

Newsletter on

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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 brings notices on research projects and teaching programmes as well as books and conferences related to African Old Testament scholarship. In brief articles it also comments upon pedagogical, methodological and research political questions. The readers of the newsletter are encouraged to use it as a means of communicating.

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Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship

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What do we mean by 'African',

when we talk about African Old Testament scholarship? Is it just a geographical term, expressing no more than the country or continent in which the scholar is trained and works (cp. Dutch vs Belgian scholarship), or does it also reflect some of the thematic and methodological preferences that characterize the different scholarly (and geographical!) traditions (cp. German vs American scholarship)?

There is no simple answer to this question; many factors play their part. Some of the relevant factors are discussed in the present issue of *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship*, and it is to be hoped that these brief contributions can cause more discussion on what we actually mean by "African" in our focus on African Old Testament scholarship.

Knut Holter

Methodological challenges of Old Testament scholarship in the African context

Benjamin Abotchie Ntreh

It was an understatement when David T. Adamo recently stated that it is a Herculean task to discuss the challenges of OT scholarship in the entire continent of Africa.¹ In reality it is almost impossible, because there is virtually no communication between African scholars in the field. The problems are numerous, but time and space will allow me to tackle only the following: The lack of African scholars in OT studies, the lack of co-ordination among the few who are in the field, and their scholarly interests.

There is not a single country in Africa with as many as ten scholars in OT studies. If such a country exists, it is very endowed. Even Nigeria, with its large population, is not that endowed. The fact of the matter is that those very few scholars trained in OT studies are personnel of the churches. And what often happens is that the scholars leave the field of teaching and research for ecclesiastical appointments in their respective churches. They could of course still pursue research work, though working with church administration. However, in general they are not doing so. This may be due to the fact that in Africa research does not seem to get the proper value that it deserves. As a result, these OT scholars are not motivated to pursue their research in the fertile but neglected field of Old Testament studies. Other scholars, because of financial constraints, leave the continent for greener pastures in foreign countries. Due to these and other problems,² there are few African Old Testament scholars.

The few scholars in the field who remain in Africa live and do their research in isolation from each other. Until very recently, I was not aware of the existence of the *African Journal of Biblical Studies* that is published in a neighbouring country, Nigeria. I got to know it only because the Society of Biblical Literature, USA, of which I am a member, sent me a newsletter that mentioned the journal. There is virtually no communication between African scholars of the OT to disseminate

¹ Cf. D.T. Adamo, "Doing Old Testament research in Africa", *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* 3 (1997) 8.

² Other explanations for the non-existence of African researchers in the field have already been enumerated by Adamo; cf. *ibid.*, 8-11.

information about their research. And the cost of production of journals on the continent is actually so high that it is cheaper to subscribe to a foreign journal than to one locally. All this makes it almost impossible to do meaningful scholarship in any field, in isolation or together with only a handful of colleagues. Accordingly, there is an urgent need for conscious efforts to make interaction between the few Africans in the field of OT scholarship possible. In this connection, the launching of a *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* is a great starter. However, we need to do more.

The interaction can take place on at least two levels. First, there is a need for African OT scholars to arrange conferences and seminars with participation from the entire continent. This would obviously involve sponsorship; money would have to be raised from both within and outside the continent to sponsor the conference- and seminar-participants. Secondly, the interaction could also take place through the interchange of our research findings. It seems that it is necessary that complimentary copies of journals and other published works in the field are given free to relevant libraries. By this process of interaction we shall hopefully be able to sharpen our questions and then gradually evolve a better methodology.

Another point that is relevant to the discussion here is the reluctance of many African OT scholars to depart from the Euro-American approaches and methodological assumptions in which they were trained. There are two directions here. Some scholars are certainly concerned with the questions raised by the African context. Unfortunately, however, they lack the proper tools and in the end they interpret it all through the eyes of their Euro-American trainers. Other scholars actually do not care about African concerns at all in their study of the OT. They have accepted the approaches and methodologies of their trainers as universal and cannot be bothered with African concerns in their interpretation of the OT.

In fact, for African scholars to evolve our own methodology in the study of the OT, we have to define the goals and concerns of what should be addressed. Till now, so has unfortunately not been the case.³ Personally, I am persuaded by the view that it is the reader that gives

³ So was also the situation thirty years ago; cf. K.A. Dickson, "Continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament and African life and thought", K. Appiah-Kubi & S. Torres (eds.), *African theology en route*, New York (1979) 95-108, 106.

meaning and relevance to the text.⁴ From this perspective the text cannot be relevant for the African reader if he or she merely accepts the interpretation of people whose experiences differ from those of the African reader. Thus, for the OT to be meaningful in Africa, it has to be given an interpretation that takes African concerns into consideration. However, this view must be shared by other African researchers of the OT before we can come to a consensus.

African OT scholarship is a new phenomenon. And the problems that confront a scholarship in this context seem insurmountable. However, if we move out from our isolation, interact with one another and set common goals and agendas, also OT scholars outside our continent will have to reckon with our scholarship. This will give us confidence to produce more, and we will eventually gain international recognition.

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⁴ Cf. E. Freund, *The return of the reader: Reader response criticism*. London & New York 1987; and T.J. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible*. New York (1985) 73-91.

Intertestamental literature in Africa

Kris J. N. Owan

The so-called intertestamental epoch encompasses the period between 500 B.C. and A.D. 200, in the broad sense, and that between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100 in the strict sense. While ordinary readers of the Bible get the impression that not much happened in this period, recent biblical and historical research as well as archaeological discoveries reveal that a lot of literary, cultural, political and religious developments took place.

Christian and Jewish scholars have analysed the political, economic, intellectual and above all religious aspects of the encounter between Jews and Greeks of this period. A brand new culture christened "Hellenistic" grew out of the symbiosis between the Jewish and Greek cultures, and this can be quite instructive for the African Christian, as there is so much in common between the Jews of the OT and Africans on the one hand, and between Jewish-Hellenists and Africans on the other hand. The rich literature of the period and the ways in which people yearned for a better grasp of the will and the word of God to direct their daily lives, can be of immense value to the cause of the Bible in Africa in the following ways among others:

(1) The intertestamental literature (in the broad sense) can be of great value to the African search for a better understanding of the Christian doctrine of the transcendence and immanence of God. 1 Macc, for example, shows the reverence for the transcendent God by completely omitting God's name Adonaj Elohim from the book altogether, whereas Sapiential books such as Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, and Prov 1-9 (written in the era under study) depict the same transcendent God in forms of personified wisdom. There is good basis here for African Christian ecumenism on the one hand and the dialogue between Christians, Muslims and African traditional religionists on the other, on our belief in the transcendent and immanent God.

(2) More than the canonical books, intertestamental books like 2 Macc, Tobit and 2 Esdras deal with angels and demons and other spiritual realities that have a very special impact on the lives also of Africans. Since the NT shows special concern for fighting the devil, demons and evil spirits, these books provide effective ways of teaching Africans that good must conquer evil in the long run, no matter how long it takes.

(3) The rich literary traditions of the era in question give pride of place to oral forms and structures in the nature of midrashic and targumic literature. These patterns of biblical communication and transmission can be of immense use in African illiterate communities especially (in addition to other uses in the Academia).

(4) The canonical Bible and the NT in particular make constant and at time incomprehensible references to Jewish sects and parties like the Pharisees, Sadducees and Zealots. It is however with information from the literature of the intertestamental period that one comes to know more about these religio-political parties and sects, their origins, aims and objectives. A knowledge of the heat generated by the mutually antagonistic stance of the parties with their differing attitudes towards foreign domination of the Jews gives a clearer context to the question posed to Jesus: Is it lawful for us to give tribute to the Caesar or not? This also provides the background for a better understanding of the circumstances that led to the crucifixion of Jesus.

(5) The special age of the growth and development of wisdom literature finds particular expression in the intertestamental epoch; cf. books such as Prov 1-9 (of the personification of Wisdom), Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, Baruch, additions to Daniel and the Books of Enoch. In style and content the wisdom traits and tenets of the literature of the period should find favour in the mind of the African, especially with their penchant for the wisdom of proverbs and wise sayings, their love for myths, legends, fables, stories, riddles and puzzles of all kinds.

(6) In this connection the translation methodologies reflected in the Septuagint can be used by Africans in their search for better relevance of the Bible in Africa. The Septuagint is noted for interpreting while translating and translating while interpreting, and it depends heavily on the midrashic and targumic methods of interpreting and translating the Bible. Its concepts of inculturation and contextualization of the biblical message the "interpretatio Graeca", can serve as a model for our "interpretatio Africana".

(7) The intertestamental origins of important Christian doctrines like messianism, apocalypticism, martyrdom and eschatology, climaxing in the doctrine of resurrection and after-life, remain in many cases rather inexplicable and unintelligible without the knowledge provided by many books of the period. 2 Macc, 2 Esdras, Enoch, Later sections of Daniel, and the so-called Apocalypse of Isaiah (Isa 24-27) - all these of the late Greek period, add decisive information to our knowledge of these

important doctrines. Many of these doctrines in their original sources are couched in parlance quite dear to African, with the latter's love for the magical, the esoteric, the fantabulous and the fantastic.

(8) The importance of the apocalyptic 2 Esdras for understanding the canonical apocalypics of Zechariah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and later in the NT book of Apocalypse, cannot be overemphasised. The revolt of the Maccabees is also best understood in the context of the apocalyptic. So would the Book of Daniel be closed for the clarifying historical references in the Book of Maccabees. It is the apocalyptic literature above all that teaches in very dramatic form that God must in the end conquer the Devil, good must overcome evil, and that God must finally save us in and through Christ, the Lamb of God and Lion of Judah.

(9) In a special way, the intertestamental literature and the milieu that produced it teach us God's unfailing love and concern for his creation, especially for those who call on him in times of distress. The literature above all convinces those who have faith that at the fullness of time, God in Christ finally came that we may have life, life in its plenitude. Africans will do well to imbibe this where he/she is and as he/she is. The much more knowledgeable in biblical matters (humanly speaking) can in the African spirit of being one another's keeper bring their knowledge to bear on other "less-privileged" Africans, to follow Christ's own will for them, but on Christ's own terms and his only.

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A brief report of the 16th IOSOT Congress, Oslo, 2-7 August 1998

Aloo Osotsi Mojola

For Old Testament scholars or students of the Hebrew Bible - Oslo, Norway was the place to be in August 1998. Why? The sixteenth congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT) took place in this beautiful Norwegian seaside city. From the 2nd to the 7th August nearly 500 OT scholars from around the world met daily on the grounds of the old University of Oslo to exchange their latest theories and speculations on the Hebrew Bible, to make new contacts, renew friendships, make known their latest publications, research and try out their balloons. And of course, for some of the delegates, take a few days of deserved rest and leisure exploring the fjords and forests of Norway and its Nordic neighbours.

Tagged onto the IOSOT congress were the smaller satellite meetings of the International Organization for Targum Study (IOTS), the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies (IOSCS), the International Organization for Qumran Studies (IOQS) as well as the International Organization for Masoretic Study (IOMS). In addition to the professionals at these meetings, were also some spouses and some representatives of the news media, academic publishers and booksellers.

The sunless and wet Norwegian summer of August 1998 perfectly captured the mood of these meetings. These were not typical summer days. Neither was the IOSOT typical of an international gathering in this era of globalization. True, many countries were represented, but the delegates were mainly representative of the tribes of the Western world. Few from Asia, Africa or South America could be seen at these meetings. Considering that the Christian demographic centre of gravity is shifting to the countries of the south, it was interesting to note that their representatives had a very low profile, if any. It is not surprising therefore that their viewpoints were generally not reflected or featured in the proceedings. Of course this was not by design or intended by the organizers. It simply reflects the dynamics of IOSOT and similar professional bodies in the present new world order.

The proceedings at IOSOT congresses are supposed to be in three languages, namely English, French and German. At this 16th Congress,

French and German were virtually shut out. English had a heyday. French and German speakers had to shift their gears and try their best shot at English. No wonder the French and German sessions were generally poorly attended. The current international status and widespread use of English would require that at future congresses, anyone with any desire or hopes of being in the spotlight or at centre stage operate through the medium of this language of the new global village.

What actually transpired at the 16th IOSOT congress? With nearly 500 participants and half as many academic papers presented and circulated, it is hardly possible to find a unifying theme. The opening presidential address by Professor Magne Sæbø was itself a reflection of this lack of a unifying thread or general vision of the current state of the art and of where the field of OT studies is headed. As the leader of the local Congress committee in Oslo, Professor Sæbø offered wonderful Norwegian hospitality and welcome to the delegates. His opening address was however somewhat inward looking. Although titled "Crossing Borders" it focussed exclusively on the work of four great Norwegian OT scholars - J.A. Knudtzon, S. Mowinckel, I.P. Seierstad and A.S. Kapelrud. This salute to Norwegian OT scholarship and its four departed heroes is fine and has its place. But as a presidential address to an international audience it was perhaps symptomatic of some of the traditionalism in the field!

Prof. Kirsten Nielsen of the University of Aarhus, Denmark, in the opening plenary session addressed the controversial question of "Intertextuality and the Bible" and was followed by a panel discussion on "Intertextuality and the pluralism of methods". The question of intertextuality as an approach and as a method is no doubt now in vogue. However, it raises thorny hermeneutical as well as epistemological questions, such as the interaction between the contexts, intertexts, texts, intentions and meanings of the original or implied author or authors, and those of the reader or current reading communities. How does this interaction affect exegesis and interpretation? Prof. Nielsen seemed to pose a Pandora's box in her claim that future texts will have consequences for textual interpretation. In which case each and every scholar's interpretation should be regarded as an inspiration to a dialogue.

Discussions touching on the historicity of the what is recorded in the Old Testament loomed large. Bob Becking's plenary address, "A plea for a historical critical study of the Old Testament", was a nuanced and sophisticated argument calling for the revival and renewal of the

historical critical approaches in OT studies. He is aware that "texts do not equal the past" and that "the interpretation of the past is eventually based on the belief-system of the author(s) of a text". Consequently, "it is impossible to reconstruct history in an objective way". Clearly, Prof. Becking's plea is for something not quite like the traditional historical critical approaches! He however places himself in the framework of what he terms post-post-modern historical criticism.

Avi Hurvitz's concern is no less for the historicity of the biblical materials. In his plenary paper "Can biblical texts be dated linguistically?", he attempts to make a case based on what he sees as "the sovereign and autonomously operated linguistic discipline of Biblical Hebrew" - for the primacy of linguistic evidence over against historical and theological arguments. Prof. Hurvitz is convinced that in historical linguistics as applied to the historical development of the Hebrew tongue we have an objective handle for resolving certain historical conundrums arising from the study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. As would be expected, the many dissenting voices were not to be silenced by Prof. Hurvitz's assertive arguments.

Peter Machinist's plenary lecture on the "The crisis of history in the study of the Hebrew Bible", which was followed by a panel discussion on the "Hebrew Bible and history", brought to a head many of the undercurrents, and captured somewhat the mood at the 16th IOSOT Congress in Oslo. In the line of fire appeared to be the so-called Copenhagen School represented by such scholars as Thomas Thomson and the Sheffield Academic Press camp represented by such scholars as Philip Davies and Keith W. Whitlam. Needless to say, this debate at Oslo did not resolve the crisis.

Perhaps underlying the crisis of history in the study of the OT is a larger crisis, namely the crisis of post-modernism and deconstructionism which clearly has not left any branch of this ancient discipline or the other disciplines in the human and social sciences unaffected by its impact and influence. All the old presuppositions have been called into question, all certainties gone, diversity, relativism and pluralism abound. This is not necessarily a bad thing. The main plenary lectures or papers such as those mentioned above reflected this crisis, but the over a hundred or so short papers read at this congress no less reflected this underlying crisis at the heart of our modern global and secularized culture.

For text-critical scholars and readers of the Hebrew Bible in general, the plenary report and discussion on the preparation of two new

forthcoming critical editions of the Hebrew Bible was of special interest. There is the new edition, Biblia Hebraica Quinta (BHQ) being sponsored by the United Bible Societies of which the small book of Ruth was circulated as a product and indication of this effort. There is also the Hebrew University Bible (HUB) being sponsored mainly by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem of which the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah have already been issued in 1995 and 1997 respectively. While this session may have appeared more generally objective and less affected by the discussion on historicity, the underlying elusive search for the so-called Ur-text of the present Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible remained a reminder that the question was not too far off.

Naturally, this gathering of mainly academic state paid biblical scholars and professionals of the Western world hardly paid much attention to the question of the value of their field, or its relevance in the modern world or to the ordinary taxpayer who indirectly makes possible such congresses as IOSOT. Given the current crisis in the academic study of the field, is the academic and so-called scientific humanistic field of OT studies still needed? Or does it belong to the literature department? Is it mainly a subject of devotional study in the context of a seminary, or in a denominational institution or even in an ideologically defined religious or semi-religious community? If, as Thomas Thomson claims, "an ancient text does not give us evidence for what it asserts, only of what it implies of that past", then such texts have nothing to do with history as objective information about the past, but rather have everything to do with the ideology, religious doctrines, moral and value claims of the author(s) of such texts together with other communal functions or uses that such texts may be put to.

A number of questions were raised but left unaddressed at the 16th IOSOT Congress in Oslo. Hopefully future congresses will take them up!

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What 'African' means for South African Old Testament scholarship

Rudolph de W. Oosthuizen

To you the Creator, to you the powerful I offer this new plant.
New fruit of the old tree. You are the master, we are the children.
To you Creator, to you the powerful.¹

For many years the two worlds of South Africa, i.e. the "first world" and the "third world", were separated, and the reality of *apartheid* has shaped and nurtured present South Africa (Martey 1993:36). In fact, it influenced every aspect of life of the people of South Africa, and will continue to do so for many years to come! In terms of religion, it influenced the interaction and dialogue between the various religious denominations evidenced by the various - often conflicting - interpretations of the Biblical text. The interaction between African culture and Christian faith in South Africa can be regarded as a complicated interchange between aspects of African culture and religious ideas, belief and rituals with that of Christianity, and this interchange is a subject of continuing research. In consequence one can distinguish different approaches in the struggle to develop a Christianity with a distinctively "African" identity. The transition to a democratically elected majority rule in South Africa (ushered in by the elections on 27/28 April 1994) saw not only the return of South Africa to the international arena, but also confirmed that South Africa is not to be separated from the rest of the continent. With the dawning of a new era, South African society has to re-position itself with regard to the socio-political, economic and ideological context wherein it finds itself, i.e. Africa.

It is already well attested that Old Testament Scholarship in South Africa, born in the cradle of European and American scholarship (Deist 1994:21; Hovland 1993:99), to a certain extent ignored the importance of doing theology from within the African context. More than ever before, Old Testament scholarship now needs a contextual approach that takes cognisance of the cultures of the different peoples in South Africa. Reading the Bible from an African perspective is indeed the appropriate

¹ This prayer ("Consecration of the New Born Child") of the Gabon Pygmies accompanies the offering of a newly born child to God, as a kind of first-fruit offering (Shorter 1975:33).

starting point of an African Christian Theology. The basic source of African theology is the Bible, often referred to as the "foundational document" of Christianity, but as long as Christianity (and by implication also its interpretation of the Bible) fails to become one with Africa's cultural heritage, it will continue to be experienced as a foreign intrusion (Crafford 1996:24). In establishing its own identity, African Christian theology therefore needs to develop a way of reading the Bible that reflects the viewpoint and life concerns² of African Christians (Hindson 1984:33):

The social, economic, political and other contexts of texts as well as of interpreters have an important bearing upon the "meaning" of such texts. Any interpreter should be conscious of this fact and inculcate it into his pronouncements on the "meaning" of a text.

Various attempts at contextualization can be found in Africa (Hovland 1993:91; Kurewa 1975:36). At least two³ hermeneutical procedures can be identified: "Africanization"⁴ and "liberation" (Martey 1993:37). South African Black theology, with a stronger emphasis on politics (Khabela 1997:108) belongs to the latter. The cultural theological approach (Africanization) stresses the fact that an African Christian theology must be firmly rooted in the Christian tradition, specifically in the Bible, but it should also regard African traditional religious culture as an indispensable source of African Christian theology (Pauw 1994:17). An African Christian theology (Africanization), in its positive assessment of its own African culture (Hovland 1993:91), seeks to reflect upon and express the Christian faith in African thought-forms and idioms as it is experienced in African communities,⁵ and always in dialogue with the rest of Christianity (Kurewa 1975:36).

² The interpretation of the Bible in South Africa cannot be seen in isolation from the socio-economic developments and transformation.

³ Pauw (1994:17) identifies three distinct approaches to theology in Africa, i.e. cultural theological, black theology, but then also an approach with a more philosophical emphasis which tries to bring into interaction Christian theology and African traditional religion.

⁴ Attempts at "Africanization" can be traced back to the publication of *Des pretres noirs s'interrogent* in 1956 (Martey 1993:64). The interest in the subject of Christianity and African culture is evidenced by the amount of literature on it.

⁵ The need to construct an interface between enculturation hermeneutics and liberation hermeneutics is also argued for (Martey 1993:55; West 1997:335).

On defining the "African reality"

A fundamental issue in need of clarification is what constitutes African culture. It is too vague, of course, to denote everything from the continent merely as "African". It is a rather complex task to define or describe the pluralistic character of the African reality (Martey 1993:4), and in describing some aspects of the African reality I will limit myself to the more immediate context, i.e. South Africa.

The realities in South Africa today, with its controversial history of oppression, complex population composition, economic development etc., sets it apart from the rest of the continent. Whereas the so called "first" and "third" worlds were separated under Apartheid, political and economic reforms have progressively removed impediments to the mingling or integration of these two worlds. The racial mixture, however, continues to exert a major influence on all aspects of life - business, social and political.⁶ It comes as no surprise that "African" is mostly defined in terms of race, i.e. black (Standard Bank 1995:7):

To some, "Black" means all who are not white. More commonly it is used to mean Africans only, i.e. people of African origin and thus not Coloureds or Indians.

It follows that race consciousness form an important point of departure for specifically "black theology" in South Africa (Abrahams 1994:247; Khabela 1997:96). But racism and race-consciousness are basically social phenomena (Khabela 1997:95; Kottak 1991:68). In South Africa, this racial categorisation, reflecting social and cultural differences, overlaps in large part with various ethnic groups, i.e. groups that are socially differentiated, and that have developed their own subculture, language, religion, etc.

Generally speaking, the "first world" component refers to the European (white?) part of the population whereas the "third world" component refers to the non-European (black?) component, inclusive of its respective religious heritages. For the one component it comprises Christianity in its "Western dress", whilst for the other it comprises Christianity in its "African dress". This "African dress" is also, apart

⁶ According to the population estimates of the Development Bank of South Africa (1996), of the population of approximately 43.8m, 77% were African, 12% white, 9% coloured and 2% Asian (Sidiropoulos 1997:7).

from its reference to race, defined with specific reference to African traditional religion.⁷ There is, however, a certain need to transcend the legacies of colonialism or apartheid (West 1997:324):

If the Bible and Biblical scholarship have been instruments of colonising cultures in the past, there is no reason why, in the present, they cannot serve as instruments of liberation.

In recognition of our pluralistic society, which, as far as religion is concerned, forms part of the Christian kaleidoscope in Africa, there is a need of drawing these different traditions closer together (Pauw 1994:19); a need for establishing common goals and unifying symbols (Gous 1993:176). Without ignoring the realities of South Africa, theology can play an important role in the process of reconciliation in South Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa seems to be the continent with the fastest growing Christian population in the world (Pauw 1994:14). And now, even more, South Africans, black and white, should seek together to lay the foundations for reconciliation and justice. As early as 1961 (I was born in 1962!) the necessity of an inclusive approach⁸ towards doing theology in South Africa was stated at the Cottesloe Consultation (De Gruchy, Villa-Vicencio 1983:149):

We recognize that all racial groups who permanently inhabit our country are a part of our total population, and we regard them as indigenous. Members of these groups have an equal right to make their contribution towards the enrichment of the life of the country.

Whilst modern African Christianity is largely the child of evangelisation (and sometimes colonisation) from Europe or America (Mbiti 1986:7), it urgently needs to lay the foundation for tomorrow's Christian theology in Africa (Adamo 1997:9). A small step towards a new harmony, forged between (traditional) Africa and modernity (Martey 1993:142), can be taken on the level of the interpretation of the Old Testament (Abrahams

⁷ Although more than 70% of the South African population think of themselves as Christians, and merely 20% as belonging to Traditional religions (Hildebrandt 1987:268), statistics cannot reveal the strength of African traditional religion (Mbiti 1986:4).

⁸ Historical developments in South Africa has clearly illustrated that the usurpation of the Bible (and by implication the Old Testament) by various groups has brought us nowhere (Botha 1992:51-52).

1997:37), even more so where the majority of the population regards itself as Christian (Kato 1975:175):

It is because of this irreducible, immutable message, that Christianity has produced the third race comprising men and women from all races.

After all, the Bible belongs to the African, as well as the Western world. But, Christianity in (South) Africa, in order to take up its legitimate place in the history of the church, need to establish its own identity with due recognition of its uniqueness, specifically in terms of its own cultural heritage (Martey 1993:55, own emphasis):

"Africanization" [...] can be described as a hermeneutic procedure that seek both *understanding* of the African cultural-political reality and *interpretation* of this reality in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so as to bring about *transformation* of the oppressive status quo.

Doing Theology: What "Africa" can mean for Old Testament scholarship

African religion, in many ways, concerns a world of experience that approaches the Old Testament world of experience much more closely than does European or American experience (Adamo 1997:8; Oosthuizen 1997:49). The similarities and compatibility of the Old Testament with that African traditional religion has often been the subject of research, i.e. sacrifice (Thompson 1974:20); ancestor veneration (Fashole-Luke (1974:209), time (Oosthuizen 1993). There is also, at least at face value, similarities in their respective understanding of sin, creation, family, community, i.e. a common outlook on life and human existence (Burden 1983:49).

My own interest as an Old Testament scholar is focussed more on the possibilities "locked away" in reading the Old Testament *in* South Africa and *for* South Africa - by allowing aspects which are crucial for an African world-view to interact in the process of interpretation.⁹ In

⁹ In establishing a link between Africa and the Old Testament, it is not good enough to merely point to a geographical connection between the Old Testament (Palestine) and Africa (Egypt). Africa north of the Sahara (Egypt) and Southern Africa (Sub-Sahara) are to a certain extent worlds apart. My concern is not the geographical link as such rather the similarities in their (Sub-Saharan Africa and the Old Testament) respective experiences of reality and common outlook on life and human existence.

consequence it might not only serve the communication of the gospel, but also facilitate a dialogue between the text and the contemporary reader.

One of the issues which needs to be addressed concerns the role/interpretation of the Bible because it seems as if it is exactly at this level where African scholarship failed to establish or develop a thorough exegetical procedure or method (Gitau & al. 1997:6). This situation can partly be ascribed to the lack of interest of studying the "foundational documents" of Christianity in its original language (Fashole-Luke 1975:80). Despite the before mentioned correspondences between the Old Testament and Africa, it is only recently that South African Old Testament scholarship is paying more attention to their relation, seeking to integrate the Christian faith with African cultural life and thought forms. In so doing, South African scholarship needs to move beyond comparative studies, despite its pedagogical value (Dickson 1974:156). Similarities in world-view, concepts and rituals may function as a hermeneutical key to open up the text for an African audience, and result in a new perspective on the biblical text; in other words, an interpretation that is more appropriate to the African context. However, African theology, in its examination of the Biblical text, is in need of an exegetical starting point; it also needs to define theoretically or methodologically the interplay between the African context and the Bible. Old Testament scholarship in South Africa will have to move on and get clarification on the direction it wants to go concerning e.g. models of interaction/contextualization, hermeneutical foundations, exegetical tools, etc. In so doing we can arrive at different interpretations where the Bible is also allowed to inform (transform) a particular African milieu (Wambutda 1980:29).

Conclusion

The dawning of a new era in South Africa renders possible a new understanding of the Bible (Old Testament) by allowing the biblical and African views of reality to interact in the process of interpretation. In so doing it might also serve as a corrective to the individualist, secularist and technological character of Western society (Kato 1975:175):

The error begins with some Western missionaries who identified the kingdom of God with Western civilisation.

When the context of the interpreter is taken into account, it can function in a creative way and, in so doing, contribute towards the establishing of a distinctive South African Christianity, and also contribute towards reconciliation in South Africa. Although Africa is looked upon as the new centre of gravity of the people of God (Schumacher 1974:205), not enough has been done concerning the indigenisation of the Christian faith, also in terms of the interpretation of the Old Testament. This task, however, does not belong to *black* theologians only (contra Crafford 1996:24). It is the task of all South Africans, black and white, to embark on this journey and look after this newly born child,¹⁰ i.e. an African Christian theology, which can help us to better understand Christianity in all its dimensions.¹¹ Maybe then the child - in the future- will also look after us.¹²

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¹⁰ Adamo (1997:8) indicates that Old Testament research in Africa is in general still in its infancy, dating back to the 1960's, hence the reference and inclusion of the prayer, "Consecration of the New Born Child", of the Gabon Pygmies.

¹¹ It is ironic that as a child, Christ was brought to "Africa" for shelter (Mt 2).

¹² I can only endorse what Adamo (1997:9) is saying, i.e. "the future of Christian Theology in Africa depends on Biblical research in Africa today".

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Some recent studies on postcolonialism and biblical scholarship

Knut Holter

Contemporary biblical scholarship is increasingly acknowledging that there is no "innocent" interpretation of the Bible; all interpretation reflects some of the ideological, historical and material context of the interpreter. Walter Brueggemann, to mention one influential example, emphasizes this in his recent and already celebrated *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997):¹

We now recognize that there is no interest-free interpretation, no interpretation that is not in the service of some interest and in some sense advocacy. (p. 63)

If there is no interest-free interpretation of the Bible, it is of course important to expose those (often hidden) interests that are reflected in both previous and contemporary biblical scholarship. One of the central terms in this contemporary exposing enterprise is "postcolonialism", and some recent contributions in this field should briefly be presented in the following.

The most recent contribution is the first volume in a new series from Sheffield Academic Press - The Bible and Postcolonialism; this first volume is entitled *The postcolonial Bible*, and it is edited by R.S. Sugirtharajah.² In dialogue with recent literary and cultural criticism, the editor describes postcolonialism as:

[...] a way of critiquing the totalizing forms of Eurocentric thinking and of reshaping dominant meanings. It is a mental attitude more than a method [...]. It is a critical enterprise aimed at unmasking the link between idea and power, which lies behind Western theories and learning. It is a discursive resistance to imperialism, imperial ideologies, imperial attitudes and their continued incarnations in such wide-ranging fields as politics, economics, history and theological and biblical studies. (p. 93)

¹ W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, dispute, advocacy*. Minneapolis 1997.

² R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The postcolonial Bible*. Sheffield 1998 (The Bible and Postcolonialism; 1).

Throughout the ten essays of the volume, different aspects of what this "mental attitude" may mean for biblical studies are discussed; let me briefly present three of them. One example is Roland Boer (pp. 24-48, who investigates biblical studies in Australia, characterizing it in terms of the clichés of colonial existence, such as cultural hierarchy ('Aboriginal culture is devalued by the colonial settlers, whose culture is itself understood to be inferior to the colonial centre', p. 31) and cultural cringe ('[...] the prestige of publication at a press in Europe or the USA far outweighs that of an Australian press', p. 32). Another example (the only African one) is Musa Dube from Botswana (pp. 118-135), who claims that the Johannine exalting of Jesus to divine status above all other religious figures is not very different from traditional colonial ideology; as an alternative, academic readers are called upon to decolonize the ideology of John's text and to work on readings of liberating interdependence between Christians and Jews, One-Third World and Two-third World, Western and Non-Western, etc. A third example is Randall Bailey (pp. 66-90), who investigates the Afrocentric interpretation of the Bible in the African American community, noting four different tasks that have been focused by African American scholars; that is the African presence in the biblical texts, the delineation of racism and white supremacy in the traditions of interpretations, the review of biblical interpretation in the history of the black community, and the attempts to discover the story of this community, and to use this story as a strategy for reading.

Another contribution in the same direction (and with some of the same authors) is a 1996 issue of the journal *Semeia* on *Postcolonialism and scriptural reading*, edited by Laura E. Donaldson.³ The scope of this *Semeia* issue is interdisciplinary and multifaceted; what links its eight essays and five responses together, according to the editor, is a critical focus on imperialism, neo-colonialism and Eurocentrism, and the issue aims to

[...] document what postcolonial criticism might mean for biblical studies, not only as a practice for interpretation but also as a challenge to the disciplinary history of the religious academy. (p. 1)

³ L.E. Donaldson (ed.), *Postcolonialism and scriptural reading*. Atlanta 1996 [= *Semeia* 75].

One illustrative example of this is Jon L. Bergquist's discussion (pp. 15-35) of imperial motives for canonization, where he uses postcolonial theory to understand the process of canonical formation. Bergquist points out that empires use texts to expound and expand their imperializing ideologies, and he considers the early stages of OT canonization from the perspective of imperial production of ideology during the reign of the Persian empire over colonial Yehud. Another example in the *Semeia* issue is Kimberly Rae Connor's discussion (pp. 107-128) of African American spirituals. In the spirituals, it is argued,

[...] enslaved people critically analyzed their colonial conditions, fashioned a creative theological response, indicted their oppressors without overtly denigrating them, re-asserted the influence of an African sensibility, and empowered themselves by exercising a form of resistance that would endure longer than the conditions to which they were subject. (p. 107)

A third, and at least related, contribution is a monograph by Michael Prior, *The Bible and colonialism: A moral critique* (1997).⁴ Although not discussing the relationship between biblical scholarship and postcolonial theory *per se* - as the focus here is more directly on the land-issue of traditional colonialism - the ethical awareness and critical approach is still more or less the same as in the two contributions presented above. In his book, Prior points out that the OT claim of a divine promise of land is integrally linked with a divine mandate to exterminate the indigenous people. A contemporary interpretation of the OT land narratives must therefore, according to Prior, not only acknowledge that these narratives have been used by most Western colonizing enterprises (e.g. Latin America, South Africa, Palestine), resulting in the suffering of millions of people, but it must also acknowledge that what the narratives themselves actually call for, at least according to modern standards, are war-crimes and crimes against humanity. Both points, Prior argues, challenge contemporary biblical scholarship:

Biblical scholarship must set its own house in order by articulating ethical criteria by which dispositions unworthy of a civilized person may not be accorded a privileged place as part of a sacred text. When the sacred pages are manipulated by forces of oppression, biblical scholars cannot continue to seek

⁴ M. Prior, *The Bible and colonialism: A moral critique*. Sheffield 1997 (The Biblical Seminar; 48).

refuge by expending virtually all their intellectual energies on an unrecoverable past, thereby releasing themselves from the obligation of engaging in contemporary discourse. Nor are they justified in maintaining an academic detachment from significant engagement in real, contemporary issues. (pp. 295-296).

Reading through these three books on biblical scholarship vs postcolonialism (and colonialism), one notices that African OT scholarship is surprisingly absent. Nevertheless, they obviously raise a number of questions that are relevant also from the perspective of this newsletter.

First, I believe it is high time to place the cultural and economic Eurocentrism (Europe and the USA) of "international" biblical scholarship on the agenda. Western members of the guild of biblical scholars must eventually recognize non-Western scholarship as more than exotic "voices from the margin". This does not mean that for example African biblical interpretation should cut off its connections with traditional Western scholarship. Interaction is by all means necessary. Still, what it does mean is that Western scholarship must acknowledge that African interpretation simply has to reflect the questions, experiences and philosophy of Africa, in the same way as contemporary and previous Western interpretation reflects the Western context.⁵

Secondly, however, I would like to emphasize that postcolonial biblical interpretation hardly is any *shibboleth* by which African and other examples of marginalized scholarship suddenly can be allowed into the promised land of scholarly recognition. The task of unmasking the link between (not least Western) scholarly and economic power is certainly important,⁶ but it is nevertheless only one amongst many aspects challenging contemporary biblical scholarship in the West and in Africa.

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⁵ Cf. J. Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African eyes: Inculturation and hermeneutics", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995) 3-14, and F. Deist, "Biblical interpretation in post-colonial Africa", *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 72 (1996) 110-118.

⁶ Cf. K. Holter, "'It's not only a question of money! African Old Testament scholarship between the myths and meanings of the South and the money and methods of the North", *Old Testament Essays* 11 (1998) 240-254.

Conferences

- ♦ The 1999 annual conference of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS) is tentatively scheduled to be hold in June or July at Immanuel College of Theology, Ibadan. The theme of the conference will be "Reading the Bible in Nigerian perspectives". For further information, please contact the secretary of NABIS, Dr J.D. Gwamna, Department of Religious Studies, University of Jos, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.
- ♦ Related to the "African Americans and the Bible Project", a multidiciplinary, arts-expressive and international conference on "African Americans and the Bible: Social-cultural formation and sacred texts" - will be held at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, 8-11 April 1999; cf. the website information at www.uts.columbia.edu/projects/AFAMBIBL. For further information, please contact Prof Vincent Wimbush, Union Theological Seminary, 3041 Broadway, New York, NY 10027, USA; e-mail: vwimbush@uts.columbia.edu.

Research

- ♦ University of Ibadan, Nigeria: Rev Caleb Ogunkunle is working with a PhD thesis entitled *Biblical imprecatory psalms: Their forms and uses in ancient Israel and some selected churches in Nigeria* (Supervisor: Dr J.O. Akao). Address: Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.
- ♦ University of Ibadan, Nigeria: Rev Odelami is working with a PhD thesis entitled *Prophetism: An intermediation concept in Hebrew and Yoruba societies* (Supervisor: Dr. J.O. Akao). Address: Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

- ♦ University of Jos, Nigeria: Dr John Ademola Aworinde completed in 1997 his PhD thesis entitled *A comparative analysis of destiny in the Old Testament and in Yoruba philosophy of life* (Supervisor: Prof Daniel N. Wambutda). Address: Department of Religious Studies, University of Jos, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.
- ♦ Ondo State University, Nigeria: Dr Gabriel O. Abe, Associate Professor of Old Testament, is currently working with a research project entitled *Sacrificial system in Yahwism and in Yoruba traditional religion*. The project first examines sacrifice as an Ancient Near Eastern phenomenon, with particular reference to the priestly office and the altar in the sacrificial system of Yahwism; in this connection also the place of atonement and the place of sacrifice in post-exilic Judaism is studied. Secondly, the project examines the sacrificial system in Yoruba traditional religion. The background of the phenomenon is unveiled, and the role of the traditional priests, objectives, victims of sacrifice, rites, divinities, offerings and altar are examined. Thirdly, the project highlights the obvious and obscure similarities and dissimilarities of sacrifice in the two religious systems. Address: P.O. Box 119, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.
- ♦ University of Malawi, Zomba, Malawi: Dr Felix L. Chingota plans to start a research project on *Land Issues in Malawi from a biblical perspective*; the project will follow the contextual approach in G. West, *Contextual Bible Study*. Pietermaritzburg 1993. Address: Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Malawi, Chancellor College, P.O. Box 280, Zomba, Malawi.
- ♦ University of Stellenbosch, South Africa: Rev Muyo Joshua (Cameroon) has started a ThD project entitled *The scapegoat sacrifice of Leviticus 16 and the nefo'o ritual of the Bafut of Cameroon*. (Supervisor: Prof Hendrik Bosman). Address: Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, Matieland 7602, South Africa; e-mail: 9893954@rgo.sun.ac.za
- ♦ Phil.-Theol. Hochschule St. Georgen, Frankfurt a.M., Germany: Ignatius Madueke Obinwa (Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria) is working with a PhD thesis entitled *Yahweh my Refuge: Analysis of Psalm 71* (Supervisor: Prof Hans-Winfried

Jüngling). A number of authors regard Ps 71 as an anthology of various parts of other psalms and even of some non-poetical texts of the Bible. This is focused in the present study, which also takes a hard look at the many textual problems in the psalm. The approach is contextual; an attempt is being made to examine the text in its immediate and wider contexts within the Bible, as well as its historical contexts, past and present, including the African context. Address: Phil.-Theol. Hochschule St. Georgen, Offenbacher Landstrasse 224, D-60599 Frankfurt am Main, Germany; e-mail: fxpth106@rz.uni-frankfurt.de

Book notes

- ♦ D.T. Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament*. San Francisco: Christian Universities Press 1998 (208 pp., \$54.95). David T. Adamo, Professor of biblical and religious studies at Delta State University in Abraka, Nigeria, has in recent years published a large number of articles focusing on the so-called African presence in the OT. The present book is a slightly revised version of the source of these articles, his 1986 Ph.D. dissertation from Baylor University, Waco, Texas. Adamo criticizes traditional Western OT scholarship of a more or less deliberate de-Africanization of the OT, and as a response he meticulously goes through references to African nations and individuals in the Torah, the Nebiim, and the Kethuvim. In the previous articles, and now in this book, Adamo emphasizes the role of the OT references to Cush, to some extent at the expense of OT references to other African nations, especially Egypt. Some would probably also argue that Adamo exaggerates when he claims that Africa and Africans made a significant contribution to the religious life and civilization of the ancient Near East, and in particular ancient Israel (cf. p. 165). Still, the book is a most welcome contribution. We now finally have easy access to the major ideas of an important OT scholar in Africa; ideas which already have received some scholarly interest, cf. K. Holter, "Should Old Testament 'Cush' be rendered 'Africa'?", *The Bible Translator* 48 (1997) 331-336, and M. Høyland, "An African presence in the Old

Testament? D.T. Adamo's interpretation of the Old Testament Cush passages", *Old Testament Essays* 11 (1998) 50-58.

(K. Holter)

- ♦ S.P. Abrahams, J. Punt, & D.T. Williams (eds.), *Theology on the Tyume*. Alice: Lovedale Press 1997 (iii + 174 pp).

This very interesting collection of essays by all members of the Faculty of Theology, University of Fort Hare, serves the double purpose of commemorating the eightieth anniversary of Fort Hare and honouring professor Gideon Thom for his twentytwo years of service to the Faculty and the University. Several of the essays are of interest from the perspective of this OT newsletter; cf. J. Punt: "Reading the Bible in Africa: Towards a hermeneutic of Ubuntu", S.P. Abrahams: "Reconciliation - paths to peace and healing: An OT paradigm", R. de W. Oosthuizen: "'Umntu akazingcwabi': The living dead in the OT and Africa", M.G. Khabela: "Biblical hermeneutics of Black theology - an unfinished debate", J. Punt: "Ἀρά γε γινώσκεις ἃ ἀναγινώσκεις;" (Ac 26[sic; =8]:30b): The biblical languages and theological education in Africa", R. de W. Oosthuizen: "The eleventh commandment is: Thou shalt take care of the earth", P.D.F. Strijdom: "What Tekoa did to Amos". The book can be ordered from David Philip Publishers (Pty) Ltd, P.O. Box 23408, 7700 Claremont, South Africa.

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- ♦ Hannah W. Kinoti & John M. Waliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in biblical theology*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers 1997 (African Christianity Series) (209 pp.; East Africa: K.Sh. 500.00; outside East Africa: US\$ 15.00).

The African Christianity Series is sustained by the Ecumenical Colloquium of Eastern African Theologians, a consultative forum which since 1987 has been committed to the promotion of contextual theology in Africa, and the present volume in this series focuses on the Bible in African Christianity. The following contributions are of special relevance from the perspective of this newsletter: E. Obeng advocates the use of historical critical methods in his "The use of biblical critical methods in rooting the Scriptures in Africa"; L. Magessa points out the need for an interpretation of the Bible that is informed by the African experience, in his "From privatized to

popular biblical hermeneutics in Africa"; Z. Nthamburi & D. Waruta surveys "Biblical hermeneutics in African instituted churches"; N. Ndungu gives a case study (the Akurinu church) of the same in his "The Bible in an African independent church"; J.N.K. Mugambi discusses "The Bible and ecumenism in African Christianity"; and also M.N. Getui discusses "The Bible as a tool for ecumenism"; D.T. Adamo discusses the concept of "Peace in the Old Testament and in the African heritage"; and G.L. Yorke, in his "The Bible and the black diaspora", points out that the inculturation and liberation hermeneutical approaches of African interpretation of the Bible are also found in the African diaspora. These papers - together with four others - give a very interesting introduction to different aspects of the role of the Bible in African theology and church life, and deserves a wide readership.

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- ♦ G.O. West & M.W. Dube (eds.), *'Reading with': An exploration of the interface between critical and ordinary readings of the Bible. African overtures*. Atlanta 1996 [= *Semeia* 73] (284 pp., \$19.95). *Semeia* aims at being an "experimental" journal for biblical criticism, and the guest editors of this volume, G.O. West (University of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa) and M.W. Dube (University of Botswana), have clearly succeeded in this. Not only do they work from (mainly South) African perspectives, but they also highlight the often neglected relationship between "ordinary" and critical readings; the key words in this interface are "reading with" rather than "reading for". Of special interest from the perspective of this OT newsletter are G.O. West: "Reading the Bible differently: Giving shape to the discourse of the dominated", I.J. Mosala: "Race, class and gender as hermeneutical factors in the African independent churches' appropriation of the Bible", J.S. Pobee: "Bible study in Africa: A passover of language", J. Riches: "Interpreting the Bible in African contexts: Glasgow consultation", G.H. Wittenburg: "Old Testament theology, for whom?", B.C. Lategan: "Scholar and ordinary reader: More than a simple interface".

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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. Other scholars working with the Old Testament within the context of Africa are interested in your ideas and meanings, your research and book projects, your meetings and conferences.

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