

## THE USAGE OF THE BIBLE IN AFRICAN MISSIONARY HISTORY: THE LEGACY OF NEW TESTAMENT USAGE IN AFRICA.

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**Abstract:** An issue that is closely related to the approaches and methodologies to biblical interpretation in Africa is the use of the Bible in missionary history. Through the decades, there have been the introduction, translation, exegesis and usage of the Bible by European missionaries who were the carriers of Christianity to Africa. These European missionaries came from diverse missionary organisations and various backgrounds. This article explores the possible ideological baggage that was left behind by Western missionaries that worked in selected parts of Africa. Furthermore, it examines the usage of history as a tool in the formulation and interpretation of Christian ideology by European enterprises. It also looks at the effects of such an ideology on missionary work in some parts of Africa.

### 1. *History and Mission*

The word history is often used to denote approaches to a discipline that deals with human existence in the world. For Darlap & Splett, history as used in Europe, denotes the science or study of history (*historia*) or the study of the specific events (*Geschichte*). According to them history involves the attempt one makes 'to know, investigate, except the German *Geschichte*. They then argue that the former adopted the approach that emphasizes the scientific approach to the subject while the latter which originated from the Germans 'envisages rather the event itself, first the individual occurrence and the individual life-process and the total world-process.'<sup>1</sup>

In sum, the key figure in dealing with the understanding of history is humankind, and it has got to do with the perception of them as the possessors of their history under certain conditions, that is, when and only when they 'understand it (a truth which is basic to the two senses of history, as event and historical knowledge, *Geschichte* and *historia*).'<sup>2</sup> Hence, the study of the facts and events with regard to the church in its totality is what is normally described as Church history and this is crucial to the understanding of the Church in the past, the Church in the present and the Church to come in the future. From its inception, the Church sees itself as having a task to perform, which it normally refers to as its 'mission to the world'; that is, to self-extend itself to other places where it has no visible presence and influence. Our focus in this paper is the role the Bible played and continues to play in this whole exercise. This is very crucial because the church always

<sup>1</sup> A. Darlap & J. Splett, 'History' in Karl Rahner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Freiburg-in-Breisgau (Burns & Oates 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1993), pp. 618-627.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

insisted that the missionary venture that it undertook comes from the biblical charge or commission from the Bible to do so.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Baur's usage of history as an ideological tool

In dealing with the missionary task of the Church in the use of the Bible, the technical competence required by the hermeneut or interpreter is not just a kind of historical expertise which enables you to give authoritative versions of the faith. It is about reconstructing theological traditions just as Baur reconstructed liberative forms of theology in Nineteenth Century Germany to rescue German theology from authoritarian structures. Baur's objective in undertaking his theological interpretation through historical research is not to undermine theological understanding but rather to provide objective "interpretation by the usage of historical data". Morgan calls Baur's approach, a "sympathetic hermeneutical" [approach], which provided more "objective" (because it is responsive to the object) history-writing.<sup>4</sup> This was because of Baur's conviction that 'true science' is the product of life and it is not alien to it; it represents the 'noblest spiritual side of life.'<sup>5</sup>

Schleiermacher also expanded this same idea by going further to relate this conception of religion to Christianity by saying that

The original intuition of Christianity is more glorious, more sublime, more worthy of adult humanity, penetrates deeper into the systematic religion and extends itself further over the whole universe.<sup>6</sup>

He further elevates Christianity in his assertion that it is a "higher power of religion."<sup>7</sup> This is because of his contention that Christianity is 'most and best. conscious of God, and the divine order in religion and history.'<sup>8</sup> Schleiermacher goes on to lay the foundation for colonial ideology that Baur and others employed in their development of *kulturprotestantismus* by stating that, with respect to Christianity,

Almost its first work on appearing was to destroy the last expectation of its pious contemporaries, saying it was irreligious and godless to expect any other restoration than the restoration to purer faiths, to higher view of things and eternal life of God. Boldly it led the heathen beyond the separation they had made between the world of the gods and the world of men.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For example, The Great Commission from Matthew 28.

<sup>4</sup> R. Morgan, 'Ferdinand Christian Baur', in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thoughts in the West*, Vol. 1, N. Smart, J. Clayton, S. Katz & P. Sherry (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985), p. 265.

<sup>5</sup> F.C. Baur, 'Gutachten of 27 June 1839', in *Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen*, 750, (1839).

<sup>6</sup> F. Schleiermacher, *The Brief Outline on the study of Theology*, Translated with introductions and notes by T. N. Tice (Richmond: John Knox, 1966), p. 241.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.242.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

It is within the above-mentioned contextual frame of reference that Baur's work sparked off the movement in biblical interpretation that led to the propagation of Western Protestantism as a superior religion that has the capacity to manifest truth. Baur's work led to the 'notion' of a universal church history {which} depends on a speculative comprehension of that history, in which a specific theological conception of the nature of the church is brought to bear on the data in order to elicit from it its meaning.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the reconstruction of this universal history was perceived by Baur solely as a "Protestant phenomenon and... a peculiarly Protestant science."<sup>11</sup> These developments in Western Christianity served as a basis for colonial ideology.

In summary, Baur's attempt to relate truth to culture based on his indebtedness to socio-cultural, economic and political situations led to the formulation of imperialistic hermeneutics which identified pure religion with the evolution of Protestantism in the nineteenth century in Germany. Baur, therefore, is not conscious of the diversities in religions beyond the borders of Germany as having something to contribute towards the development of Christianity.

This means that it is necessary to reflect on the exegetical development of Christianity. In a sense, his main target was the bourgeois supernaturalist hermeneutics of his time. Hence, Baur's apologetics, which attempts to marry historical inquiry and a specifically Protestant superior theory of religion, led to imperialistic models of interpretation which are incompatible with the development of enculturation models of interpretation. This is because culture and community become more and more important as one attempts to adapt religious beliefs and practices. Any attempt to relate the gospel to the religious practices and beliefs of other lands must take into consideration the peculiarities of diverse cultural contexts and communities and their implications for undertaking such an adaptation.

For instance, Hegel's philosophical history influenced the reconstruction of truth in Baur's day. Hence the type of theology that resulted from Baur was a type of enculturation theology that bought into its own culture – the price of which was imperialistic theology in which historical theology dabbled.

Furthermore, the conception and formulation of the relationship between truth and culture from Baur and beyond led to the entrenchment of Cultural Protestantism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Germany. The development of *Kulturprotestantismus* in Germany and its adoption by the church in Western Europe is of interest to me because of the role it played in the historical reconstruction of truth in Africa. *Kulturprotestantismus* served as the basis for the formulation of colonial ideology and European value-setting for biblical interpretation in the non-Western world, including Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In sum, the understanding of the relationship between history and truth on the one hand, and that of truth and culture on the other, which was initiated by Baur and which later led to the propagation of 'cultural Protestantism' by liberal theologians, had

<sup>10</sup> P. C. Hodgson & Ferdinand Christian Baur, *The Formation of Historical Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 166.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.165.



implications for the development of theology in Africa. For instance, what were the missionary agendas; which of them are lucrative and which of them are conjugative? How has the Bible been handed down? Where has it come from? How was it used to manage or direct the lifestyles of people and communities. This means that there is the need to look carefully at the missionary heritage of Africa during the era of colonialism, with regard to missionary societies and their usage of the Bible and what their emphases were, which have led to the cultivation of the kind of Christian self-understanding/s or Christianity/ies that we have in Africa today. How can this legacy, be reshaped in a post-colonial era and post-missionary contemporary Africa?

Now the question is, how was this ideology transmitted to Africa? This calls for a critical reflection and analysis of the reception history of the Bible from its missionary times. The works of Jean and John Comaroff deals specifically with this with reference to the reception history of the Bible in Southern Africa.

##### 5. Comaroff's view on Reception History of the Bible in Africa

Jean and John Comaroff's *Ethnography and the historical imagination*<sup>12</sup> explains the adoption of Kulturprotestantismus by Western Protestant missionaries in South Africa by stating that the colonization of South Africa – and many parts of the world – began with an

ideological onslaught on the part of Christian missionaries, self-styled bearers of European civilization. These men set out to 'convert' heathens by persuading them of the content of their theological message and, even more profoundly, by reconstructing their everyday worlds.<sup>13</sup>

The Church in the age of modernity in Europe saw itself as the possessor of universal history-truth which it needed to take to non-European nations which, being "unable to master their environment, [they] lacked all culture and history."<sup>14</sup> With respect to Africa, "Christendom challenged local symbols, threatening to convert them into universal currency."<sup>15</sup> This was because European missionaries saw themselves as the carriers of the truth to Africans, whom they regarded as those without it.

What effect did this have on the reception history or our inherited beliefs (acquired from our missionary heritage)? For example, the missionary heritage of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is acquired from the Basel Mission (from Switzerland but consisting of both German and Swiss missionaries). The Basel Mission was involved in pioneering Bible translations into Ghanaian languages, the selection and translation of European hymns (mainly German ones) into Ghanaian languages and the setting up of the first theological seminary in Ghana.

<sup>12</sup> J. Comaroff, & Jean Comaroff. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*. Boulder (San Francisco & Oxford: Westview, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 258.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

This was the ideological framework from which most nineteenth and twentieth century Western Missionary enterprises operated in other parts of the World. Hence, Western Missionaries saw themselves as the sole carries of 'truth' and Protestant Christianity as "the only true form of religion." For instance, this is the posture with which the Basel Mission worked in the then Gold Coast. This is evident in *The Basel Mission Centenary (1828-1928) Brochure* which the ideology of using the Bible to preach the Good News to the people of the Gold Coast as follows:

The outcome of the faithful preaching of the Gospel had been a steady progress of true civilization...Twice parliament considered giving up the colony. It was especially Schrenk who argued that Christian England could not allow the country to sink back into its former barbarism<sup>16</sup>.

So the cooperation of parliament and missionary organization was needed to salvage the Ghanaian from backwardness in conformity with the same spirit in South Africa and other parts of Africa. The tool for this undertaking was the Bible and the preaching of its message to the African.

It is therefore very revealing to examine some few excerpts from the *Report of the Basel Evangelical Mission on the Gold Coast West-Africa-1900* and comment on them. The report starts by stating that

Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. I Sam 7:12. These words will best express our feelings when we review the events of the past 72 years since our Mission work was commenced on the Gold Coast.<sup>17</sup>

Here scripture is being used as the main source of energy that has driven the missionary work for the number of years that the missionaries have been at it in the then Gold Coast.

Another excerpt of the same report states:

Thus we give all honour to our God; we know we are only instruments in God's hands; but that we are instruments indeed we must always maintain. The fact should not be disregarded by so many. Europeans as well as natives that whatever this country has become it has become through the mission and in respect to natives it is not too much to say whatever they are they owe to the mission.<sup>18</sup>

From the excerpt above, it is evident that the work of God that has been done with the Bible is being commended for the level of nation building in its entirety. So here all the spheres of life are seen as being affected by the Bible.

<sup>16</sup> For more details see the *Basel Mission Centenary (1828-1928)* Published by The Scottish Mission in Accra in October 1928 for the celebration of the anniversary; Comaroff, J & J.L. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, San Francisco, & Oxford: Westview, 1992), p. 13,

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 1

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

The question we now ask is to what extent is this heritage being maintained in the context within which the Bible is read?

This was the setting within which Christianity operated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Africa. However, towards the middle part of the twentieth century, there was an increase in awareness among Africans of the need for identity and self-expression. These developments were spearheaded by African nationalists and freedom fighters in many parts of Africa. The work of the nationalist movements and the kinds of awareness it generated affected the political, economic and social issues (which included religion) throughout Africa.

In the area of religion, the increase in awareness contributed to the formation of African-instituted Churches which initiated a theologizing process that was subsequently taken over by African biblical scholars, whose pre-occupation was basically to inculturate the Gospel within the African socio-cultural set-up. For instance, with respect to the Twana of South Africa, the development was

Precisely because the cross, the book, the coin were saturated signs, they were variously and ingeniously redeployed to bear a host of new meanings as non western peoples-Twana prophets, Naparama fighters, and others-fashioned their visions of modernity.<sup>19</sup>

Commenting on the response of the Twana people in South Africa to European mission work, Comaroff & Comaroff note that:

In the long round, the implications of evangelical imperialism were to be fixed by the wider context in which it was embedded, just as they were to be mediated by the responses of the Twana themselves.<sup>20</sup>

They further argue that "because it is a multiply motivated, social history... it will always be both predictable yet subject to the innovative and the unforeseen."<sup>21</sup>

However, this is a summary of the total effect of Christianity on the Twana people. Let us now see the role the Bible played in this whole exercise as we focus on Comaroff's reflection on its introduction among the BaTlhaping people of Southern Africa.

The question is, what was the response or reaction of Africans to the introduction of the Bible by the missionaries? In this regard, both West and Magomba argue that the African were in control of their lives and their choices before the Bible was introduced to them by the missionaries.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, West is in agreement with Wimbush that even

<sup>19</sup> J. Clifford, *The predicament of culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 5 & 6.

<sup>20</sup> J. Comaroff & J.L. Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, San Francisco, & Oxford: Westview, 1992), p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> M.P. Magomba, 'Early engagement with the Bible among the Gogo people of Tanzania: historical hermeneutical study of ordinary 'readers' transactions with the Bible', Masters thesis (University of Kwazulu-natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2005); G.O. West, 'Early encounters with the Bible among the BaTlhaping: historical and hermeneutical Signs', In *Biblical Interpretation*, 12 (2004),



though these periods of indigenous control were followed by colonial control, they are very significant as they served as the foundation upon which, in some sense, all other interpretations of the Bible were built and judged.<sup>23</sup> The perception of the Bible at the point of its introduction by the traders, missionaries and explorers was that it was one of the goods to be exchanged and there are indications that the earliest signs in these encounters and exchanges were that the Tlhaping recognized the Bible as one of the “goods of strange power” associated with their visitors.<sup>24</sup> In the assessment of the power of the Bible, the Tlhaping were able to identify its shortcomings. For instance, one of their traditional healers pointed this out when he stated that “he did not need instruction from any one, for the dice (*bola*) which hang from his neck informed him of everything that happened at a distance; and added, if they were to attend to instructions, they have no time to hunt or to do anything.”<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, earlier that same day, the uncle of the Tlhaping chief, having listened to the story of the origins of circumcision from John Campbell asked “if they should be taught to understand book.”<sup>26</sup> This indicates that the introduction of the untranslated, ‘closed’ Bible to the African was marked by their recognition of it as an object of power that should be exchanged by all means because of its perceived strange usefulness. However, at that time, “The gun was more of a priority than the Bible among the Tlhaping but as colonialism advanced, extracting its toll on the lives of the Tlhaping and other Africans, so the terrain of struggle shifted requiring new weapons.”<sup>27</sup> Hence according to West, “colonialism not only created the conditions for a different kind of struggle, it also partially provided the resources in the guise of reading and translation.”<sup>28</sup>

West states further that:

With the coming of colonialism proper came the infrastructure to establish schools and undertake the task of Bible translation. But as in the early encounters with the Bible, so in the earliest acts of evangelism, the missionary was dependent on African agency that is local ‘interpreters’ were the first interpreters of the Bible to their own people.<sup>29</sup>

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pp. 251-281.

<sup>23</sup> V.L. Wimbush (Ed.), *African Americans and the Bible: sacred texts and social textures* (New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> J. Comaroff, J & J.L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism & Consciousness in South Africa* (vol.1) (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1991), p. 182.

<sup>25</sup> J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa: undertaken at the request of the Missionary society* (Third Edition, Corrected ed.) (London: Black, Parry & Co., 1815), p. 193.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 192.

<sup>27</sup> G.O. West, ‘Early encounters with the Bible among the BaTlhaping: historical and hermeneutical Signs’, *Biblical Interpretation*, 12 (2004), p. 260.

<sup>28</sup> G.O. West, “Interrogating the comparative paradigm in African biblical scholarship”, Presented at the Stellenbosch conference on Exegesis & Actualisation In Africa and Europe”, February, 2006, p. 260.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

Firstly, with regard to education and infrastructure, the mission schools established throughout Africa, for instance, helped most Africans to understand their own history and to start the analysis and reflection of their histories in the light of its imperial domination. However, whilst operating these mission schools, the missionaries were at the same time imposing European Christianity on Africans through imperialistic theology that they propagated in the Churches they established throughout Africa. Thus European mission to Africa contains seeds of liberation but at the same time it had oppressive elements in it which was a contradiction in terms. The relationship between these contradictory European activities in Africa and the striving for African self-understanding was that “it was in the space between the liberal worldview of mission and the racist world of settler society that modern black nationalist consciousness was to take root.”<sup>30</sup> Thus we can say that the seeds of liberation sown by the missionaries were utilized by Africans to subvert the European oppressive imperialistic theology. The subversion of this type of theology from the West was a major step which led to the adoption of theologies related to culture and resistance by those doing theology in Africa in the twentieth century, namely, inculturation and resistant theologies

Secondly, with regard to Bible translation, it is necessary to reflect on the exegetical practices that the missionary enterprises brought to various parts of Africa which is employed in their translation, presentation and teaching of the Bible. This is because according to J. & J Comaroff in their statement concerning the Setswanas in South Africa, ‘Those who chose to peruse the Setswana Bible learned more than sacred story, more even than how to read. They were subjected to a form of cultural translation’.<sup>31</sup>

Comaroff further indicates in a later publication of theirs that the reason for this was that the first African ‘interpreters’ of the Bible to their people often went “far beyond the literal rendering of their masters’ narrative.”<sup>32</sup>

This therefore leads us to the role that the translation of the Bible into the vernaculars played in the missionary enterprise in Africa. This is very important because we are now in the era when the Bible has now passed from the hands of the missionaries into the hands of local African communities. This happened “only with the advent of the Bible in local vernacular.”<sup>33</sup>

In this period, a period we can refer to as ‘colonial’—what West refers to as neo-indigenous hermeneutic which gained impetus from the translation of the Bible into African vernaculars takes shape.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> J. Comaroff & J.L. Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> J. Comaroff, J & J.L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism & Consciousness in South Africa* (vol.1), p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> J. Comaroff, J & J. L. Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: the dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier* (vol.2) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 78-79.

<sup>33</sup> G.O. West, ‘Interrogating the comparative paradigm in African biblical scholarship’ p.5.

<sup>34</sup> According to West, ‘neo indigenous African hermeneutic is a type of hermeneutic that appropriates and participates in both the foundational features of indigenous African hermeneutics and particular appropriated features of colonial hermeneutics’ (West: 2005: 56). This is founded within the context of



Lamin Sanneh's *Translating the Message* probes deeper into the role that the translation of the Bible into African languages played in its usage in missionary history. Sanneh admits that he is taking translation "beyond the narrow, technical bounds of textual work."<sup>35</sup> This is because "language is the intimate, articulate expression of culture." This implies that the translation of the Bible into the vernaculars "was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria for the message, a piece of radical indigenization for greater than the standard portrayal of mission as Western imperialism."<sup>36</sup>

In a detailed discourse which is rooted in an exegesis of part of the New Testament, precisely the Pauline mission to the Gentiles in weakening the European missionary hegemony, Sanneh says:

I see translation as introducing a dynamic and pluralist factor into questions of the essence of the religion. Thus if we ask the question about the essence of Christianity, whatever the final answer, we would be forced to reckon with what the fresh medium reveals to us in feedback. It may thus happen that our earlier understanding of the message will be challenged and even overturned by the force of the new experience. Translation would consequently help to bring us to new ways of viewing the world, commencing a process of revitalization that reaches into both the personal and cultural spheres.<sup>37</sup>

In sum, Sanneh's argument is that the inherent translatability of the Bible provides the potential for the revitalization of both the biblical message and the receptor culture. According to Kwame Bediako who further developed the idea of Sanneh, translation enabled the Bible to become 'an independent yardstick by which to test, and sometimes to reject, what Western missionaries taught and practised and in so doing ' provide the basis for developing new, indigenous forms of Christianity.'<sup>38</sup> Bediako's work identifies the key role of African involvement in the translation of the Bible into indigenous African languages. This was because the missionaries were entirely dependent on Africans for the translation process, though the African presence was not usually acknowledged in the official missionary records.<sup>39</sup>

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African indigenous thought systems. G.O. West, 'Interrogating the comparative paradigm in African biblical scholarship', p. 260.

<sup>35</sup> L. Sanneh, *Translating the message: The missionary impact on culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> L. Sanneh, *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> L. Sanneh, *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>38</sup> See also K. Appiah-Kubi & S. Torres (ed.), *African Theology En route* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), p. 119; K. Bediako, 'Epilogue: The impact of the Bible in Africa'. In Ype, Schaaf (ed.), *on their way rejoicing: the history and role of the Bible in Africa*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), pp. 234-254; J.S. Mbiti, 'The Biblical Basis for present Trends in African Theology' in K. Appiah-Kubi & S. Torres (ed.), *African Theology En route*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>39</sup> A.O. Mojola, '100 Years of the Luganda Bible (1896-1996): A General Survey' in G.O. West & M. W. Dube (ed.), *The Bible in Africa: Transaction, Trajectories & Trends* (Boston/Leiden: Brill

So in this respect we can say that Africans played a major role in both the pre-translation and translation stages of the Bible in the development of its usage. However, we are only conversant with the post-translation stage. Perhaps this is because that is the era of African biblical scholarship; that is, when colonialism was fully established Africans trained with European theological tools tried to reconstruct African theology in their own context.

Contextual theology has a certain agenda that is related to its own tradition. The agenda for African biblical scholars was to develop forms of African theology, which are located in its cultural history as well as the political and economic realities that Africans are facing up to in their various contexts. In this respect Kwame Bediako argues strongly that with the translation of the Bible into African languages, Mother-tongue Scriptures, accordingly, come to constitute an irreplaceable element for 'the birth of theology.'<sup>40</sup> This is summarized by Ukpong in his 'Theological literature from Africa' where he states that:

African Theology or African Christian Theology is a creative encounter between African thought system and European Christian thought system. Feminist theology addresses the issue of sexism; Black Theology the issue of racism in South Africa; and liberation theology addresses oppressive economic and political (civil and ecclesiastical) structures.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, African biblical scholarship which came to the fore in the period of post-missionary times when colonialism was full-blown seems to have received a lot of attention even though it has very little clues to give us concerning the usage of the Bible in Africa today. Indeed, I fully agree with West that the long period of colonial control, African resistance to colonialism and African biblical scholarship have played various roles in the tradition of biblical usage in Africa. Therefore we need to differentiate between the different usages of the Bible that we have today due to the long history of its introduction into Africa. That which developed out of the struggles with colonialism spearheaded mainly by biblical scholars trained in the West which came to the fore in the post-colonial era and the usage of the Bible that goes alongside that which is done by ordinary readers which appears to pay less attention to colonial issues. This is what West underscores in his assertion that:

Neo-indigenous African biblical hermeneutics has given rise to two interpretative strands, the one following the trajectories set by missionary-colonial education and the other

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Academic Press, 2001), pp.524-537; A.O. Mojola, 'The Swahili Bible in East Africa from 1844 to 1996: A Brief Survey with Special Reference to Tanzania', in G.O. West & M.W. Dube (ed.), *The Bible in Africa*, pp. 511-523.

<sup>40</sup> K. Bediako, 'Biblical Exegesis in the African Context: The Factor and Impact of the Translated Scriptures', *Journal of African Christian Thought*. 6 (2003), pp. 15-30.

<sup>41</sup> J.S. Ukpong, 'Theological literature from Africa'. *Concilium* 5 (1988), pp. 67-75.



following a less analysed trajectory, but one that might owe more to indigenous hermeneutical impulses than to missionary –colonial ones.<sup>42</sup>

However, West admits that in recent times, biblical scholars have been paying more attention to the latter which he calls the less analysed trajectory.

This may explain why South African biblical scholars like Mosala and Mofokeng would still pursue the Bible as a tool for dealing with the struggles of the South African people. Musa Dube espouses *Semoya* hermeneutics which involves reading the Bible with Batswana women in the African Instituted Churches. Douglas Waruta and Zablon Nthamburi's essay, 'How should Africans read the Bible?' contains some significant analysis of how African Christians actually read the Bible. Nashon Ndung'u analyses the role of the Bible in the rise of the Akurinu Church among the Gikuyu of Kenya and in worship. David Adamu Tuesday, in a more descriptive article explains the use of Psalms among the Aladura Churches in Nigeria. Fergus King provides a comprehensive description of the ordinary African hermeneutics in his analysis of the use of hymns in Tanzanian Churches. Similarly, Hillary Mijoga explains the use the Bible by African Instituted Churches in their preaching. Also, Philip Laryea analyses passages and hymns in Ga exegetically to ascertain their value to the ordinary Ga Christian, likewise John Ekem who identifies and analyses connections between the New Testament and its usage among Ghanaians.

This brings us to the interpretations of the New Testament in Africa by biblical scholars in the post-colonial period. With regard to the New Testament, Dube rightly puts some of the questions that will guide such a study in her 'Consuming a Colonial Cultural Bomb' with regard to the readers of the Setswana language of Bostwana, concerning translating Badimo into Demons in the Setswana Bible, she states that:

It is hard to avoid thinking about the Setswana readers/hearers who first read the Setswana Bible in 1857 and those who continued to read it for the next 150 years that followed: Did these Setswana readers/hearers discover their own Badimo as devils and demons? Did the written Setswana Bible prove to them that they were lost and knew no God so much so that they venerated demons and devils as sacred beings?<sup>43</sup>

This is an attempt by Dube to reflect on the missionary usage of the concept of demons in the Gospels, particularly Matthew's Gospel, in Bostwana. However, it is not Dube alone; there are other African scholars who would want to examine particular passages in the New Testament to find out how their recipients actually utilize them in their daily lives.

A typical example of this is Philip Laryea's critical examination of Acts 14:8-17 and 17: 22-31 in Ga to find out 'the issues, meanings and concerns that should be of interest to anyone whose religious orientation has been shaped by Ga tradition and

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<sup>42</sup> G.O. West, 'Shifting Perspectives On The Comparative Paradigm In ( South) African Biblical Scholarship', *Religion & Theology*, 12 (2005), pp. 49-72.

<sup>43</sup> M. Dube, 'Consuming A Cultural Bomb: Translating Badimo into "Demons" In the Setswana Bible (Matthew 8:28-34; 15:22; 10:8)' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 73 (1999), p. 42.



culture.<sup>44</sup> Obviously his interest is in the ordinary readers who are the users of the Ga Bible. He focused specifically on the speeches that were delivered at Lystra. He illustrates this in Acts 14:8 which reads in Ga as follows:

*Shi Dio ni yo amemã leñ agbó le naa le osofo le hi e etsinahii ke nyanyrai keba agboi le anaa, koni le ke osafo le fεε sha afole*

(And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the people).

In his exegesis of this passage, Laryea says:

Whereas in the Lystran religious tradition it was the sacrificial victims (in this case the cows) that were adorned with garlands, in the Ga tradition it is the priests and other religious functionaries that wear *nyanyrai*.<sup>45</sup>

In his analysis he commented that,

Although this may not be the intention of the translator, the passage nevertheless has the potential of conveying to its readers and hearers this thought and imagery.<sup>46</sup>

Considering both Musa Dube and Philip Laryea who were struggling to make sense of their new Testament texts based on the translation of the texts into their respective contexts, one recognises that the problem both of them face is that they seem not to have the key to a clear understanding of their texts because of the uncertainty concerning the meaning they conveyed to the generations that received them in the pre-missionary, pre-colonial and colonial periods and how they used these texts. Perhaps the reason for their acceptance till the post-colonial and post-missionary era that are still unknown to the post-missionary biblical scholar. Justin Ukpong carried out a research among ordinary people in Port Harcourt between 1991-1994 and the outcome was that more people read the New Testament than the Old Testament. That research also revealed that people are more interested in using the Bible for dealing with issues of survival and security. Research also carried out among ordinary people concerning where they go for help whenever they are in trouble in Madina and Jos in Ghana and Nigeria<sup>47</sup> respectively revealed that they would go to the gospels for help rather than the Old Testament.<sup>48</sup> This means that interpreting the New Testament cannot be simply overlooked in the usage of

<sup>44</sup> P.T. Laryea, 'Reading Acts 14: 8-17 & 17:22-31 in Ga: A Critical Examination of the Issues, Meanings and Interpretations Arising from Exegesis in the Mother Tongue', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 6 (2003), p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p.37.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> For more details see Anum, E. *The Madina, Jos and Mubi Survey and Report: Follow-Up of Port Harcourt Survey*, 2000.

<sup>48</sup> E. Anum, *The Madina, Jos and Mubi Survey and Report: Follow-Up of Port Harcourt Survey*, 2000.

the Bible in Africa. It is therefore very crucial to look at its usage in missionary history. It seems the usage of the Bible generally in Africa is very complex. That kind of complexity is what was noticed by Maluleke when he indicated that "on the whole, in practice, ordinary African Christian Churches are far more innovative and subversive in their appropriation of the Bible than they appear."<sup>49</sup> Though they may appear to be taking part in the debates among African biblical scholars and theologians when they 'mouth the Bible-is-equal-to-the-word-of-God formula, "their actual practice is that they are creatively pragmatic and selective in their use of the Bible so that the Bible may enhance rather than frustrate their struggles."<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, Dube's attempt to read Matthew 15:21-28 with Batswana AIC women in Botswana revealed that the ordinary readers can even sometimes have a mind of their own by resorting to supernatural involvement in the interpretative process. She stated that as the discussion progressed the respondents frequently pointed out: "*Kana re bua ka dilo tsa Semoya*"; that is, "Remember, we are discussing issues of the spirit."<sup>51</sup>

Looking at the developments in New Testament hermeneutics generally, it appears the legacy of the Bible in Missionary history occupies a central place and is a force to reckon with. It also appears that this is the key to opening the doors for understanding the mixed signals that we are now getting. On one hand, we hear the recognition of the Bible as a very powerful tool, but on the other hand we realise that there is a selective way of using the Bible. This is evident in the way most Africans turn to the New Testament specifically for assistance in their daily life struggles. However, it seems another legacy that still lingers is the high stake that ordinary readers had in negotiating their usage of the Bible in missionary history. This means that for biblical scholars to be able to do critical exegesis, in Africa, we need to dig into the philosophy behind the attitude of its recipients in the pre-translation period as that will help unravel some of the hermeneutical difficulties we are now faced with. These difficulties have been properly captured by Pobee in his statement that: "... our inherited legacy must be trained to our needs. The 'critical' element is non-negotiable, for the word of God, as logos, must contain the element of rationality."<sup>52</sup> In the light of this comment by Pobee, it is important to turn our attention to Ekem's Developing Akan Study Material on 1 Cor.11:2-16'. In this article, Ekem first does an exegetical discussion of the text which is about head-covering to places of worship. In his comment to the ordinary people whom he has in mind, he specifically asked the question:

<sup>49</sup> T. Maluleke, 'Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty First Century', *Journal Of Theology For Southern Africa*, 99 (1997), p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> T. Maluleke, 'Black and African Theologies in A New World Order: A Time To Drink From Our Own Wells', *A Journal Of Theology For Southern Africa*, 96 (1996), p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> M. Dube, 'Readings of *Semoya*: Batswana women's interpretation of Matt. 15: 21-28', *Semeia*. 73 (1996), p. 124.

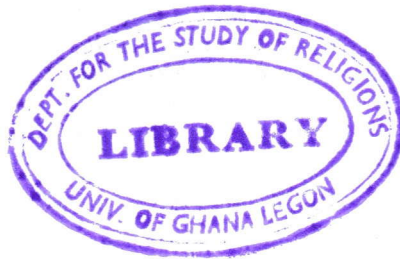
<sup>52</sup> J.S. Pobee, Minutes of Glasgow consultation, 1994, 13.

If Paul were to write to Asante women in Ghana some of whom wear (*dansikran*) [shaved head nicely painted with rich ink, a symbol of honor, royalty and wisdom in Asante] to Church, would he condemn them?<sup>53</sup>

So the legacy of 'closed' Bible which was introduced by the missionaries in the pre-translation era still persists particularly with reference to the New Testament as we still know very little of the mechanisms used and very little research has been done on it.

#### 6. Conclusion

I would say that the legacy of the bible as a strange object of power from the pre-colonial and pre-translation era which predates the colonial and post-colonial era of biblical scholarship still persists. The solution to it is to dig out the pre-colonial and the pre-translation appropriation of it which has just barely begun with little pockets of awareness of it in the works of Mojola and Gerald West.



<sup>53</sup> J.D.K. Ekem, 'Developing Akan Study Bible material on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16' in Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole & Ernst R. Wendland (eds.), *Interacting with Scriptures in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2005), p.116.