

Newsletter on

**African
Old
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Scholarship**

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Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship aims at being a meeting place where African Old Testament scholars and non-Africans interested in African Old Testament scholarship can exchange ideas and information. The newsletter wants to bring brief notices on research projects and teaching programmes, as well as books and conferences related to African Old Testament scholarship. It also wants to comment upon research policy and methodological questions. The readers of the newsletter are encouraged to use it as a means of communicating.

Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship is published biannually; in May and November. Paper issues of the newsletter are sent free of charge to African Old Testament scholars and African theological libraries (i.e. libraries in university departments of theology and religion, and degree granting seminaries and colleges). The annual subscription rate for non-African scholars and libraries is US \$ 8.00.

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CONTRARY

to for example research colleagues in the departments of chemistry or medicine, OT scholars do not need large laboratories with sophisticated and expensive technological equipment. What still is needed, however, is access to the major international market-place, where current scholarly products are being offered, evaluated and exchanged.

Access to this market-place is to some extent a question of economic resources; the rapidly increasing number of scholarly books and journals are indeed expensive, and so are also the bibliographical tools we need and the international conferences we would like to go to. Still, access to the market-place is not only a question of economic resources. Also other factors are of importance; one is the question of cooperation, in order to use the economic resources better, another is the

question of creating more local market-places, that would be easier to get access to, and that would also be more sensitive to the local context.

When the present issue of the *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* focuses on the conditions for doing OT research in Africa, several different perspectives are discussed. Underneath the different perspectives, however, lies a wish to participate in the building of a market-place that is open and accessible to everyone engaged in OT scholarship within the context of Africa, and that is also sensitive to the questions and demands of the African context.

Winston Kawale presents the new data base on the Bible in Africa, developed at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. This base, which eventually will be found on the web, will be of great importance for further research on the relationship between Africa and the OT, and, more generally, for future OT scholarship in Africa. Another, and related presentation, is Joseph Muutuki's survey of library resources with regard to OT research in Nairobi. This survey is a useful documentation of what the different libraries are able to offer, and it also demonstrates some of the potential for a closer cooperation, both for the different institutions and for the individual researchers. A third contribution is David T. Adamo's article on OT research in Africa, where he advocates the need for cooperation with regard to the use of man power, research facilities, and publication. And, finally, the editor of *African Journal of Biblical studies*, Gabriel O. Abe, gives a brief presentation of the present difficulties facing the publishers of this very important journal.

Knut Holter

NEW DATA BASE: BIBLE IN AFRICA RESEARCH PROJECT

By Winston R. Kawale

The Bible in Africa Research Project started in 1994, initiated by professor Hendrik L. Bosman, professor of Old Testament and head of the Department of Old and New Testament, Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. The project is funded by the University of Stellenbosch, and three student research assistants are involved, Rev Winston Kawale (Malawi), Rev Edwin Zulu (Zambia) and Mr Douglas Muchiri (Kenya). The purpose of the project is to provide a computerised resource data base on the use and interpretation of the Bible in the context of Africa. The data will eventually be accessible through Sabinet (South Africa Bibliographical Network) and Internet.

About 1557 books, articles, essays, and monographs on the study of the Bible in Africa have been identified. For easy access to the work each entry has bibliographical information, subject terms, and summary notes. The subject terms are similar to those used in the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) thesaurus. The subject terms which are used include for example "theology", "translation", "hermeneutics or interpretation", "proverbs", and "magic". The project will also categorise the contributions according to which regions in Africa they originate from; that is, North Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa. There will also be a category for the contributions from outside Africa.

Besides the compilation of the data base, the project also aims to contribute to the interpretation of research trends in Old and New Testament studies in Africa; cf. as an example of this, W. Kawale's critical article on the "Divergent interpretation of the relationship between some concepts of God in the Old Testament and in African Traditional Religions", *Old Testament Essays* 8 (1995) 7-30.

Several sources have been used to identify the entries. These include *Booknotes for Africa*, 1996- ; G. LeMarquand, "A bibliography of the

Bible in Africa: A preliminary publication", *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Southern Africa and Africa* 2/II (1995) 6- 40, and 3/I 1996 24- 32 ; G. West & M.W. Dube (eds.), *"Reading with": African overtures* [= *Semeia* vol. 73] 1996 ; K. Holter, *Tropical Africa and the Old Testament: A select and annotated bibliography*. Oslo: University of Oslo 1996 ; J.U. Young, *African Theology: A critical analysis and annotated bibliography*. Westport: Greenwood Press 1993 ; J.H. Evans, *Black theology : A critical assessment and annotated bibliography*, Westport: Greenwood Press 1987 ; P.E. Ofori, *Christianity in tropical Africa: A selective annotated bibliography*, Nendeln: KTO Press 1977 ; *Religious Indexes* [RIO / RIT / IBRR] 1975- [on CD ROM from ATLA] ; *Africa Ecclesial Review* 1969- ; *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* ; *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* ; *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* ; AMECEA Gaba Publications, Eldoret, Kenya ; *Africa Theological Journal* ; *African Journal of Biblical Studies* ; Computerised and Card Catalogue of the Library Services, University of Stellenbosch ; Sabinet (South African Bibliographical Network).

For more information on the project, please contact: Professor Hendrik L. Bosman, Department of Old and New Testament, Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, Matieland 7602, South Africa; tel: (+27) 021 808 3267; fax: (+27) 021 808 3251; e-mail: hlbl@maties.sun.ac.za

Rev Winston Kawale is about to complete a PhD thesis (University of Stellenbosch) on Gen 1-3 read against the background of the cosmogony of the Chewa of Malawi; cf. *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* 1 (1996) 6. He will then take up the position as lecturer in OT studies at Zomba Theological College (P.O. Box 130, Zomba, Malawi); present address is still Department of Old and New Testament, Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, Matieland 7602, South Africa; e-mail: 9264760@firga.sun.ac.za

LIBRARY RESOURCES FOR OLD TESTAMENT RESEARCH IN NAIROBI

By Joseph Muutuki

How good or bleak are the chances of one doing Old Testament research in Kenya? This question was recently posed at Daystar University in Nairobi. Clearly, this is not a question that we would be able to answer in one sentence. There are several private and government universities as well as a number of theological seminaries in and around Nairobi, and one would have to visit their libraries before responding to the question. Still, the question is very important. Is it possible for us here in Kenya to begin and complete a research work in Old Testament studies? Do our libraries have the basic tools of relevant books, dictionaries, lexica, and journals, that are needed for Kenyan Old Testament scholars? Or, to put it in another way, do our libraries have the basic tools that would be needed for a Western Old Testament professor who may choose to come to Kenya for a sabbatical?

In order to find an answer to this question, I have visited some of the theological libraries in and around Nairobi, to see what library resources they are able to offer. As the question originally was asked at Daystar University, its library was the first to be visited. Daystar, however, does not have a large collection of Old Testament literature; about 250 books on Old Testament theology, introductions, interpretation, and criticism, and besides a few concordances. At present, the Daystar library does not have any journals directly related to Old Testament studies, but it is in the process of subscribing to some.

The library of the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) is well organized and subscribes to over 40 international theological journals, of which five are related to the African context. The library offers access to more than 300 books related to Old Testament studies, including commentary series like *Word Biblical Commentary*, *International Critical Commentary*, and also dictionaries like G.J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old*

Testament and D.N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Of journals one should notice that the library has *Journal of Biblical Literature* (from 1955 on microfilm), *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, and *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. The library also offers bibliographical tools as *Old Testament Abstracts*, *Religious Index One: Periodicals*, and K. Holter, *Tropical Africa and the Old Testament: A select and annotated bibliography* (1996).

Another good library is that of Hekima Catholic College, with over 400 books related to Old Testament studies, including commentary series as *International Critical Commentary* and *Word Biblical Commentary*. Hekima subscribes to a number of journals in French and English, and it has dictionaries like *The Cambridge Dictionary of the Bible*. The place is very well maintained and is extremely quiet for anyone who needs quietness for serious studies.

There is one more Catholic institution of higher learning in Nairobi which is of interest for Old Testament scholars, that is the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. The university library has more than 500 books related to Old Testament studies, including Hebrew grammars and concordances, and commentary series as *The New International Commentary*. Of journals one should note *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* and *Vetus Testamentum* (1973-), and of bibliographical tools one should note *Old Testament Abstracts*, *The International African Bibliography*, and *The Biblical Bibliography* (1977-).

The library of the Nairobi International School of Theology has more than 300 books related to Old Testament studies, including G.J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, and L. Laird Harris & al. (eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. The library has journals as *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* and *Journal of Biblical Literature*, and also bibliographical tools as *Religion Index One & Two*.

Of course, what has been said above may not be enough for scholars wishing to do research in the Old Testament. In such a case there are other and older institutions like the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University. One will here find journals as *Journal of African Studies* (1974-), *Journal of Religion in Africa* (1969-), and *Africa Theological*

Journal. These university libraries also have bibliographical tools as *Dissertation Abstracts*, *African Studies Abstracts*, *Current Bibliographies on African Studies*, *International Bibliographies on Religion Index*, and *The Library of Congress Catalog*. Unfortunately the public universities do not have as many books, and if one were to say the two of them combined do not have over 200 books related to Old Testament studies, that would not be an underestimation. One can hardly find theological dictionaries and commentaries on their shelves.

The question posed in the beginning of this article, whether it is possible to do research related to Old Testament studies in Nairobi, can now be answered. On the one hand the libraries which here are surveyed clearly provide possibilities for certain kinds of research work related to the Old Testament. However, on the other hand, there is obviously a need for a wider range of scholarly literature. It should here be noted that the private institutions generally seems to have better facilities for research than the public ones. A major draw back that any person doing research in Kenya will find in this age of technology is that none of the the above mentioned institutions have materials on CD-Rom or are on Internet for databases. However, one hears from some of them that they soon will be connected or are in the process of installing their software.

In conclusion it should be emphasized that each institution is unique. The private institutions seem to put a lot of emphasis on theological literature, whereas the public universities are likely to put the emphasis elsewhere. Kenya has not fostered too many theologians in the past, except, of course, the well known John S. Mbiti back in the 1960s and 70s. Africa still remains a continent of oral tradition, and books have accordingly not played any important role. Still, the newer institutions of higher learning have began to set pace for a new era of theologians, including theologians who are going to write on issues related to Old Testament studies.

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DOING OLD TESTAMENT RESEARCH IN AFRICA

By David Tuesday Adamo

Discussing Old Testament (OT) research in the entire continent of Africa is indeed a Herculean task, as Africa is such a large continent with so many countries. The development is not the same in all countries, and the state of OT research certainly differs.¹

OT research in Africa is in general still in its infancy, dating back to the 1960s. However, already in the late 1970s, John Mbiti was able to locate a number of books and articles related to the OT, written by African scholars.² Throughout the 1970s and 80s the need for serious biblical research was emphasised and encouraged in many conferences and consultations. Unfortunately, however, the books and articles resulting from these conferences and consultations turned out to have few serious OT contributions. Still, there were some positive exceptions; one was the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies, and their *African Journal of Biblical Studies*; another, of course, was the Old Testament Society of South Africa, and their *Old Testament Essays*.

The importance of OT research in Africa

Serious questioning of the role of the OT within the church can be dated back to the second century CE. And there is a clear line going from Marcion, who dismissed the OT as a Christian book, and up to the modern era with scholars as Adolph von Harnack, Friedrich Delitzsch, and Rudolph Bultmann, and their negative evaluation of the OT. Corresponding approaches are also reflected in contemporary Africa. In Nigeria, for example, it is not uncommon to see churches called New Testament Church. Several years ago a student in my class belonging to

¹ Cf. N. Onwu, "The current state of biblical studies in Africa today", *The Journal of Religious Thought* 41 (1985) 35-46.

² Cf. J. Mbiti, "The biblical basis in present trends of African theology", *Africa Theological Journal* 7/1 (1978) 72-85.

one of these churches confronted me with the idea that the OT is outdated and therefore no more relevant. To him the New Testament is the relevant Christian Bible.

The importance of the OT in Africa can be seen in the fact that the African and OT worldviews are almost identical; cf. for example their understanding of phenomena as sin, creation, family, community, names, history, heaven, etc. Accordingly, African biblical scholars are likely to understand these OT phenomena better than Euro-American scholars, due to the fact that they feel at home when they encounter them in the OT.

The need for OT research in Africa is seen in the fact that no continent has been misrepresented in biblical scholarship like Africa. Euro-American biblical scholars doing research on passages that have bearing on Africa and the African diaspora clearly reflect their scholastic prejudices. The Bible has been used, not only to justify the enslaving of Africans, but also to develop a theory of inferiority of black people. Likewise, Euro-American missiological research in Africa is crooked and full of prejudice against the people of Africa. African culture, which is close to the biblical culture, is summarily dismissed as irrelevant to the understanding of the gospel, or even dismissed as magical, paganistic and fetishitic. Unless serious OT research in Africa is able to expose and correct this academic sin, Africa will continue to languish in scholastic oppression.

As pointed out by Samuel Abogunrin, professor at the University of Ibadan, the future of Christian theology in Africa depends on biblical research in Africa today; hence, biblical scholars of today are pioneers in laying the foundation of tomorrow's Christian theology in Africa.³ African Christianity is very dynamic, and Euro-American theology is too weak to meet the need and challenges of Africa. In fact, the Euro-American approach is in some ways irrelevant to biblical studies. Since the future of African theology depends on authentic African biblical research, particularly with regard to the OT, African biblical scholars must face the present challenge of presenting the gospel message in the light of African culture and experience.

³ Cf. S.O. Abogunrin, "Biblical research in Africa: The task ahead", *Africa Journal of Biblical Studies* 1/I (1986) 7-24, 21.

Problems facing OT research in Africa

Despite the importance pointed out above of OT research in Africa, it still faces serious problems. One is the government policies in the continent. Several governments in Africa are perpetuating oppressive policies. Many scholars live under military regimes that have no regard for research. If there is any investment in research at all, it is always in science, which is said to be the only research area that is of relevance to national development. One result of this is that the libraries lack current journals and books for research. Another result is that salaries are low. Accordingly, many brilliant biblical scholars have left for greener pastures, and some of those who are abroad refuse to come back to Africa. The Nigerian situation, for example, is rather pathetic. Despite the petro-dollars flowing into the country, Nigerian lecturers and professors are the least paid in Africa. This situation leads to a frustration that hardly encourages research. One Nigerian newspaper recently said that most Nigerians live below the poverty level. Even biblical scholars spend their time looking for something to eat. And, under such circumstances, it is obviously difficult to do any meaningful research.

Another problem is that in most African universities and theological seminaries there is a lack of competent man power in the field of OT research, and clearly also in biblical and other Semitic languages. Most of the graduate students wanting to do OT are therefore left without competent supervision, and prospective OT students are forced to take up other areas of studies. Those who still choose to specialize in the OT are being supervised by lecturers and professors with specialisation in African indigenous religion, church history, or systematic theology. This is, at least, the situation in the departments of religious studies in most Nigerian universities. And with regard to the theological seminaries, few of them offer graduate studies, not to talk about OT research.

A third problem is that although there is a large number of scholarly journals throughout Africa, the majority of these journals are dead before they see the light of the day, or they are not circulated beyond the country. And, finally, a fourth problem is that many prospective African student deliberately refuse to do OT research because of the

languages demanded. They rather prefer church history, systematic theology, or African indigenous religion.

Towards a solution

Despite the importance of biblical research, the problems pointed out above have been hindering the growth of OT research in Africa to the extent that up till now there is no centre of excellence in biblical studies in African universities and seminaries. The following suggestions would probably help to solve some of the problems.

First, there is a need for more cooperation with regard to the use of man power and research facilities among African theological seminaries and university departments of religious studies; also Euro-American institutions should participate in this cooperation. The cooperation should include research fellowships and exchange of postgraduate students as well as lecturers and professors. It should also involve special scholarships for particular programs in OT studies related to African culture.

Second, there is also a need for more cooperation with regard to publication of research books and articles. The majority of the institutions cannot finance the publication of their journals and books. There are many research projects going on, but the cost of publishing them is unreachable. Closely related to this suggestion, it should also be noted that there is a need on a more general basis for exchange and donation of recent and back copies of books and journals.⁴

I strongly believe that if these suggestions are implemented, they would help to improve the conditions of doing OT research in Africa.

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⁴ I would here like to acknowledge the donation of some substantial volumes of books to our Department of Religious Studies, Delta State University, Abraka, by the American Academy of Religion in 1995.

AFRICAN JOURNAL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

By Gabriel Oyedele Abe

African Journal of Biblical Studies (AJBS) is an international journal focusing on African biblical scholarship, published biannually (in April and October) by the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS). It has gained reputable recognition world-wide within its short period of existence since 1986.

AJBS has among its aims and objectives to provide a forum for scholarly discussion and exchange of information and ideas on current issues in biblical research and the study of related languages. However, the journal especially wishes to relate the interpretation of the Bible to the life situation in Africa and to African societal problems. Accordingly, it encourages biblical scholars in Africa to look afresh at the Bible with an African insight, and then relate their interpretation to the past, the prevailing, and to future situations of the church in Africa. *AJBS* also wants to provide its readers with up-to-date information on new developments in biblical research, in Africa as well as elsewhere.

Since its inception, the following volumes of *AJBS* have been published: 1/I-II (1986), 2/I-II (1987), 6/I-II (1991), 7/I-II (1992), and 8/I (1993). Volumes 3/I-II (1988), 4/I-II (1989), and 5/I-II (1990) have been pending at the Scripture Union Press in Ibadan for years, due to the inability of the press to cope with the increasing costs of printing materials over the agreed charges earlier made. NABIS is not financially strong enough to pay more to the Scripture Union Press, hence there is a standstill since 1990.

The Baptist Printing Press in Ibadan has been wonderful in coming to our rescue. It has printed our volumes 6/I-II (1991), 7/I-II (1992), and 8/I (1993) in trust. NABIS therefore owes the Baptist Printing Press more than 300,000 naira. Our volumes 8/II (1993) and a NABIS book, *Covenant in the Bible and the African Context*, (1991) are still pending at

the Baptist Printing Press, and they have stopped further work on the rest publications until our debts are paid up.

Volumes 9/I-II (1994), 10/I-II (1995), and a second NABIS book, *Biblical Principles as Moral Foundations for the Nigerian Society* (1996) are being printed at the University of Jos Press. Also this is being done in trust. NABIS has no financial viability to get these publications out of the press. Work has reached an advanced stage on the editing of volume 11/I-II (1996), and it will soon go to the press.

The Nigerian economic woes, combined with instability in our universities preventing students from purchasing *AJBS* and other NABIS publications, contribute largely to our financial incapacity. Hence, in our editorial column we continue to tender our apologies to our numerous subscribers and readers for coming out with our outstanding editions of *AJBS* so late from the press. However, in spite of the long delay due to our financial inability, *AJBS* will continue to be an effective forum for disseminating scholarly views in relating biblical studies to the context of Africa.

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We seize this opportunity to appeal to lovers of biblical studies and academic excellence, to philanthropists, finance institutions and the likes, to come to our rescue.

Rev Dr Gabriel Oyedele Abe is Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies, Ondo State University, Nigeria, besides serving as editor of *African Journal of Biblical Studies*.

CONFERENCES

- ♦ The sixteenth congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament will be held in Oslo, 2.-7. August 1998, under the presidency of Professor Magne Sæbø. For further information, please contact the secretary of the congress, Professor Hans M. Barstad, Department of Biblical Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, P.O. Box 1023, Blindern, N-0315 Oslo, Norway.
- ♦ The 1997 annual conference of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS) is postponed until early 1998; no exact date is still decided. For further information, please contact the secretary of NABIS, Mr J.D. Gwamna, Department of Religious Studies, University of Jos, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.
- ♦ The 1997 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) taking place in San Francisco now in November, was presented in the previous issue of this newsletter. That presentation focused on some of the papers that are to be read in the "Bible in Africa, Asia and Latin America Session" (cf. pp. 13-14). However, also another paper should be noted, Wyatt MacGaffey, "Prophecy in a spiral universe: Central African translations of the Bible" (The endowment for Biblical research lecture series). Prof MacGaffey will here focus on how the Bible translated into the KiKongo language of the Atlantic coast of Central Africa has been understood by local Christians in terms of the indigenous cosmology; further, the role of the Bible in the religious movement started in 1921 by the Kongo prophet Simon Kimbangu and in the Church founded by his sons in 1957; also, the part played by millennial expectations in the politics leading to the independence of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1960; and finally some observations on recent religious developments.

RESEARCH

- ♦ University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria: Malachy Ikechukwu Okwueze completed in 1995 his Ph.D. thesis entitled *Myth: The Old Testament experience* (Supervisor: Dr D.J.I. Ebo). This study examines mythical material in the Old Testament (in Genesis 1-11, the Psalms, and in some prophetic books) in the light of corresponding material in Babylonian and Graeco-Roman sources. With regard to the relationship between the two, it is pointed out that not all mythical material in the Old Testament should be ascribed to non-Israelite traditions. And with regard to the definition of "myth", an inclusive approach is advocated. Address: Dr Malachy Ikechukwu Okwueze, Department of Religion, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.
- ♦ School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway: Marta Høyland has started a Th.D. project entitled "*A people tall and smooth-skinned*": A study of the portrayal of Cush in the Book of *Isaiah* (Supervisor: Dr Knut Holter). The project has grown out of her study of the Nigerian exegete David Tuesday Adamo, and his focus on the OT Cush passages; cf. her "An African presence in the Old Testament? David Tuesday Adamo's interpretation of the Old Testament Cush passages", forthcoming in *Old Testament Essays*, 1998. Address: Marta Høyland, Misjonsvegen 34, N-4024 Stavanger, Norway; e-mail: mh@misjonshs.no

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As the very idea of this newsletter is to be a forum for exchange of ideas and information, the editor constantly needs response from the readers. Your ideas and meanings, your research and book projects, your meetings and conferences - all is of interest for other scholars working with the Old Testament within the context of Africa.

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