates diverse cultural perspectives.

H. RELEVANCE OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS TO THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF AFRICAN BELIEFS AND CULTURE

The relevance of "Biblical Exegesis and African Beliefs and Practices" lies in its effort to contextualize the Christian faith within the African socio-cultural context. It addresses the struggles African converts face in reconciling their Christian beliefs with their African identity. This field of study

seeks to make the Bible more relatable and applicable to the lives of African Christians by interpreting it through an African lens, using familiar languages, illustrations, and cultural references.

Biblical exegesis facilitates cultural contextualization. It emphasizes the importance of interpreting the Bible within the African context, as opposed to a Western one. This involves understanding the text in light of African worldviews, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions. It is helpful in addressing contemporary issues. It grapples with issues relevant to African Christians, such as polygamy, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and women's leadership in the church. Family and societal chaos created by wrong interpretation of some biblical narratives can be curbed through adequate and balanced exegetical analysis of such narratives.

Biblical exegesis empowers African voices. It promotes African agency in biblical interpretation, correcting the historical trend of interpreting the Bible through extraneous cultural and ideological conditioning. Besides, it gives room for promotion of inclusivity. This denotes that biblical exegesis seeks to make Christian faith appealing and relevant to all Africans, including the poor and marginalized. It enables development of African Christian theology. It contributes to the development of an authentic African Christian theology rooted in African experiences and perspectives.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the outcome of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Biblical exegesis should be the concern of every user of the Bible especially student theologians and certified theologians.
2. The two major languages of the Bible (Hebrew and Greek) must be priority in the study of Theology.
3. African Religion and Culture should be studied and observed to understand its values and tenets.
4. African religion and culture should not be disregarded and treated with contempt as if it has nothing to offer to the society.
5. Every possible effort should be made by Africans (Igbos) to transmit valuable Africa cultural practices to younger and subsequent generations.
6. Preachers of Biblical messages should link findings of exegesis of biblical text to suitable African socio-cultural practice with the sole aim of retaining moral rectitude among members of the contemporary society.
7. Biblical exegetes should endeavour to use their discoveries from biblical exegesis to discourage vices and promote and imbibe virtues.

J. CONCLUSION

The ability to understand the context of biblical text is dependent on the expertise of the exegete on Biblical exegesis. Proficiency in biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek respectively is highly indispensable in the exercise of biblical exegesis. It is really difficult to comprehend the original intention of biblical narrative if one is a novice to biblical exegesis.

Close reading of biblical text makes it easy to make new discoveries from the study of a biblical text. But it is only sufficient knowledge of Hebrew and Greek languages that makes the close reading feasible.

The value of cross-cultural interpretation recognizes the potential of the African context to enhance the understanding and interpretation of biblical texts. Cross-cultural biblical interpretation offers original interpretative insights and challenges professional biblical scholarship. The importance of context

highlights that there is no superior context or culture when it comes to biblical interpretation. The potential for authentic theology affirms that an African biblical hermeneutic approach is a possible route to developing an authentic African Christian theology. In addition, the significance of indigenous beliefs acknowledges the enduring significance of indigenous worldviews, beliefs, and practices in Africa.

The need for contextualization of biblical interpretation in Africa makes the identity and presence of Jesus more real to the Church in Africa. Moreover, proper knowledge of African religion and culture is required for African hermeneutic of the Bible. Hence, there is need to pay attention to African religious tenets and values through formal studies. Such study would offer learners the opportunity to understand the nature and provenance of African religion and culture. Effort should be made to connect contextual message of the Bible to social reality in African milieu.

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