

New Testament Exegesis in (Modern) Africa

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The opinion is often expressed that the worldview of African peoples is close to the Old Testament, or that Africans feel more at home with the Old Testament than with the New. Kwesi Dickson, for example, has explored what he calls the "African predilection for the Old Testament" noting even that some early African Christian leaders worried that since the Old Testament atmosphere was so congenial converts "might not want to go further" (Dickson, 1984:146; cf. Dickson, 1973; Dickson, 1979).

Certainly it is true that the Old Testament is used in African preaching more frequently than it is used in the pulpits of North Atlantic countries. It is also true that many Old Testament ideas which seem quite foreign to western minds appear to be readily comprehensible in African contexts. It is easier to understand the meaning of the concept of 'covenant', for example, if one's people practices covenant rituals (Arulefela, 1988). Sacrificial rituals found in Old Testament narratives and legal texts seem to be more easily appreciated by African people who have seen sacrifices performed (Ukpong, 1987). Some Old Testament wisdom literature may be more easily grasped by African peoples who have rich proverbial traditions (Nare, 1986; Golka, 1993; Masenya, 1996). The Old Testament Levirate marriage traditions are certainly understandable amongst a people (like the Luo of Kenya and Tanzania) who have similar traditions (Kirwen, 1979). Africans do seem to feel 'at home' with the Old Testament - at least compared to many readers from the Northern Hemisphere.

This is not to say, however, that the New Testament is less important in Africa than it is in the West. On the contrary, many of the ideas just mentioned (covenant, sacrifice, wisdom) are important in the New Testament as well as in the Old. To say that the world of Africa has many similarities to the world of the Old Testament is therefore to acknowledge that the African and New Testament worlds contain many continuities. African readers do sometimes note that there is in the New Testament something which is radically new, something which is distinct from the Hebrew Bible, from African tradition and from the western world, but this discontinuity, this new thing is not a culture or tradition incomprehensible to Africa, but the person of Jesus Christ who seems at once at home in and alien to every culture.

It may be that the 'modern', post-Enlightenment West is the odd one out in this comparative game. Perhaps Marcion has cast such a shadow over the West that it is easier for westerners to see the *discontinuities* between Testament, and certainly post-Enlightenment scholarship has emphasised the 'gap' between the biblical and modern worlds.

This is not to imply that Africa does not appreciate the discontinuities between the Bible and the African world. There are indications that some African Christians consider the New Testament to be very important, perhaps even more important than the Old Testament, precisely because of some of the differences. For example, a survey done in Port Harcourt, Nigeria found that while many Africans think that the Old Testament has more similarities to the world of Africa, the New Testament is considered to be more 'powerful' and is often used in a magical way to combat evil (Riches, 1996:184). There is also some evidence that suggests that many New Testament texts are highly valued by African preachers and congregations (Turner, 1965).

This essay will survey a number of African 'reading communities' (missionaries, white South Africans, liberationist exegetes, inculturationist exegetes), and make note of some New Testament texts and themes which have been influential, sometimes even paradigmatic for these communities. We will see that the importance of texts is always related to the social and cultural context of the exegete and his or her community. For this reason, attention will be paid to contextual issues and their influence on exegesis. We will see that the continuity between Africa and the New Testament as well as the radical newness of the New Testament to Africa are important elements in popular and scholarly understandings of the New Testament in Africa.

In the modern period Christianity was brought to Africa by missionaries from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and the Caribbean. With the possible exception of the few black missionaries from the Caribbean and the United States, most of these missionaries were white, and carried a biblical

message wrapped in European, Enlightenment clothing. Most African Christians are grateful for the work of these missionaries, whose effort involved enormous dedication and often great suffering. It is also true, however, that few African Christians are unaware of the cultural blindness and even racial prejudice of much mission activity.

The missionary who came with the Bible also came as an interpreter of the Bible. The missionary's reading of the text was filtered through cultural lenses which were not always congenial to African traditional life. There was much in traditional African culture which came as a shock to western missionaries. Issues such as female circumcision and polygyny, were (and remain!) complex and controversial. The history of missions in Africa is varied, but the common perception of missionaries, both in African church circles and in scholarly work of African writers, is that the missionaries failed to comprehend the depth and the richness of Africa. Missionary intentions no doubt varied, but the overall impression left by the visitors was that Africa had been weighed in the western balance and found wanting: only by becoming less African could one become more Christian. This perception is only part of the truth about missionary activity, but it is a part of the truth which is often most deeply felt. At the theological level it has left Africans with a nagging theological question: Where was God before the missionaries brought the Bible to Africa? Had God forgotten us? Did God love Europeans more?

Today the influence of various forms of western biblical interpretation is pervasive in the mission-founded churches. On the popular level, evangelists from Europe and North America often hold 'crusades' in African cities in which biblical preaching is an important tool. Often these rallies are broadcast or televised. Many of these evangelists know little about Africa, its history, its hopes and its problems. Likewise, most of the published material available in African Christian book stores was published in Europe or North America, usually with a western audience in mind. On the more scholarly level, most books to be found in African theological colleges and universities were written in Europe or North America, by scholars using exegetical tools produced out of post-Enlightenment philosophical and theological traditions. Very few of these works have any other context in mind but the original historical contexts of the biblical writers and the North Atlantic contexts of the scholars and their readers. Most African biblical scholars must do much of their graduate work outside of Africa, with professors who have little knowledge of (and, sadly, sometimes even little sympathy with) their students' cultural and religious background. Few African Christians, pastors or scholars wish to jettison all western learning; fewer believe it to be adequate.

Western influence is to be seen even in the texts of the Bibles which most Africans read. A priority for many missionaries and missionary societies, especially the Protestants, was the translation of the Bible (Schaaf, 1994). As it has turned out, the work of translation has aided the spread of Christianity more than almost any other factor, ironically because vernacular translations gave the Bible a degree of independence from the European worldview of the missionary and gave Africans a source of Christian authority external to the missionary (Sanneh, 1989). To an extent the Bible and its message could be heard on its own terms. One result of the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages has been the enormous growth of African instituted churches, organizations which have effectively merged African culture and tradition with their own readings of the Biblical story (Barrett, 1968). On the other hand, western ideas could not help but find their way into many of these translations, since the missionary usually had control of the final published product.

An examination of missionary exegesis of Romans 13 provides an interesting example of the way scripture has been read by this community.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a

mortal human being or birds or fourfooted animals or reptiles...Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:18-23, 28-31, NRSV)

Andrew Walls has produced a valuable study of missionary interpretation of this important text (Walls, 1996). In a careful investigation of nineteenth and early twentieth century missionary sermons and reports, Walls traces the use of Romans 1 by missionaries in their encounter with 'foreign' cultures. For many missionaries Paul's words self-evidently condemn non-Christian religion.

David Jonathan East, one of a small host of writers on West Africa in the 1840's, produces an imposing account (based on travellers' tales) of African slavery, drunkenness, immorality, and lack of commercial probity. He then quotes Romans 1:28-31. "What an awful comment upon this affecting portion of Holy Writ are the humiliating facts which these and the preceding chapters record." In another place, however, East recognizes that African paganism, though reprehensible, is in one respect different from that of Romans 1. Though African people have images, they do not make images of the Supreme God: they simply ignore him for the subordinate divinities and spirits.

Thus it appears, that if they have not "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image, made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things" - they have, in their view, excluded him from the government of his world, and substituted in his room the wild creatures of their own imaginations, identifying these professedly spiritual existences with what is material and oft times grossly absurd (Walls, 1996:62).

As far as East is concerned, the truth of Romans 1 is confirmed by the self-evident depravity of African people. Their idolatry has led them to immorality. Having excluded God "from the government of his world" Africans have been "given up" to absurd spiritual and moral behaviour. Such assertions about the indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas is repeated frequently in the nineteenth century by missionaries, travellers and chroniclers. The corollary was that if such religions and cultures were so obviously debased, the truth and beauty of the Christian religion shines forth all the more clearly.

Although Romans 1 (and Romans 2, as Walls points out) condemns *people* for their sinfulness and idolatry, the missionary rhetoric tended to condemn *systems* of belief. Walls' comments are apt:

As systems, and ultimately the collective labels for systems which we call the world religions, have slipped into the place of ungodly people in the interpretation of Romans 1, so Christianity, also conceived as a system, has sometimes slipped into the place of the righteousness of God. The true system has been opposed to false systems condemned there. It has sometimes, but not always, been realized that "Christianity" is a term formally identical with the other labels; that it certainly covers as wide a range of phenomena as most of them; that, if the principalities and powers work within human systems, they can and do work within this one. Man-in-Christianity lies under the wrath of God just as much as Man-in-Hinduism...it is not Christianity which saves, but Christ (Walls, 1996:62).

If Paul's letter to the Romans has implications for the African traditionalist, its message is addressed equally to the western Christian: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23). Romans 1 addresses the human situation, not just the *non-western* human condition.

One community of Europeans established themselves more solidly on African soil than any other - the Dutch settlers who came to South Africa. The deeply religious Afrikaner community has long been involved in the work of biblical exegesis. Biblical scholarship is now quite a large industry in South Africa. Learned professors in seminaries and universities produce many volumes of work every year.

But there is a deep ambiguity in this work. Although produced on the continent of Africa, some of these white scholars identify themselves more closely with European exegesis than with the African context. For example, the prolific New Testament scholar from Pretoria, A.G. van Aarde, in discussing the history of Jesus research in South Africa, makes it clear that the major dialogue partners in this enterprise have been western scholars and that the major issue underlying South African New Testament research has been the tension between dogmatic theology and the historical-critical method (Van Aarde, 1993[a]; Van Aarde, 1993[b]). Although van Aarde's second essay does make reference to the emergence of "engaged scholarship" in his survey of more recent South African trends, he is still able to use the phrase "we, as First-World theologians" to describe South African Jesus scholarship (Van Aarde, 1993[b]:947).

This identification with things European has made John Mbiti reluctant even to discuss White South African biblical scholarship. Mbiti excludes this exegetical tradition from his survey of the use of the Bible in Africa on the grounds that it is "still European" and "closed to the realities of African presence" (Mbiti, 1986:17). "I do not draw from this strand of Christianity in my presentation," he says, "because it does not speak the language of indigenous African Christianity and because it has excluded itself from African life" (Mbiti, 1986:18).

It is easy to appreciate Mbiti's position. A review of major South African journals leaves the impression that until very recently white scholars have shown little interest in scholarly engagement with either the political or religious realities of black Africa. But Mbiti's solution is too simple - for white South African exegesis has not "excluded itself" from African life. Indeed, white South African exegesis is deeply implicated in the suffering of black South Africans. In an article in the South African journal *Scriptura*, Dirk J. Smit briefly outlines the history white biblical scholarship.

In a first stage, prominent scholars played an important role in legitimizing apartheid and opponents were ostracized from the South African scholarly scene. In a second stage, the socio-political interpretation of the Bible has been strongly rejected, in the name of the ethos of scientific research. At present, in a third stage, the debate between scientific, historical scholarship and committed, socio-politically involved reading, is urgent but diffuse, since it is being argued at so many fronts (Smit, 1990:33).

As Smit sees the situation, some white South African biblical scholars have attempted to defend the racism of apartheid on biblical grounds, and, when this strategy failed, some have attempted to bracket out questions of a 'political' nature by arguing that the proper place of biblical scholarship was the text itself, and not the readers of the text – even if some Bible reader suffer under the hands of other readers.

It is exactly for this reason that we must reconsider Mbiti's decision to leave white South African exegesis out of consideration. In fact, Biblical scholarship in South Africa is *not* simply transplanted European scholarship. White South African biblical scholarship, especially that which stems from the Afrikaner community, has its roots in the cultural mythology of the Afrikaner people. To ignore this scholarly tradition will not help.

A biblical theme which has had a strong influence among the Afrikaner people is the idea of election: that Israel is the chosen people of God. December 16 is perhaps the most important day of the year for the Afrikaner people. Various called Dingaan's Day, the Day of the Covenant and the Day of the Vow, it was on this date in 1838 that several hundred Voortrekkers fought the Battle of Blood River against more than 10,000 Zulu warriors under the leadership of Zulu King Dingane. At least 3,000 Zulu's were killed. No Afrikaners died. Before the battle it is believed that many of the Afrikaners had taken the following covenantal vow:

My brethren and fellow countrymen, at this moment we stand before the holy God of heaven and earth, to make a promise, if He will be with us and protect us and deliver the enemy into our hands so that we may triumph over him, that we shall observe the day and the date as an anniversary in each year and a day of

thanksgiving like the Sabbath, in His honour; and that we shall enjoin our children that they must take part with us in this, for a remembrance even for our posterity; and if anyone sees a difficulty in this, let him return from this place. For the honour of His name shall be joyfully exalted, and to Him the fame and honour of the victory must be given (Akenson, 1991:47).

In the years which followed the Voortrekkers' victory the Afrikaners' rather unorganized knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures gradually hardened into an ideology which asserted that Afrikaners themselves were the elect people of God. In the words of Donald Harman Akenson, "It is a very short step from saying that 'we are like the children of Israel' to believing that 'we are a Chosen People'" (Akenson, 1991:70).

The preacher at the 1895 commemoration of the Day of the Covenant understood the election of Israel as a matrix through which the Afrikaner people should understand themselves - and understand the Africans who inhabited the land they had entered,

When we think of the former emigrants, the Voortrekkers of yore, it is then revealed unto us how God, in his divine providence, dealt with them, even as He dealt with the Israelite Nation of Old. ... He summoned them to the same task: Canaan was inhabited by heathen alienated from God... Israel was bidden make it the Lord's dwelling place (Van Jaarsveld, 1964:11).

In other words, just as the Afrikaners take the place of the Hebrews in this new covenantal narrative, so the Zulus and other black Africans take the place of the Canaanites. Just as it was the duty of Israel to cleanse the land of pagans in the occupation of Palestine, so it was the divinely sanctioned work of the Afrikaner nation to purge the land of heathen.

The story of how the Afrikaner people came to adopt this covenantal ideology, is a complex one, as is the story of the recent repudiation of this ideology by the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK). We will not attempt a review of this history here. Our task is the elucidation of New Testament exegesis in Africa. As can be seen from the above paragraphs, Afrikaner ideology appears to have little to do with the New Testament. The hermeneutical matrix of this ideology is the transposition of Old Testament covenantal ideas into a South African key.

As Akenson points out, the New Testament is a problem for this ideological world. The words of Jesus and the writings of Paul come as a direct repudiation of racial exclusiveness. "Distinctions between people based on their ethnicity or social standing are specifically rejected" (Akenson, 1991:305-306). How, then, could Afrikaner Christians, deal with the New Testament?

Whereas the general principles of the "Old Testament" were taken as having direct institutional implications in the modern world, the "New Testament" principles were interpreted as being doctrines of the heart, ones that had to reign in every righteous soul, but which had no direct institutional implications. Although the NGK scholars would never have admitted the point directly, it is fair to summarize their hermeneutic as saying that the "Old Testament" ruled the visible world and the "New Testament" guided the world of the spirit. ... Thus the largest of the Dutch Reformed churches not only implicitly affirmed apartheid, but indirectly rejected their own integration with the black and "coloured" Reformed churches (Akenson, 1991:306).

This literalistic use of the Old Testament coupled with a spiritualizing interpretation of the New Testament has had (literally) deadly implications. This hermeneutic has allowed and even bolstered a violent and racist regime. In such a situation a different reading of New Testament texts must eventually arise.

In recent years, the oppressively and officially racist ideology of South Africa has called forth a re-reading of biblical texts. This mode of reading repudiates the idea that there could be exegesis without presuppositions, scholarship with commitment. Liberationist scholars have chosen to be explicit that they are committed to and engaged in a struggle for justice, and that their Bible reading will be a part of this struggle. This is as much true now in the post-apartheid era as it was during apartheid, for the land is not yet healed and great inequities still exist. Although liberationist exegesis has been more dominant in

South Africa than in other parts of the continent, tyranny has not been limited to that region, and a number of African writers from outside of South Africa have recently produced writings which seek to employ the Bible as a tool in the struggle for social and political liberation in their own contexts (Magesa, 1977; Ela, 1980; Nthamburi, 1980; Owan, 1996).

As with other liberation theologies, the story of the Exodus is often taken as a starting point for theological reflection. Desmond Tutu and many others have explored the theological and political dimensions of this text for the South African context (Tutu, 1983; Flint, 1987; Oosthuizen, 1988; Wittenburg, 1991; Nurnberger, 1992). The story of Israel held in bondage in Egypt had a familiar ring to black people in captivity under unjust systems of colonialism and apartheid. The Israelites plea for freedom from slavery was heard as an echo of the aspirations of South African blacks. The promise of God to Moses that he had heard the cries of his people and he had come down to deliver (Exodus 3:7-12) was a word of hope in the midst of suffering.

But the Exodus, while paradigmatic for liberation exegesis, was not the only biblical text which has given courage in the context of struggle. Many New Testament texts have been held up as signs that God was on the side of the poor and marginalized. The Song of Mary, the Magnificat, is read as a song of a woman who trusted God to act in the midst of an unjust situation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:51-53, NRSV; Wittenburg, 1991)

For some, like Allan Boesak, Jesus himself is seen as one who shares the black experience of poverty.

The historical Jesus of the New Testament has a special significance for those who share the black experience. He was poor, the son of poor people who could not bring the prescribed sacrifice at his birth... He belonged to a poor downtrodden people, oppressed and destitute of rights in their own country and subjugated to countless daily humiliations under foreign rulers. He lived and worked among the poor... He was one of them.(Boesak, 1976:43)

Boesak has also written on the book of Revelation, showing that consolation in the hope of a future need not lead to complacency with present injustice (Boesak, 1987).

The use of the Bible in liberation theology has itself been a site of struggle. Writers such as Boesak and Tutu not only find liberating themes in the Bible, but see the Bible itself as liberative Word of God. Those who find justification for apartheid in the Bible are told that they are misusing the text.

On the other hand, Itumeleng Mosala has criticized black theology for not recognizing that the text itself is a production of class struggle. Writing within an explicitly Marxist paradigm, Mosala focuses his attention behind the text, looking for clues to the ideology which gave rise to the text. In his study of Luke, for example, Mosala argues that the theme of the poor in Luke's writings is in fact not liberative for the poor. The text itself, he says, treats the poor as a subject - but the text is written by and addressed to the rich. Mosala advocates a hermeneutic which first 'liberates the Bible' by exposing not only its oppressive use, but its origins in the class struggle (Mosala, 1989; cf West, 1997).

One New Testament text makes more appearances in South African liberationist exegesis than any other - Romans 13:1-7 (Moulder, 1977; Nopece, 1986; Nurnberger, 1987; Draper, 1988; Wanamaker, 1988; Wanamaker, 1992; Hale, 1992; Jan Botha, 1994).

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the

servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them--taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due. (NRSV)

South Africa may be the most biblically literate society on earth. At the height of the struggle against apartheid, people on both sides were able to quote scripture in support of their views. Often these verses from Romans were used in an attempt to persuade antiapartheid activists, especially church leaders, not to oppose the government. After all, Paul's words were about obedience to a pagan government, while the South Africa government was 'Christian.' Incidents similar to the following, which is related by Allan Boesak, could be repeated many South African Christians:

On 19 October 1977, I was visited for the first time by the South African Security Police. They stayed from 3:30 a.m. till 7:00 a.m. At one point I was challenged by the Security Police captain (who assured me that he was a Christian and, in fact, an elder of the white Dutch Reformed Church) on my persistent resistance to the government. "How can you do what you are doing," he asked, "while you know what Romans Thirteen says?"... For him, as for millions of other Christians in South Africa and across the world, Romans 13 is an unequivocal, unrelenting call for blind obedience to the state (Boesak, 1986: 138).

And, of course, Boesak is not the only South African who has experienced the results of the long history of the oppressive use of this text.

On the other hand, South African exegetes have often pointed out that Romans 13 is not a call to blind obedience and that Paul's words contain limits on the power of the state: all authority is "from God" (v.1), therefore all powers should recognize and reflect God's authority; government is to be "God's servant for good" (v.4) - not for evil; the word "submit" does not imply force or coercion, it is argued, but rather the obligation to love the neighbour (v.8-10). It is further noted that Romans 13 must be read in the context of other biblical passages which make it clear that primary obedience is to be given to God rather than human beings (Acts 4:19), and that the state itself is capable of radical disobedience and evil (Revelation 13).

In a new South Africa, liberationist exegetes will continue to examine the text as one means of striving for justice. At the same time, new issues have begun to emerge. It is being recognized by some that it is not enough to read the Bible 'for' the poor and marginalized. These communities themselves have insights which must be brought to the text. A process of reading 'with' poor and marginalized communities is being developed especially out of the Institute for the Study of the Bible in Pietermaritzburg, where scholars ('trained readers') work together with 'ordinary readers' to discover the liberating potential of biblical texts. This interaction between popular and scholarly readings is in need of more investigation (West, 1993).

Liberationist exegetes who have rightly been consumed with the struggle against apartheid will begin to examine the meaning of African culture for a new South Africa. In this search they may be helped by Bible readers from other parts of the continent - to which we now turn.

According to Justin Ukpong, inculturation theology is not a theological discipline, but rather a way of doing theology which cuts across disciplines. Applied to biblical studies, inculturation hermeneutic is characterized, he says, by consciously and explicitly seeking "to interpret the biblical text from socio-cultural perspectives of different people" (Ukpong, 1996:190). Whether it is practised in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, or indeed, in Europe or North America, inculturation hermeneutics seeks to read the biblical text in the light of the needs, hopes, cultural values, religious aspirations, political, social and economic realities of human beings. The goal of inculturation hermeneutics is the enhancement of God-given life.

There is a growing corpus of written material on the New Testament being produced in Sub-Saharan Africa. A decade ago, in a review of scholarly biblical studies from Africa, Mbiti made a distinction

between biblical studies which related to the African context and 'pure' biblical studies, that is, biblical studies which did not make any explicit attempt to relate the biblical text to the African environment (Mbiti, 1986:49). The distinction is dubious. Although there are, of course, studies which are more concerned with the text than with the reader, no exegesis can be described as 'pure'. There is no disinterested, objective scholarship. We are all "engaged in cultural readings of the Bible" (Riches, 1996:186). In fact Mbiti could find only one work by an African scholar which he believed could fit into the category of pure scholarship.

At the time of his writing Mbiti was apparently unaware that John Pobee's doctoral dissertation had been published. *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (Pobee, 1985) is one of the few works of African authorship which does not mention Africa in its text. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Pobee's dissertation was unrelated to African life. In his preface Pobee makes explicit the connection between his research and his life:

Though a happy and privileged sojourner in Cambridge, my heart was bleeding for my motherland, Ghana, which had come under the grip of a corrupt and ruthless tyrant and government. While I laboured to follow my calling as a New Testament scholar, I also agonized over the fate of loved ones back home, my parents and the Church of God (Pobee, 1985: vii).

The context of African suffering does not enter into the body of Pobee's thesis, but Africa determined the choice of topic.

Since Mbiti's review the Nigerian Roman Catholic sister, Teresa Okure, has completed and published her doctoral research, a study in Johannine theology (Okure, 1988[a]). As with Pobee's work, so in Okure's thesis, the African situation is not mentioned in the text. But, once again, the preface is used to highlight the motivation behind the research.

My interest in mission dates back to my school days, and was inspired by my living experiences of mission in the African context. I was often struck by the contrast between certain statements of Jesus found mostly in John's gospel concerning his mission from the Father and the actual conception and exercise of mission which obtained in my context. This contrast belonged mostly in the order of the attitude of the missionary to the work and the people, and of the method in the exercise of mission. The whole experience raised for me a number of unanswered questions concerning the relationship of the mission exercised in my context to the mission of Jesus.

In the course of my biblical studies, however, I had completely forgotten that I had had these questions. The choice of the topic for this work was therefore not consciously connected with them. This was likely due to the biblical discipline itself which, like most theological disciplines of this century was, and to a large extent still is, literary and academically oriented, not designed to address real life issues. It was only afterwards, indeed as I was reflecting on a suitable preface for this book, that I remembered that I had had these questions, and that here in the pages of this book I had finally found satisfying answers to them (Okure, 1988[a]: v).

Okure's choice of topic was influenced by her experience of mission work in Nigeria, although this was apparently not a conscious choice and although Nigeria is nowhere mentioned in her exegesis.

But the works of Pobee and Okure are exceptions to the general rule. Although there is no scholarship which does not have a contextual interest, African biblical scholarship usually goes out of its way to highlight issues of importance for the African situation. Exegesis is explicitly related to life. Four issues from the African world appear to command the most attention from African New Testament exegetes: 1. mission and colonialism; 2. suffering; 3. faith; and, 4. African traditional religion and culture. These are not airtight containers, of course. Much of the dissatisfaction with missionary work comes from the inability of missionaries to take African traditions seriously. The root of much African suffering stems from European colonialism. And so on. But while these subjects cannot be separated, they can at least be distinguished for the sake of elucidation and example.

We note first of all, that New Testament exegesis in Africa is practised within a context of mission and colonialism. As we have already seen in our earlier discussion of missionary exegesis, for most of Africa the Bible arrived in the hands of missionaries from the North Atlantic world. The interpretation of the Bible reflected missionary minds which were shaped by that world and which had little understanding of the culture of Africa. Although in some parts of Africa the message of the New Testament as conveyed by the missionaries was received with joy, certain tensions began to emerge.

First of all, once the Bible was in the hands and in the language of Africans themselves, it became evident that there were differences between what the missionaries said and what the book said. A classic example has to do with polygyny. Although most missionary societies and the churches which they represented condemned the practice, it did not escape the notice of African readers that many of the great 'heroes of the faith' had more than one wife.

These tensions were not limited to Old Testament examples. A visitor to African churches will notice immediately that mission-founded churches and African-founded churches have different emphases. Of note is the pervasive practice of healing in African instituted churches and the almost complete lack of emphasis on healing in churches with roots in the missionary societies. There are several reasons for the emphasis on healing in African instituted churches. An obvious reason is that many Africans are in need of healing. A second is that Africans have traditionally been accustomed to ask God for healing. A third reason, and the one of most interest to us here, is that the pages of the New Testament are full of healing stories. We are left to ask why the mission churches have not been open to healing by prayer and ritual. The answer lies in the worldview of most nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries. Consider the opinion of Samuel Abogunrin, for example:

When Christianity, which from the earliest period has existed in parts of North Africa and Ethiopia, was introduced into the rest of Black Africa, the world view of Western Christian theologians retained only a veneer of Biblical worldview. The world-view of the Western missionaries who preached the Gospel in Africa had by then become quasi-scientific (Abogunrin, 1988: v; cf. Imasogie, 1986:52).

The deist worldview which pervaded even the most pious of missionaries was able to interpret New Testament healing stories either as spiritual lessons having little to do with prayer for sick bodies, or as a call to found clinics and hospitals. The latter they ought to have done, not neglecting the former. In short many missionaries did not hear aspects of the message of the New Testament which Africans claim to be able to hear very clearly indeed. The missionary worldview and the ethos of the New Testament were sometimes quite far apart.

This tension between African and western worldviews continues in scholarly circles. Most African biblical scholars find western scepticism unacceptable. As John Pobee puts it, "the tinge of agnosticism so characteristic of the Northern scientific method will not be wholly satisfactory" (Pobee, 1996:166).

A second tension between the Bible and the missionaries stemmed from the involvement of the missions with colonialism. The history of the relationship between the missions and colonial exploitation is complex. It is true that many missionaries were often at odds with the policies of colonial governments and sought to defend the rights of Africans against oppressive practices. It is also true that the construction of colonial infrastructure made the missionaries' jobs easier, that missionaries could sometimes be co-opted by colonial authorities and that many, no doubt, had mixed motives. Consider the example of David Livingstone. He was an outspoken and energetic opponent of the slave trade. He also believed that missionaries should come to Africa in order to open the way not only for Christianity - but for Christianity and 'commerce'. Africans did not miss that fact that although the New Testament spoke of the reign of God, missionaries often seemed to speak and act on behalf of other ideologies and other sovereign powers.

A New Testament text which has received much attention from African exegetes is the story of Paul's preaching on Mars Hill in Athens (Apochi, 1995; Igenzoza, 1984; Manus, 1985; Manus, 1989; Manus, 1990; Martin, 1962; Onwu, 1988; Osei-Bonsu, 1994; Geraghty, 1996).

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you...From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him-though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:22-23, 25-31, NRSV)

This story has provided fertile ground for exploring how evangelism should build bridges between the gospel and culture. Many African exegetes find an echo of some of their own concerns about openness to African culture and religion in Paul's presentation in which he investigates the culture before he speaks and then when he does speak he quotes the Athenians' own poets approvingly and shows how Greek religious traditions point the way to Christ. According to Chris Ukachukwu Manus, a Roman Catholic New Testament scholar from Nigeria, "Luke's text has...a special appeal for the young churches of Africa. It presents us with a model worthy of emulation for mission in Africa where the inhabitants are still as much 'religious' as the Athenians of antiquity [sic: antiquity]" (Manus, 1990:212). This approach to mission, says Manus, is in contrast to the approach of early European missionaries.

Those early missionaries, unlike Paul [,] did not see our forebears as deeply religious...Rather they insisted on a total break from our past. The rupture from our past urged by Christian missionaries has not been successful, rather it tends to produce hostility...due partly to the disdain for our traditional belief systems by early evangelists (Manus, 1990:214).

Manus goes on to enjoin his readers to seek to forge links between the gospel message and African culture, which, he says (using a phrase from the great African theologian Clement of Alexandria), is a 'preparation for the gospel.'

A second important situation which receives attention in African exegesis is the pervasive presence of suffering on the continent. News from Africa, as it arrives in the West via international news services, is invariably bad news. Wars and rumours of wars, disease, environmental degradation, famine, tyranny, displaced peoples, and crushing debt loads are only the beginning of the litany of misery which could be recited. Africa is of little 'strategic' importance to Western powers, and so the stability of an African nation is of little interest compared, for example, with Israel/Palestine or the fragmented countries of the former Yugoslavia. A recent article on malaria in a respected news magazine (Shell, 1997) suggests that although this disease is by far the most devastating health problem in the world it has received comparatively little attention from the world community - partly because most of the people who suffer and die from the disease daily live in the 'third world', particularly in Africa.

The cries for liberation from these plagues of war, sickness and poverty do not escape the ears of African readers of the New Testament. On a popular level it is common for ordinary people to use the New Testament in an effort to construct what has been called a "theology of survival. In Port Harcourt, Nigeria, a survey of ordinary Africans found that they were much less concerned with relating the Bible to African culture than with using it to surmount problems of childlessness, unemployment, sickness, demon-possession, etc. Respondents might recognize that there were closer connections between African culture and the Old Testament, but they still preferred the New because of its greater spiritual power (Riches, 1996:184).

African New Testament scholars and preachers find that they are confronted by the problems of African suffering whenever they open the text. To study the New Testament in Africa is to be constantly

challenged to demonstrate the relevance of the exegetical task. For example, in 1993, when the country of Kenya lived through a period of ethnic 'clashes' which many Kenyans believe were initiated by the government, Bishop David Gitari (now the Anglican Archbishop of Kenya), preached a sermon on John 10, reminding his people that Jesus was the Good Shepherd - and reminding the politicians that there are shepherds who are thieves and robbers.

At the present time, the sight of the numerous displaced people in our midst is to be likened to the crowds which Jesus saw, 'harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd'. Kenyans should no longer look like this when they have 188 strong shepherds [parliamentarians] to attend to their plight. If these parliamentarians decide to shun their duties, the sovereign Lord says this, 'I will build up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice' (Ezek.34:16). (Gitari, 1996)

Gitari's call for justice and warning of judgement earned him much criticism from the parliament, but Gitari would argue that he had little choice; the situation - and the text - compelled him.

In the context of suffering, the passion of Jesus carries great meaning for readers of the New Testament, popular and scholarly alike (Dickson, 1984:185-99). It is perhaps the artistic and liturgical depictions of the New Testament which make the greatest impact. A mural by the now-martyred Cameroonian theologian Englebert Mveng adorns the chapel of Hekima College, a Jesuit institution in Nairobi. At the bottom of the mural is Nairobi's skyline and above the city hangs the suffering Christ, depicted with African features – an African suffering for Africa.

A powerful exploration of the meaning of the cross is the poem "I am an African" by Gabriel Setiloane, in which the cross interprets African suffering as a sharing in God's pain and African traditions interpret the cross of Christ in sacrificial terminology (Setiloane, 1976:56-59).

And yet for us it is when He is on the cross,
This Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands
And open side, like a beast at a sacrifice;

When He is stripped naked like us,
Browned and sweating water and blood in the heat of the sun
Yet silent,
That we cannot resist him.
How like us He is, this Jesus of Nazareth,
Beaten, tortured, imprisoned, spat upon, truncheoned,
Denied by his own, and chased like a thief in the night,
Despised, and rejected like a dog that has fleas.
For NO REASON.

No reason, but that He was Son of His Father
Or...Was there a reason?
There was indeed...!
As in that sheep or goat we offer in sacrifice,
Quiet and uncomplaining,
Its blood falling to the ground to cleanse it...and us;
And making peace between us and our fathers long passed away:
He is the LAMB!
His blood cleanses not only us,
not only the clan,
not only the tribe,
But all, all MANKIND:
Black and White and Brown and Red,
All Mankind!

The cross of Jesus also plays a key liturgical role for suffering Christians in Africa. In a recent article, Mark Nikkel expounds the meaning of the cross as it is experienced amongst Sudanese Christians who have been displaced by war and famine.

Among Dinka communities crosses appear today in an endless array of shapes, designs, and materials. They are displayed on people of all ages and in all possible locations, private and public. It appears that for many Bor Dinka, the aesthetic energies once invested in grooming and adorning a fine name ox, or in personal body decoration are today given to creating elaborate new designs for the simple cruciform shape (1995:161).

In Dinka hymnody the cross is a symbol of salvation from sin: "I am praying, remembering the cross and the crown of thorns [the things you] suffered because of my great sin" (hymn by Andrew Mayol, quoted in Nikkel, 1995:166); a standard for battle against the evil one: "The flag of your cross, makes Satan flee away" (hymn by Abraham Agoot Ajok Agoot, quoted in Nikkel, 1995:165). It is even personified in human form: "We have our piece of wood that walks like a human being; We have a cross which you cannot reject" (hymn by Naomi Alueel Deng, quoted in Nikkel, 1995:165). Especially striking is a hymn in which the Dinka take on themselves the role of cross bearer, following the example of the African, Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21-22 & par.).

We are calling upon you to accept us;
We are crying that you might hear us.
Embrace us intimately ('cuddle' us) for we are your children,
and let us carry your cross and follow after you.
Let us be like Simon, the man of Cyrene, who went with you to
the place of the skull (hymn by John Col Ater Cut, quoted
in Nikkel, 1995:167-68).

In these artistic and liturgical portrayals the cross is not an image of hopelessness and despair in suffering. Rather, in the cross African readers of the New Testament see both the identification of God with African pain, and the atoning work of the Lamb. According to Theresa Souga, "The realism of the cross every day tells me, as a woman of the Third World, that the laws of history may be overcome by means of crucified love" (1990:22).

Thirdly, African New Testament scholarship is almost always confessional in its ethos. Even scholars who teach the New Testament in the context of the university tend to do so explicitly as people of faith.

In North Atlantic exegesis God has become one of the marginalized. Not so in most African exegesis. Here God is acknowledged as a living reality, not bracketed out in some desire to achieve an illusion of objectivity. According to Ukpong,

Interpretation is done within the canon...The Bible is looked upon as a sacred classic - a book containing norms for Christian living as well as a literary text. Historical critical tools and others are used precisely as tools to aid interpretation and not as ends in themselves (Ukpong, 1996:190).

African scholars do not live with the luxury of specialization as do scholars in the North Atlantic world, and so African biblical scholars consider themselves to be part of the larger programme of African theology. "Biblical theology in Africa is not just an autonomous unit but an integral part of African theology," according to Pobe (1996:170). In a similar vein Okure notes that her review of feminist biblical interpretation in Africa "deliberately made little distinction between African women biblical scholars and theologians," (Okure, 1993:83) since all African biblical scholars would also consider themselves to be theologians who were at the service of the church. African New Testament exegesis is explicitly a confessional exegesis.

Okure has called the story of the woman with the flow of blood "a cherished passage" among feminist biblical scholars in Africa (Okure, 1993:77). It also seems to be very popular among New Testament

scholars who do not choose to call themselves 'feminists.' It is, in fact, one of the most widely discussed of New Testament texts in African exegesis (Amoah, 1986; Tappa, 1990; Tappa, 1988; Souga, 1988; Kanyoro, 1990; Cochrane, 1991; Okure, 1992; Hohegger, 1993; Sandblom, 1993; Ukpog, 1995; West, 1995; Ntreh, 1996; Sibeko and Haddad, 1996; Mkole Jean-Claude, 1997).

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (Mark 5:25-34, NRSV; cf. Matthew 9:20-22; Luke 8:43-48)

Many connections have been noted between this story and the African world. The woman suffers from a disease which requires not only physical healing, but also healing from the social isolation caused by a blood taboo - a taboo which in Africa would also isolate a woman from her family, the community and even from the church and its ministrations. The woman is healed by touching the clothing of Jesus, believing that this would be effective for her cure - an idea similar to ideas about the power of the clothing of prophetic figures in some parts of Africa (Hohegger, 1993). Even the mention of 'power' 'going out' from Jesus is parallel to African ideas about spiritual power (Sibeko and Haddad, 1996; Sandblom, 1993).

Of no little consequence for African readers is Jesus' description of the woman as having "faith." In her exposition of this story, Okure sees the woman's faith as a challenge. In contrast to the man in John 5, this woman wanted to be healed; although her approach was "somewhat magic-like", "she dared to believe" (Okure, 1992[b]:228). Okure praises the woman for her courage in seeking Jesus out, for overcoming her worry over the possible transmission of uncleanness, for putting behind her the fear of the crowd. She had faith that the power of Jesus would heal her. African women also need to reach out to touch Jesus. God will not be defiled by the touch of an African woman, she says. African women need to touch Jesus, "because we genuinely need wholeness and life from him, both for ourselves individually, for one another and for our people" (Okure, 1992[b]: 229).

African exegesis does not seek to understand the text merely for its own sake, or out of an intellectual curiosity. African exegesis is need-driven and faith oriented. African biblical study is, almost always, explicitly confessional. The faith of the woman with the flow of blood is often seen as a model for the exegete. Her faith was not detached and merely cerebral, but engaged and committed to life.

Finally, African exegesis takes place within the context of African traditional culture and religion.

The majority of African Christians still live in the world of the New Testament, where belief in demons and a host of unseen supernatural powers was potent and real. A Jesus emptied of all the supernatural contained in the Gospels would be meaningless in the African context (Abogunrin, 1987:31).

So claims the New Testament Professor of a prominent Nigerian university. And his claim is echoed by other African scholars: "for many Africans, church persons and theologians alike, there is no conflict between biblical and traditional African religious beliefs, particularly in the belief in the existence of a spirit world, including evil spirits" (Pobee, 1996:166).

The African universe is well-populated. Ancestors, spirits, demons and angels may be invisible, but they are certainly considered to be present and active. Some African New Testament scholars are concerned about a perceived over-emphasis on the spiritual world within indigenous African Christianity. The

importance given to the place of angelic beings in the worship of Nigerian Aladura churches, for example, is sometimes criticized (Abogunrin, 1986; Owanikin, 1987). Most New Testament scholars, however, consider belief in the activity of the spirit world to be an important point of contact between Africa and the New Testament. Ukpong criticises western exegetical methodologies "because they do not reflect the concerns of African people" and goes on to suggest that "African popular acceptance of the miraculous and the supernatural must be built into any methodology seeking to operate in the African context" (Ukpong, 1994:19-20). A reading of the story of the Gerasene demoniac illustrates the importance of the spirit world for African readers.

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. (Mark 5:1-13, NRSV)

In a fascinating study of demon possession in Tanzania, Lutheran missionary Stanley Benson reports that his theological preparation afforded him no help in dealing with the demonic.

In my western oriented theological training in the 1950's, demonology was not taught or made known to any extent ... When I was confronted with ... cases of demon possession, I was forced to look anew at Scripture and the church's theological stance. I was helped not from most modern educated westerners who looked on demons as an outworn superstition; nor by many of the biblical critics who identify demon possession as a psychological malady ... My insights were gained more from an experiential nature in comparison with the literal text of Scripture. (Benson, 1980:58-59).

As we have seen, African experience and the New Testament often have more in common than either one can share with the West.

A recent exposition of the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Umeagudosa, 1996) underlines the importance of the subject of spiritual powers in African Christianity, and therefore in African exegesis. After a review of scholarship on the miracles of Jesus in general and exorcism stories in particular, Margaret Umeagudosa investigates the triple tradition story from a redaction critical perspective. The distinctive African contribution, however, comes when she turns to the relevance of the story for the African situation. Jesus delivered people from demons; he commissioned his disciples to do the same in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the same Spirit of God is still available today, she argues (Umeagudosa, 1996:35).

In Africa today people have received cures through divination, sacrifice and prayers. It is only a matter of faith. The activities of African Independent Churches in terms of healing ministry cannot be over-emphasized...

We must admit that there are problems concerning the meaning, credibility and intelligibility plaguing the whole idea of miracles...[but] Jesus was absolutely concerned with human problems, liberation from demonic powers, salvation, love, compassion and above all the wholeness of the

human person. Therefore, the inner logic of Jesus' miracles is that they are concrete evidences of the continued supreme reign of God's kingdom on earth and victory over evil (Umeagudosa, 1996:35-36).

The story of the Gerasene demoniac is not left in the past as an artefact of early Christian experience or a piece of data to be fit into a comprehensive picture of a reconstructed historical Jesus. Jesus' healing of the oppressed man is a paradigm for the task of the church, a task of deliverance which is all but forgotten in the West, but is considered vital in African contexts. As Pobebe has recently stated:

Unlike Western societies, no effort is made to explain away cosmic powers. African exegetes take seriously the reality of cosmic powers, treating them as some kind of organized disobedience to the will of God, which affects the course of human history (Pobebe, 1996: 172).

This survey has raised a number of questions which could be investigated in much more depth. For now it is sufficient to raise some issues which will probably be important for African exegetes of the New Testament in the coming years.

First, the interface between popular and academic readings is an important motif in African exegesis. Popular readings and the use of the Bible by ordinary people is taken seriously. African scholars are not unafraid to criticize some popular uses of the Bible but in contrast to the disdain for popular readings one sometimes discovers among western scholars, African scholars are generally only willing to criticize the faithful with a good deal of respect and understanding.

Second, most African New Testament scholars have done at least a portion of their training in western institutions, and all are conversant with the use of historical critical tools. It is not always evident, however, that all African scholars consider these methods to be of much importance. Since the emphasis of African scholarly readings has been more on the readers than the text, more on present and future history than on the past, the use of critical tools to reconstruct history has not been the major issue. A recent call has gone out for African scholars to be more conscientious in their use of critical methodology (Obeng, 1997).

Third, we have seen that women are beginning to emerge as a strong voice in the exegetical community. Attention focused by women on the New Testament has had the result that texts which may have hitherto been neglected are now being investigated (Okure, 1988[b]). We have seen that the story of the woman with the flow of blood is the focus of much discussion. A number of studies of other biblical passages which feature women as central characters are also beginning to emerge. The story of the Samaritan woman in John 4 (Manus, 1987; Okure, 1988[a]; Dube, 1992 and 1996; Aluko, 1993) the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 (Onwu, 1985; Dube, 1996) and the place of women in the Pauline corpus (Manus, 1984; Tzabedze, 1990; Amadi-Azuogo, 1996) have all been the focus of scholarly attention from African women or those influenced by feminist hermeneutics. The emergence of African women as exegetes has also produced a different understanding of the role of African tradition than that which has usually been found among male scholars. Whereas most male New Testament scholars in Africa have assigned an almost exclusively positive role to African tradition, women scholars have some doubts. Some African traditions (blood taboos, for example) have prevented African women from assuming certain roles in society and in the churches. These traditions are now being questioned by women biblical scholars.

Finally, it is being recognized that liberationist and inculturationist perspectives cannot be divorced. Liberation is seen as multi-faceted, not only cultural and religious, not only economic and political. God's agenda encompasses all of life. Perhaps the most important single New Testament verse in African exegesis is John 10:10 in which Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." This verse is quoted and echoed time after time in African writings on the New Testament Okure calls the verse a "key text" (Okure, 1992[a]:87). The passage in which it appears is,

a summative and programmatic passage. Jesus declares that the sole purpose of his coming into the world is so that human beings may have life...and have it to the fullest...Concern for...personal, human welfare...characterizes Jesus' entire ministry (Okure, 1992[a]:89).

The traditional African worldview is life-affirming. This Johannine hope of abundant life encapsulates, and baptizes, the desire of many African readers.

1. New Testament exegesis is not new to the continent of Africa, of course. The scholarly efforts of Origen in Egypt and Augustine in Hippo, North Africa, are well known. The exegetical tradition of the Ethiopian Church has been examined in some depth (Cowley, 1983; Cowley 1988; Mikre-Selassie, 1972; Mikre-Selassie, 1993). These exegetical traditions are still of vital importance, especially in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox churches (LeMarquand, 1998). The ancient Nubian Church produced its own translation of the Bible, but few manuscripts are extant. As the title of this article states our primary concern is with African scholarship as it has emerged in the modern period.

2. We could add to this list almost indefinitely: belief in one God, the importance of family and clan solidarity, circumcision, spiritual beings, prayer, healing are all issues of vital importance to the Old Testament, the New Testament and Africa alike.

3. "The New Testament poses a radical question. It is new in many of its assertions. It demands new morality and new doctrinal teachings." (Kinoti and Waliggo, 1997:2).

4. Efforts are being made to rethink the western scholarly myopia about such subjects as the 'Jewishness of Jesus.' See especially Stendahl, 1963.

5. See the final section of the bibliography of the present volume [*The Bible in Africa*].

6. By referring to white South Africans in this section I do not mean to imply that every white South African biblical scholar has been in sympathy with the ideology of apartheid and with situations of racism, both past and continuing in the post-apartheid era. There are many who have shown courage in their opposition to racism and injustice, both in their biblical studies and in other areas of their lives.

7. I use the term 'readers' here loosely, of course, since many black African Bible 'readers' are actually illiterate. Perhaps 'hearers' would be a more appropriate (and more biblical?) image.

8. Actually, Akenson says "The words of Jesus (and to a lesser extent the writings of the apostle Paul) are a direct repudiation of the idea of there being a Chosen People in the physical sense" (1991:305). I would argue that Paul's entire theological project is a repudiation of the idea of election having a racial basis. For Paul the covenant is established by grace, not by race, and membership in Israel is not a matter of a circumcision of the flesh, but of a circumcision of the heart. This follows directly from Paul's fundamentally Jewish belief that there is only one God who created and loves all people.

9. For a description of uses of the historical Jesus in Africa see LeMarquand, 1997.

10. The approach which is generally called 'inculturation' by African exegetes outside of South Africa, especially by Roman Catholic scholars, has much in common with what South Africans tend to call 'contextualization.' The emphasis in South Africa has tended to fall on issues of politics and

economics. In other parts of the continent cultural and religious values have received the most attention.

11. The example he found was by Tanzanian Old Testament scholar Leonidas Kalugila (Kalugila, 1980). In 1993 I had occasion, while in Nairobi, to ask Dr. Kalugila about Professor Mbiti's description of his work. His response was that in fact he had decided upon the topic of his research partly out of a desire to compare the Old Testament view of kingship with an ancient African (Egyptian) view. In Kalugila's case, a subject which appeared to be 'pure' scholarship turned out to have been determined in part by memories of African glory and honour.

12. This phrase emerged in the discussions of "The Bible in Africa Project Consultation" which took place in Glasgow in 1994 (Bible in Africa Project, 1994; cf. Riches, 1996). The full minutes of the consultation are available from Professor Riches [Department of Biblical Studies, The University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ, Scotland].

13. See the discussions in Lagerwerf, 1990; Masenya, 1995; Oduyoye, 1995; Okure, 1992(a).

14. See also Owan, 1996; Gitari, 1996.
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