



Research article

**HISTORICAL CRITICISM VERSUS AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS:
ISSUES AND PROSPECTS OF INTERPRETATIVE DIALOGUE**

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Article history:

Received 07 Jan. 2021

Accepted 22 Feb. 2021

Available online: 30-3-2021

Keywords: *Historical, Criticism, African, Biblical, Hermeneutics*

Some persons have asked the question whether it is possible to do biblical hermeneutics from a strictly African perspective without relying on some conclusions from historical criticism. An outright yes or no answer to this question would certainly bear the marks of one's social, cultural, religious, and even educational bias. The fact is that biblical interpretation has grown to a level where we can safely suggest a relationship of interdependence. Therefore, using historical, comparative, and evaluative methods, this paper examines the position and value of historical critical methodologies of biblical interpretation in engaging social contextual biblical interpretations in African perspectives. It finds that historical critical interpretative conclusions are still valuable foundations for hermeneutical approaches of African social context interpretations. It also finds that even though African biblical interpretation is newer compared to the established traditions of historical critical approaches of the Western world, historical critical investigators of the Bible need to evolve beyond intellectualism by establishing a rapport African biblical interpretation approaches. It concludes that African interpretative model has its legitimate and distinctive characteristics that is currently revolutionising thinking in biblical studies; and when this is recognised, it could promote and support understanding among biblical scholars across the globe in terms of intercultural dependence and diversity in textual application. The paper recommends and anticipates a continuous and a more robust dialogue between Western and African biblical interpretations in the future.

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Introduction

We find Walter Dietrich's (2002:77) "Parable" of theological astronomy very instructive as the take off point for this paper. He was describing the whole endeavour of biblical studies in its different acclimatization when he writes:

Please imagine a huge astronomical research laboratory, which is subdivided into various segments. We theologians work in innumerable workshops, halls and observatories: Anglo-American ones; northern, southern, and central European ones; Protestant and Catholic ones; and so on. They contain different offices and research areas, that is, for biblical, historical, systematic, or practical astronomy.... We use a variety of techniques: historical critique, statistics, logic, feminism, computer science, rhetoric, mysticism, aesthetics, and so. We also get inspiration from the neighbouring laboratories: the philosophical, the archaeological, the historical, and the philological the sociological, the pedagogical, religious studies, the psychological, the musicological, the aesthetic and art-historical, and

so on. We work with very different basic premises and have different aims in mind: more conservative or more progressive, more linked to our confession or more liberal, with more inner involvement or rather distanced and rational, more believing or more doubting.

Dietrich continues, that they are very isolated, tolerant and very busy, and sometimes very creative (Dietrich 2002:77). Rightly as Dietrich concludes, the Bible is more or less a heaven full of stars. The task of its interpretation is akin to counting the stars. It is only honest to admit that although we see the stars in their many numbers in the sky, we cannot actually count or tell how many they are up there (Dietrich 2002:77-78). For Tamez (2002:3), they have traded knowledge for emotion, which is also a way to penetrate the truth.

The words of Dietrich and Canek above explain in plain terms the need not to be dogmatic about one's method or discovery in biblical interpretation. There are innumerable layers and dimensions to biblical hermeneutics and sweeping conclusions would be nothing more or less than telling the world one has been able to count the stars. In this sense, to speak of a universal



methodology or approach to biblical interpretation is impossible. David Adamo (2005:1) in his book, *Explorations in Africa Biblical Studies*, states unequivocally that everything that happens can be a 100% goal, as no one is completely separated from all aspects of his environment, experience and culture. Similarly George Mulrain's (1919:116-132) view that the historical backdrop of hermeneutics uncovers that there has not been an understanding that has been without references to or reliant on a specific social code, thought examples, or social area of the translator, explains this thought in clearer terms.

The above notwithstanding, interpretation of Bible texts is an indispensable venture. As Dietrich and Luz (2002:vii) note, that sometimes definitions are important. In general, this is a time of cultural crisis. Old ways of understanding and practicing, even experience, no longer work. Then we have to think about what we mean. When older methods fail to answer urgent critical questions on issues of racism, violence, insecurity, fraud, war, starvation and poverty, ecological crisis, feminism, terrorism, and so on, is it not plausible to engage in interpretative dialogue? Hans Snoek's (2009:103) submission in spite of the considerable differences in context

between Africa and European biblical scholars that as far as the relation between exegesis and actualization is concerned, having oneself defined by one's own social and scientific context is particularly inevitable, and a dialogue with other contexts may be the assistance one needs to critically scrutinize one's own assumptions, is the clearest way we can explain the task of this paper.

We cannot stress the need for dialogue better. Even though social context shapes interpretation, there is still the need for mutual engagement between Western methodologies and African cultural hermeneutics. African biblical interpretation cannot deny the immense contribution and value of historical critical tools especially as premise for historical understanding of texts, neither can Western biblical scholarship outrightly reject the veracity of the sociocultural context interpretation model that have emerged from African biblical scholarship. I am sure this is what Justin Ukpong (2002:17) also saw this, when he writes that in the study of the Bible in Africa, specific West and African reading methods coexist. Thus, we see a prospect for continuous mutual dependence and benefit. This for us is where the future of interpretation lies.



Contextualising Hermeneutics

Random House Unabridged online dictionary (2011), traces the origin of the term hermeneutics to the Greek word *hermeneutikos* which is equivalent to *hermeneus*, meaning “skilled in interpreting” and “interpreting itself”. Accordingly, hermeneutics is an interpretative method. According to Marian-Webster online dictionary (2018:1), hermeneutics simply means a method or principle of interpreting the Bible. It is the study of methods of text interpretation (Marian-Webster 2018:1). From a wider view, this is the interpretation not only of texts but also defining and understanding of research in writing or orally, orally or by non-experts, that is, It deals with the nature, meaning, communication and understanding of language. This includes testing the entire interpretation process (Adamo n.d.:2).

Additionally, Wellman Jack (2012:1) sees biblical hermeneutics as definition, interpretation, expression, translation of Scripture or any other word in the Bible. So that when someone uses biblical advice, they are explaining the function of difficult or unknown words, or translating a word or words from one language to another.

Furthermore, Wellman (2012:2) adds that biblical hermeneutics is essentially the unfolding of something new or hidden to the casual Bible reader and discover incomprehensible words in all their meanings. The exhaustive definitions above give clarifications to the vague definition of biblical interpretations as ordinary method of biblical interpretation, which many writers prefer to use in their works. The definitions also summarise the basic task of interpretation, especially of historical critical study as discussed below.

Development and Thrust of Historical Criticism

Just as Dietrich ‘parable’ in our introduction suggest, Western method of biblical interpretation is varied in orientations. There are two major blocs of interpretations: the conservative who hold the traditional view and the historical critical school from which modern literary criticisms have emerged. Ancient Jewish and Christian writers, such as, Josephus, Philo, and Origen among other, and even many present-day conservatives and evangelical who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, maintain the traditional view of the Bible. For this class, the matter of authorship, date, milieu and many other critical issues raised concerning the Bible



and its world are settled issues and are not open to debate (Benware 2001:34).

Historical critical school however, presented the study of the Bible with new paradigms which have totally radicalized thinking in biblical studies. Historical criticism is a broad term that uses methods of dating documents and traditions, analyzes the events described in those documents, and uses the results of historiography to reconstruct and interpret biblical texts. Historical-critical method, like most important methods, lies in the philosophy of the Renaissance (Krentz 1975:7). This method and many of its claims are of vital importance to Bible interpretation. As Krentz (1975:33) states that the only scientifically responsible interpretation of the Bible is a survey of Bible texts. The current state of Bible texts uses historical understanding in a consistent way to identify and explain these texts in the context of traditional history.

According to Soggin (1976:34), using the historical-critical method, the interpreter investigates the formal aspect of the text, its contents and hence its literary genre; he determines, where possible, the author or at least the period in which it was written, and seeks to discover whether it was used in a particular occasion, the protocol of the court,

the wisdom school, public or private prayer, among others. This is the preoccupation of the historical critics. To clarify Soggin's view, critical historical studies are based on the strong conviction that to understand the meaning of Scripture today, one must first understand its relevance to the original reader. This view is also shared in African biblical interpretations but with more attention on the value or relevance of the texts to their contexts.

Hannah (1983:103) identifies the three aspects of the historical-critical method as source criticism, the form-critical approach and tradition criticism. For want of space, we shall focus briefly on the task of these three using the Pentateuch as major example throughout (we prefer the Pentateuch in explaining the thrust of historical criticisms. Source criticism attempts to recreate the source hidden behind the texts, but not the event hidden behind the text. Thus, the term "source criticism" generally refers to the reconstruction of written sources (Clines 1998:42).

More generally, source criticism is synonymous with Documentary Hypothesis which began as a response to the traditional claims of the Judo-Christian circle. Major proponents earlier source hypothesis were



Johann Gittfried Eichhorn (1752-1827) and Karl-David Ilgen (1763-1834). Two exclusive sources, Elohist and Yahweist were earlier identified, while Ilgen pointed out two Elohist and a Yahwist (Campbell and O'Brien 1993:2). Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780-1849) in a novel quest to understand the Bible, made two profound suggestions which also serve as basis for later Documentary Hypothesis using the Pentateuch as a case. First, he states that it is wise to know that Pentateuch codes dates back to post-monarchical era; second, that Pentateuch records may not be used as historical source (Wolf 1991:74). These opinions served as the necessary precursor for further radical criticism and the results that trailed biblical studies in the years that followed.

Flowing from these older perspectives, according to Petersen (1995:32) Franz Delitzsch acted as a powerful spokesman for the notion that the Pentateuch is made up essentially of three narrative sources PEJ and one embellished legal material D. For Petersen, though Julius Wellhausen's name later became routinely associated with the Documentary Hypothesis, he was not responsible for identifying the four constituent documents. The idea was rather inherited from a long line of study devoted to

the Pentateuch as briefly sampled in the foregoing. However, in 1886 Julius Wellhausen published *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels (Prolegomena to the History of Israel)*. In it Wellhausen argues that the Bible is a vital resource for historians, but it should not be seen literally. Wellhausen findings rang a change on the earlier theories by arguing that the relative age of the sources was different than had been supposed, namely that P instead of being the earliest was the latest one, hence the well-known sequence, JEDP, J Yahwist, E Elohist, D Deuteronomistic, P Priestly sources (Petersen 1995:32).

“Form criticism” on the other hand, is the English form of the German *Formgeschichte* “form history” or *Gattungsforschung* “genre research.” It is a process of biblical criticism attempting to group scripture into literary models including love poems, parables, proverbs, legends, and at the same time seeks to match them to specific period of oral pattern and communication (Alderman 2015). Alderman in a clearer term sees Form-criticism as a way of assessing and translating the texts of the Old Testament by studying its literary genres. He adds that these literary genres, its structure, meanings and attitudes are one way of deciding to understand the oral stage of its development



and the fact that each genre arises in and is appropriate for use in a particular situation. The purpose is to determine the relationship between the original form and life, and the notion of time as the literary tradition develops (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2015:n.p). It also seeks show the sociological setting (*sitz im leben*) for each genre.

The beginning of form-criticism may be linked to Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932). Gunkel was influenced by studies of folklore of Germanic origin and he transferred the knowledge in studying the Old Testament. Gunkel recognized that the bulk of Old Testament was folk literature and they are of oral origin. Additionally, he revealed that they also possess literary forms influenced by those of other cultural backgrounds. Gunkel argued that a history of the Old Testament literature limited to the biographies of the writers was inadequate. He then outlined the main literary types in the Old Testament describing them under the general rubrics of prose, or poetry, setting each into its historical framework, and suggesting its place in the life of ancient Israel. The objective of the form-criticism is, therefore, to find the relationship of the text with life in the different stages of its history.

On the whole, form critics study not merely the sentence as a unit of human speeches in the Bible but the literary types of speech which include the discovery of the sociological role or function of each original setting. The major claim of form critics lies first on the point at which it differs from literary criticism, while literary criticism is concerned with development of written sources, a form of criticism aiming to reconstruct the history of a statement or entity in its pre-written form. Two assumptions are particularly implicit in form critical propositions: (i) every documented text is came before some oral period of development; and (ii) from its literary format, one can learn a great deal; thus a history of the pre-literary stages of a text sheds light on the finished literary type (Armerding 1983:44).

A third major approach that has been employed in historical criticism is called traditional criticism, traditional historical approach and traditional history. Based on the origins and inventions of the critics of tradition, tradition critics focus on how ancient oral traditions and written texts evolved into complex religious and political views. According to Van Seters (1998:9), tradition history may refer either to content – the development of a tradition through



various stages over time – or to the process of transmission from the past. Those concerned with tradition history believe that each small unit or individual story of the Pentateuch was connected with a particular locality, such as a sanctuary, and was the special preserve of a tribe or clan. It is also held that every story or piece of tradition is passed on from one generation to the next, like many people in different periods of history. It is therefore suggested by tradition historians that as the tribes or clans of ancient Israel came together to form larger political entities, the individual traditions of various tribes merged to become the precious possession of the entire nation (Seter 1998:10). For us, these conclusions are very important in any contextual application of the Bible texts.

There are other equally important critical methods classed as modern literary approaches such as: Rhetorical, Narrative, Canonical, sociological, allegorical and literal methods, literary, economical, structural, redaction, social criticisms and a host of others which are increasingly becoming popular in contemporary biblical scholarship in the West (Adamo 2005:4). In this section, however, we shall briefly touch Canonical and Narrative Criticisms which we consider vital in doing African biblical

hermeneutics. Canonical Criticism which according to Brett (2008:34) was popularized by Brevard S. Child and James A. Sanders is a method of biblical interpretation aimed at comprehending the Bible as an integral part of a holy scripture that emanated from a believing worshipping community. Canonical Criticism addresses dynamic quality of scripture in interactive formation with the believing communities (Callaway 1999:142). We recognize, however, that there is plurality in canonical scriptures of various divides. The record of canonical formation is absent in canonical criticism. Rather, Canonical Criticism begins with the idea that the Bible text was created, transferred, organized, and preserved in an authoritative group. Criticism of the Bible should include research into whether these texts believe in working in society. While the historical-critical approach focuses on steps in developing biblical texts, canonical criticism examines text as received in its finished form. In essence, canonical criticism focuses on the receiving community rather than authors or sources; and on the canonical (i.e. final) form rather than on the developing processes of texts (Callaway 1999:142-143). Narrative criticism also called narratology is one of the Modern forms of biblical criticism based on modern theory and practice of



literature. As with other literary approaches (and in contrast to historical forms of criticism), narrative criticism looks at the whole text and focuses on narrative structure and composition, the development of the plot, themes and motifs, characters, and features (Johannes 1997: 194). Narrative criticism focuses on the final version of the text, taking into account the relationship of the inner world and the text as historical criticism (Rudolf 2013: 231). Narrative critics view the entire text and read it as a story, a cohesive entity that deals with conflict, resolution, character development, and more (Powell 2009:46). Again, the relevance of these conclusions should not end with just the discoveries but their application to contemporary issues. This is perhaps the clearest line that puts African biblical hermeneutics apart from the Western critical methods. For Africans readers, the Bible is a text of faith with trans-generational relevance.

African Biblical Hermeneutics and its Task

The task of African biblical interpretation is explicit in its efforts at realising African interest from the Bible. African biblical hermeneutic is also variously referred to as African biblical Studies, African cultural hermeneutics. Several other terms like

inculturation, liberation, contextual, Africentric, and vernacular hermeneutics, are also sometimes adapted its description (Adamo 2015:1). These nomenclatures do not pose any major challenge. The seeming challenge is immediately resolved once the task of African biblical hermeneutics is understood as a genuine attempt by Africans to realise their own peculiar way of interpreting the Bible aiming to satisfy their desires (Adamo n.d.: 2).

It is in the light of the above that Justin Ukpong sees inculturation hermeneutic as a referential method that seeks to make any community of ordinary people and its sociocultural context the object of biblical interpretation. For him, the differential feature is that it clarifies and emphasizes the use of imaginary frames of reference for public reading in the process of interpretation (Ukpong 2002: 18). We can legitimately adopt this definition for African biblical hermeneutics without doing any harm to the meaning. Thus, David Tuesday Adamo is also correct when he states that African biblical theology is a biblical interpretation that makes the sociological context of Africa a matter of interpretation. Furthermore, this style of Christian scriptures comes from a forward-looking point of view and that the biblical text is



analyzed from the perspective of African perspectives and culture (Adamo 2015:33).

In an expansionary discourse, Adamo (2005) has also pointed out that African cultural hermeneutics, like any other third world hermeneutics is a contextual hermeneutics knowing that interpretation is usually perfected in a specific perspective. Hence, African cultural hermeneutic is reading the text in a surpassingly African way (Adamo 2005:9). These clarifications set apart African cultural hermeneutic from those of the Western context in interpreting the Bible. This distinction is clear in the words of Ukpong (2002:17) that wanting a better vocabulary, I call the classical Western Bible reading method an intellectual method, as opposed to African reading. In contrast, African reading is inherently existential and practical, a situational approach.

By Ukpong's description of intellectualist reading, as professedly seeking of objective truth as interpretative interest, and profess employment of a universal perspective with a major concern on the meaning of biblical text, it is not difficult to understand the orientation and major concern of historical critical investigation of the Bible. African existential and pragmatic reading, do not claim a universal approach or perspective but

has interest in linking bible texts and messages to present prevailing issues, with valid results for the context concerned and possible validity for other contexts (Ukpong 2002:17). We would take what Ukpong achieved with his work, "The story of Jesus' birth (Luke 1-2): an African reading," as a good example of African reading of biblical texts in an existential perspective with valid results for Nigeria as particular context and other third world nations of the world as universal contexts (Ukpong 2002:59-69).

In Africa biblical reading, the Bible is vital, since this is the book that discloses the nature of God, creation, and the origin of man. In this sense, Adamo (2005:9) argues that in African cultural hermeneutics, God is not a one-way street. His path to the world of revelation is unrestricted. God's perspective depends on people and places he is. This argument brings to the fore, the stunning reality that African biblical interpretation developed from the feeling to meet the needs of Africans. It accentuates Asante's (1988:31) argument the doctrine of emancipation must find its existence in those who seek it, and which others cannot impose on them. It must be derived from some historical and cultural experience of the people themselves. For us, this is a definition of both the thrust and need for African



reading or interpretation of the Bible in their own contextual frame.

There are two characteristic of African biblical hermeneutics we must touch briefly here. That is, its liberation and culturally sensitive nature. Realising texts from a liberation orientation is a prominent in most third world hermeneutics. Elsa Tamaz' (2002:2-16) "Reading the bible under a sky without stars", is a fine work in this regards. The reason for this feature is clear from the understanding of their lives struggles. Brown (2004) citing Dietrich and Luz (2002) describes the approach of western interpretation and points to the abstract nature of their biblical enterprise, stating that it runs abstractly, leading to abstract results and truth that are not relevant to any context (Brown 2004:9). By abstract, they mean "unattached to the life and reading of ordinary people" and to present conditions that constitute daily life. In contrast, African cultural hermeneutics finds the Bible to be a rich resource for describing their daily struggles for language and a common source of identity.

For instance, Wunk (2015:2) points out, that in Germany (as in many other countries in the Western world) the gap between academia and the daily lives of Christians is

widening. African theology consciously seeks to unite the two worlds. Gerald West (2009:29) also wrote: African Bible students should not live alone in the academy. Regular African translators always ask African Bible scholars to communicate with them and their reality. In African Bible Hermeneutics, the interpretation of Bible texts did not end by themselves. Bible interpretations are always associated with changing contexts in Africa. This links traditional African Bible interpretations with African Bible teachings, a common effort to "read" the Bible for personal and social change.

According to Idemudia (2016:188), the liberation character of African cultural hermeneutics is immediately brought to fore when used in connection with the oppressive nature of colonial regimes in Africa which has continued into neo-colonialism in contemporary times. For instance, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and colonial regimes in Nigeria, Ghana, as well as other places in Africa, required that biblical scholars, developed new biblical readings and theologies for the liberation of the people. The apartheid and colonial regime has passed, but the liberation character of African cultural hermeneutics continues to be relevant in the face of present



day realities in Africa. The oppressive political and economic “remains” of colonial influence in Africa must be addressed and the key to success in this endeavour is a total subscription to the liberation character of the African cultural hermeneutics.

There is a sense in which common experience shape interpretation of biblical texts. This fact is well demonstrated in the book: *The Bible in a World Context: An Experiment in Contextual Hermeneutics*. In the book, three biblical scholars from different social cultural backgrounds are invited to interpret the Lukan birth of Jesus narrative (Luke 1-2) namely: Elsa Tamaz from Costa Rica, South America, who wrote “A Star Illuminates the Darkness,” Justin Ukpong from Nigeria, Africa, wrote “The account of Jesus’s Birth (Luke1-2): An African Reading,” and Saiichi Yagi (2002:75) from Japan, Asia, who wrote “Mary and Maya.” While both Tamaz and Ukpong applied the interpretation of the text to the common experience of poverty, violence, injustice, corruption, political, economic and social oppression of the weak, Yagi rather saw a transcendental meaning or motivation in connection of the text to Japanese people. According to Yagi (2002:75) writing at the dawn of the new millennium, noted that in Japan, the

difference between rich and poor, weak and powerful is relatively small. The walls of different social strata of the society are not thick. More than 90% of the total population is middle class and the standard of living is quite low. Like most western countries, life expectancy is very low. Of course, it would be difficult to for Yagi to relate the Lukan text to poverty or any of such issue giving the experience of his context. The same cannot be said about Tamaz and Ukpong’s context. Hence, shaped by the existential realities of the contexts, the text readily finds meaning in liberating the socially, politically, economically and otherwise oppressed in their environments.

In terms of cultural sensitivity, African cultural hermeneutics seeks to place Africa and Africans at a focal point globally. Here, the Bible is not only understood in African cultural thought, but seen as means for the celebration of Africans’ God-giving identity (Adamo 2005:2). Apart from its liberation and culturally sensitive characteristics, other distinguishing characteristics of African cultural hermeneutics are: orality, narration, theopoetic and imaginative (Adamo 2015:2). As rightly noted, all the later characteristics find expression in the broad context of Africa culture itself. They are things for which Africa and Africans were and are



known and associated from time immemorial.

Issues and Prospects of Interpretative Dialogue

As we already hinted in this paper, there could hardly be an independent hermeneutics in a strict sense of the word. Hence, the first issue raised here is on the value or relevance of historical critical methodologies to African biblical hermeneutics. On the whole, two major positions seem to have emerged and run concurrently regarding how Africans interpreters respond to this issue. On the one hand are those who rejected historically critical methods as a response to God's revealed Word and deny it any value or relevance. On the other hand are those who have embraced the methods as tools with relevance in breaking fundamentalism in interpretation. Many others fall between these opinions (Holter 2011:382).

Our position on this issue is informed by Ukpong's (2002:34) view aptly captioned by Holter that while Western commentators see the historical-critical approach as an end in itself, African interpreters see it more as a tool that allows the interpreter to interact with issues arising from the current historical and social context. From our examination of historical critical method in this paper, it is

clear that the above excerpt is correct premise to advocate a continuous dialogue. Africans biblical interpreters cannot jump into contextual interpretation without examining texts' *sitz im leben* and to a large extent; a proper African contextual interpretation is determined by a clear understanding of the original context of biblical texts.

The second issue that suggests a prospect for dialogue is that of abstraction and the need for contextualisation. Again Ukpong's (2002:17) description of Western reading of the Bible as intellectualist would buttress our point here. The question is: what value is in knowing the original source, form, and tradition of a biblical text? The answer to this question is found in Carlos Metters' complementary discussion of the importance of context in the process of interpretation as presented by James Brown (2004:9). For Metters, the core concern for any sort of reasonable hermeneutics is not what the stand for but its significance in the everyday lives and experience of people (Brown 2004:9). In this sense, it is possible to go beyond the abstract conclusions of historical critical method to contextualisation as found in African biblical hermeneutics. Thus, the prospect of dialogue here lies knowing the original meaning of text through historical



tools and contextualising in the approach of African biblical interpretation.

Similar to the above, the issue of misappropriation of original contexts and making the Bible to say what it does not mean, is another prospect for interpretative methodical dialogue. According to Olugbega Olagunju (2018:2), posits that the greatest danger in the process of interpreting the Bible is taking this verse out of the context in which it was written. Without employment of historical critical tools it becomes easy for anyone to make the Bible support any kind of ideology. For Olagunju, this problem is solved once the basic investigative queries of historical criticism are taken care of. Some of these queries are already delineated in the previous sections. The interpretation of the Bible in the historical context is consistent with modern sovereignty. Therefore, historically decisive approaches to addressing global denial as biblical fairy tales, lies, deceptions, or bestiality, distinguish between the possibility of a historical fact and a belief in reality; and for us this is of endless value to biblical studies irrespective of contextual milieu.

Finally for us in this work is the issue of healthy interaction in biblical studies across the globe. The Western African

interpretative dichotomy and all other such dichotomies in biblical hermeneutics are not necessary in our opinion. Ideological texts sharing and interpretative dialogue is what we have advocated in this work. This is quintessential in a world that is constantly being torn apart along so many lines: politics, economy, race, and so on. A methodical corroborative interpretation of the Bible from the standpoint of historical criticism and African biblical hermeneutics could contribute to the continuous relevance of the Bible in solving contemporary societal challenges. This idea could also help in changing the orientation of a great many in our world that see the Bible only as religious relics of the Jewish people and without pragmatic implication for the present post-modern world.

Conclusion

We have attempted the assessment of historico-critical principle of interpreting the bible in light of its place and relevance in African biblical hermeneutics and found that there is prospect of interpretative dialogue for both methods. Particularly, African interpretative model has it legitimate and distinctive characteristics that is currently revolutionising thinking in biblical studies across the globe. Again, they acknowledge that presently, the Bible is less read in the



West and general interest in the value of the Bible continues to wane. There is a palpable disconnect between the Bible and Western societies. One of the reasons advanced for this is the abstractness of the methods of interpretations prevalent in the Western world. Western interpretations have made the Bible a text book. The opposite could be said about African biblical interpretation. For Africans the Bible is a powerful book with contextual relevance in solving contemporary challenges. Many African biblical scholars acknowledge the gains of historical critical tools and deploy them when appropriate. Some contemporary Western scholars are also emulating African biblical hermeneutics especially in the area of contextualisation. For us, the recognition of this mutual dependence could promote and support understanding among biblical scholars across the globe in terms of intercultural dependence and diversity in textual application. Thus, a robust dialogue between Western and African biblical interpretations is necessary for future research on the subject.

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