

EDITOR'S NOTE
RELIGION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

How has religion contributed to human development in Africa?¹ The papers in this volume of GJRT attempt an answer. They offer insightful reflections on the significance and contribution of religion to positive social change and transformation of human life from specific religion studies disciplinary perspectives. The first four focus on exegesis and hermeneutics that are contextual and capable of ‘scratching where it itches.’ The last three contributions discuss how religious beliefs could be harnessed to promote holistic human development and social transformation in Africa.

In the first paper, **Kwaku Boamah and Felicity Apaah** argue against the claim that Christianity is a foreign religion. With scriptural evidence, they illustrate how Africans participated in the event leading to the birth of Christianity. Beyond Pentecost, Africans have contributed not only to the development of Christian doctrine and the spread of Christianity but have also contextualised their faith over the centuries. The paper concludes that an attempt to contextualise the Christian faith has, in recent times, led to several ‘faces and expressions of Christianity on the African continent. Could the same claim be made for Islam, which has been on the African continent since its foundation in the 7th century CE?

If we accept the view that Christianity has been associated with Africa since the first century CE, the question then is, how have African Christians been reading and appropriating the Christian scriptures through the centuries? **Kahl Werner** traces the development of *post-colonial Biblical hermeneutics and exegesis* and reflects on its significance as well as on problematic aspects. He has shown that because of the diversified voice of practitioners of this approach, especially on the side of scholars from the Global South, Traditional Western exegesis, from a historical-critical perspective, has been sceptical of it.

¹ Cf. G. Ossom-Batsa, N. Gatti and R.D. Ammah (eds.), *Religion and Sustainable Development: Ghanaian Perspectives* (Grandi Opere; Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2018). See also Jaco Beyers (ed.), *What Has Religion Studies in Africa Been Up To: Relevant Themes and Topics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2023).

He, however, concludes by indicating that the development of an intercultural hermeneutics from a postcolonial perspective, which also reflects on such a productive interrelation of different hermeneutical and exegetical approaches from a discourse-theoretical perspective, appears to be an urgent task for contemporary New Testament scholarship.

Daniel Owiredu examines the metaphorical structure of poverty in Akan (a West African language) and Hebrew (a Semitic language) within the framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. He compares the conceptualization of poverty in the book of Proverbs in Hebrew and Akan proverbs to establish that the two languages manifest cross-linguistic or cross-conceptual similarities concerning understanding poverty, which suggest the commonality in the human experiences and cognition of both the Ancient Israelites and the Akan. He therefore concludes that the Conceptual Metaphor Theory could be a useful tool in interpreting proverbs.

In his paper entitled ‘Liberation and Christianity in Southern Sudan: Prioritising Values that Seem to Matter’, **Zechariah Manyok Biar** has engaged the contextualisation and practice of Christianity in Africa. He argues that the values of African Traditional Religions that many South Sudanese learned before becoming Christians seem more robust than the biblical values they acquire in their Churches. From the results of a case study in Rejaf Diocese, he attributed this to interpretive gaps due to inadequate training of missionaries and pastors in South Sudan due to limited possibilities and resources. But how could this gap be filled? Probably by reviewing the theological education system.

Babatunde Adidebu’s paper examines Christian Theological Education and Discipleship as a Panacea to Nigerian Church Challenges in National Development. Using analytical and historical approaches, he discusses the significance, challenges, and prospects of Christian Theological Education in Africa. He highlights the failures of the Church and how theological education, and discipleship can serve as a panacea in tackling them. Furthermore, he argues for repositioning of theological education towards mission, socioeconomic and justice dimensions, especially in the Church and the state relation.

Sherifat Hussain-Abubakar discusses Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and its effects on the mental health, especially of women. Based on an empirical study among the Nigerian Hausa, Nupe and Yoruba ethnic groups, he argues that Islamic principles can be a panacea to GBV and its associated mental health. He further notes that religion and religious leaders should be integral stakeholders in the fight against GBV.

The last paper by **Haruna Zagoon-Sayeed** explores the values of Hajj, the annual pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca, as a potential tool for peacebuilding among Muslims in Ghana. The result of a survey he conducted shows that the hajj concept, from preparation to performance, brings an awareness of forgiveness, reconciliation, and good relationships. He concludes by recommending that the Hajj Board should leverage the Hajj village concept and its values to instil peacebuilding among Muslims.

As we thank the contributors to this volume, we also promise our readers exciting papers from around the globe in the November/ December 2024 issue. Do not miss it!

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