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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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Proverbs

are generally considered as central expressions of a culture's wisdom and tradition. So is the case in traditional Africa, and so was probably the case also in ancient Israel. The present issue of *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship* therefore focuses on the relationship between the proverbial traditions of traditional Africa and those of ancient Israel. This is a relationship that raises a number of questions – historical and literary as well as methodological, and the brief presentations in the following pages should, hopefully, lead to further reflection on an important area of research.

Knut Holter

A Mosadi (Woman) Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31

Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele)

Due to the familiarity of the poem of Proverbs 31:10-31 in my ecclesiastical circles, I got attracted to the text and determined to research on it. My aim was to move away from a literalistic reading (a reading so common in our churches) to a contextual women's liberationist reading of biblical texts. My interest was also motivated by my keen desire to understand what ideal womanhood is from the two contexts: The African/South-African/Northern Sotho context and the Israelite/Jehud biblical context. In the following lines, I will briefly outline some of the findings of my doctoral research.¹

Due to my commitment to a study of my context and noting the insufficiency of Western women's liberationist frameworks (cf. womanism, feminism) to address my context fully, I decided to formulate an approach which could address my unique African/South-African context. I have called this approach, a *bosadi* (womanhood) reading of biblical texts. The Northern Sotho word *bosadi* (womanhood) is an abstract noun from the word *mosadi* which means 'woman', 'married woman', 'wife'.² The word comes from the root *-sadi* which has to do with womanhood; *bosadi* for example may be translated as 'womanhood' or 'private parts of a woman'.

The Bosadi approach is committed to the African-ness of an African woman in South-Africa. It thus critically analyses her African context, challenges and resists the oppressive elements of the African culture, while at the same time it embraces and harnesses the liberative and empowering aspects of this culture, particularly as they relate to women. The approach also analyses the biblical text and its context, criticising whatever elements are encouraging oppression and retarding the liberation of women, while promoting the liberative elements. We may thus call a Bosadi approach an exercise in transformational

¹ M.J. Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele), *Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: A Bosadi (Womanhood) Perspective*. D. Litt. et Phil. Thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1996.

² Cf. D. Ziervogel & P.C. Mokgokong, *Comprehensive Northern Sotho Dictionary*. Pretoria (1975) 1154; cf. also J.T. Brown, *Setswana – English Dictionary*. Johannesburg (1979) 217.

hermeneutics,³ which aims at transforming unjust structures in society so as to end up with an emancipated society.

To get an impression of what ideal womanhood in the African (Northern Sotho) culture means, a survey of Northern Sotho proverbs, dealing with female imagery, was made. The researcher chose the genre of proverbs in line with the theme of the research which was based on the book of Proverbs in the Hebrew canon. A study of the Northern Sotho proverbs has revealed that women are viewed basically as wives and mothers – that is in their relationship with a male figure – and what they do and must do to make his life comfortable. The following examples will suffice:

- ♦ *Ga ba tswale ba ate gobane mo-na-le-pelo ga a tsebje*
literally: Let them be born and be many for the one with a kind heart is not known.
meaning: It is good for a family to have many children because the one who will show kindness (particularly to parents in their old age) is not known.
- ♦ *Mosadi ke tshwene o lewa mabogo*
literally: A woman is a baboon, her hands are eaten.
meaning: The beauty and delight that a woman can cause is shown by her diligence in fulfilling her domestic duties and also taking care of her husband.⁴

It might be interesting to note the meaning of the proverb that compares a man with a baboon:

- ♦ *Monna ke tshwene o ja ka matsogo a mabedi*
literally: A man is a baboon, he eats with two hands.
meaning: A married man can have concubines.

On the whole, a study of the Northern Sotho proverbs on womanhood has revealed both negative and positive portraits about women. As can be

³ Cf. J.P. Martin, "Toward a post-critical paradigm", *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987) 370-385, 372; D.J. Bosch, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. Maryknoll (1991) 189.

⁴ Cf. J.R.D. Rakoma, *Marema-ka-Dika tsa Sesotho sa Leboa*. Pretoria (1970) 184.

expected in a patriarchal culture, the negative portrait is bigger than the positive one.

The information gleaned from these proverbs was subsequently analysed from a Bosadi critical perspective, paving a way for a Bosadi reading of Proverbs 31:10-31. From this analysis, a new definition of the African woman emerges: An African female person whose full humanity as a person created in the image of Modimo her Maker, is acknowledged irrespective of whether she is married or not, or whether she has children or not.

A Bosadi approach was then used to re-read Proverbs 31:10-31 in a Northern Sotho context. What comes out of this re-reading, are the qualities that Israelite/Yehud society might have expected from a woman to qualify as an ideal ('good' or 'wise' to use the sages' terminology) woman. These qualities were then read critically from a Bosadi perspective. The result of this re-reading showed that the text of Proverbs 31:10-31 has both liberative and oppressive aspects. The text is liberative since it elevates the significance of the family (for African men and women), an important institution in traditional Africa. It is liberative because it shows a picture of an independent, powerful woman who can hold her own in the world of men. As Brenner notes, the woman portrayed in Proverbs 31:10-31 subverts the male order by becoming its essential requisite.⁵

Proverbs 31:10-31 is liberative because it acknowledges that women are hard workers. The only problem arises if such hard work tends towards slavery, if it is relegated to only a section of society (as seems to be the case in most of the Northern Sotho contexts where it appears that women are expected to work hard), and also if it is not remunerated fairly. In this case people are better paid on the basis of their race and of their sex. This was typical during the apartheid era. Though the situation is changing today, the repercussions of the previous system will remain for many years and it will continue to have an unfortunate impact on the lives of many African people in the country. The text is liberative for Africans as it reveals that their holistic outlook on life is similar to that of the Israelites. This will help them realise that the book, which has been dubbed a White man's, contains some sections that are closer to their culture than they are to the Western culture.

⁵ Cf. A. Brenner, "An F Voice?", A. Brenner & van F. Dijk-Hemmes (eds.), *On gendering texts: Female and male voices in the Hebrew Bible*. Leiden (1993) 113-130, 129.

On the other hand, the text displays its androcentricity by using the unfortunate word בַּעַל (*ba'al*) for a powerful independent woman. Such an epithet should be resisted as it denies full humanhood to women, for they are perceived as the property of men. This word also fails to acknowledge the equality between men and women.

The other problematic aspect of our present text is that it may be qualified as a text of the elite class. Such a text will not appeal to the majority of many poor African women in South Africa. Even those who happen to be rich, may never hope to achieve the status of the אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל (*'eshet chayil*) or Woman of Worth in their lifetime. It may be viewed as an oppressive text of the elitist status quo. The text is also problematic due to its separation between what appears to be a womanly sphere of the family and the more significant (public) sphere of men – the gates of the city. Such a traditional division between these spheres, on the basis of gender, should be rejected as it does women and society itself injustice. All people should be allowed to exercise their God-given potential as they feel suitable. Another problematic aspect of Proverbs 31:10-31 is its portrayal of an ideal family as one constituted by both male and female, children and servants. That is not always the case in life. There are many Northern Sotho families which are single-parented, most or almost all these families are headed by women. Many African women may never hope to be like the Woman of Worth in their lifetime – they may never hope to have servants for example, let alone the high quality servants mentioned in the text! They may never hope to dress like her.

Some families are polygynous, yet their members identify with the Christian Bible. How would women in such families read this text and make meaning out of it? Will it not serve to reinforce the stereotype of the missionaries that the polygyny practised in African culture shows that it is heathen?

The information in the above lines reveals a painful reality, a hidden reality to many African/South-African women that the Book which they have come to embrace can at times, cause them pain. Yet at the same time, the same Bible can soothe them. The Bible can be likened with a coin which has two sides: on the one hand the Bible hurts, on the other hand it heals.

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Biblical and African Wisdom in Proverbs

Friedemann W. Golka

Wisdom we call all those parts of the Old Testament in which knowledge is not acquired through a process of revelation, but through the rational application of the human mind (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes).

At a first glance it would appear that in the Bible we are dealing with popular proverbs. But this is not what standard works on Hebrew Wisdom tell you. There it is assumed that at court there was a class of "wise men" who taught in equally hypothetical schools, and that their teaching consisted of the class ethics of the civil service. But Wisdom is no profession, but a human quality (intelligence), and schools are only mentioned in the OT in the 2nd century BC – 800 years after Solomon! Scribes were trained within a master-apprentice system. The perspective of biblical proverbs is not that of the courtier, but rather that of ordinary people. During the period of the Judges, when these proverbs originated, Israel was a tribal society of the same kind as can be found in Africa. For this reason – and not because of some influence one way or another – we detect a great similarity between Hebrew and African proverbs.

But why should one compare two cultures with no proven contact? If it is true that Hebrew proverbs are older than the monarchy, then, as popular proverbs, they belong indeed to the period of the Judges, described in the biblical book of the same name. This is the time of the formation of the Israelite state. What we find is a typical tribal society similar to those of Africa. Even the phenomenon "tribes without rulers", described by Middleton and Tait, is a good description of Israel during the period of the Judges. If the forms of political organization in Israel and Africa were similar, we need not be surprised to find similar proverbs in both cases. If the forms and problems of life in Israel and Africa are similar, then it becomes increasingly unlikely that Hebrew Wisdom is to be derived from the surrounding high cultures of the Ancient Near East. Like the African ones Hebrew proverbs would have to be explained as indigenous wisdom. Biblical proverbs can be divided into seven large areas:

- (I) Man
- (II) Man in community
- (III) Work and possessions

- (IV) Public life
- (V) Wisdom and folly
- (VI) God and man
- (VII) The righteous and the wicked

The first five groups can also be found in Africa, however, not VI and VII. Let me present just a small selection for comparison:

- ♦ The purpose in a man's mind is like deep water,
but a man of understanding will draw it out. (Prov 20:5)
- ♦ Man is like a pepper,
till you have chewed it you do not know how hot it is. (Hausa)
- ♦ He who conceals hatred has lying lips,
and he who utters slander is a fool. (Prov 10:18)
- ♦ Good words are food, bad words poison. (Malagasy)
- ♦ It is better to live in a corner of the housetop
than in a house shared with a contentious woman. (Prov 21:9)
- ♦ To marry is to put a snake in one's handbag. (Bantu)
- ♦ The glory of young men is their strength,
but the beauty of old men is their grey hair. (Prov 20:29)
- ♦ The young bird does not crow until it hears the old ones.
(Bechuana)
- ♦ Where there are no oxen, there is no grain;
but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox. (Prov 14:4)
- ♦ The one who loses the cattle is the one who herds them. (Lovedu)
- ♦ The sluggard says 'There is a lion outside!
I shall be slain in the streets!' (Prov 22:13)
- ♦ The sluggard has no locusts even if they sleep in his courtyard.
(Lovedu)

- ♦ The poor is disliked even by his neighbour,
but the rich has many friends. (Prov 14:20)
- ♦ A good name cannot be eaten, it is money that counts. (Fante)

- ♦ A servant who deals wisely has the king's favour,
but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully. (Prov 14:35)
- ♦ A big goat does not snort without reason. (Kamba)

- ♦ Wise men lay up knowledge,
but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near. (Prov 10:14)
- ♦ We begin by being foolish, and we become wise by experience.
(Masai)

Already from these few examples it can be seen that there is agreement between the main groups of Hebrew and African proverbs. In both cases we are dealing with tribal societies. Also the background of agriculture and small crafts is common to Israel and Africa. But why are groups VI and VII (God and man, and The righteous and the wicked) absent in Africa? (Isolated appearances can be attributed to Islamic influence.) This is explained by the fact that these subjects are not part of folk wisdom. With these two groups yahwistic faith in Israel has produced a degree of reflection which is not to be found in the proverbial wisdom of Africa.

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African Proverbs

A Compilation of proverb collections, studies, bibliographies and other resources for African proverbs on CD-ROM¹

Peter L. Kimilike

This valuable multi-disciplinary research tool is a recent contribution by the Global Mapping International and African Proverbs Project. With regard to biblical studies it comes just in time. Today's new openness, methodologically speaking, for tools and material provided by the social sciences, makes this a most interesting contribution.

What we have here is a modern technology, multi-purpose electronic research device with enormous efficiency and capacity. Its foremost advantage is that it makes available over 28,000 African proverbs from numerous published and unpublished African primary sources. This fact greatly reduces the time and financial costs incurred in field research. In addition, it has a wider ethnological scope and geographical coverage of over 1,200 languages from Africa south of the Sahara. For instance, to mention just a few, there are proverbs collections from the Akan, Ewe, Grebo, Jabo (West Africa); Lugbara, Kaonde, Mongo-Nkundu, Bore, Lobi (Central Africa); Oromo (Horn of Africa); Swahili, Sukuma, Luganda (East Africa); Tswana, Sesotho (South Africa). The latter point is even much more important in enhancing a balanced representation of the African proverbial material. It is possible now for a study to make general assertions over a variety of themes in an African contextual proverbial study. In the past it was difficult to do the same because many of those collections had been made in isolation.

Another major difficulty in a comparative study has been the lack of African cultural contexts for the validation of African proverbial sources. Many scholars had taken to atomistic treatment of proverbs. The preceding problem posed it difficult to establish a proper performance context necessary to their understanding. The result was a violation of the anthropological methodology which obviously affects the final theses. In

¹ Review of S. Nussbaum (ed.), *African Proverbs: Collections, studies, bibliographies: CD #3 in the 20:21 Library. Version 1.0 for Windows*. Published 1996 by Global Mapping International, 7899 Lexington Drive, Suite 200A, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80920, USA; e-mail: info@gmi.org Price: US\$ 99.95; in Africa with a special discount US\$55.00 from Rev. John Shane, Nairobi, Kenya, e-mail: john@umsg.org

addition to the continued predominant lack of material to provide for a coherent study of the complex, short, pithy and mnemonic sayings has been the greatest hindrance and a cause of the stagnation in their study. Many interested scholars had abandoned their study. This fact is true even on the studies of the Old Testament book of Proverbs which has a lower number of comprehensive scholarship when compared to other books of the Bible.

The African Proverbs CD-ROM has advanced a step further towards alleviating the preceding problem. First, by the provision of an update of studies, reference books, maps and abstracts or booknotes on the subject. Second, the provision of an updated bibliography of African proverbs collections. This includes a few reprints of books and a major part presented in key pages, i.e. the title page, the content, the introduction, a page or two of the text and the bibliography. And third, the provided translations, explanations, illustrations and indices to the proverbs. These together are by all means a great help to the research. The facility is enough to enable the researcher recognize, appreciate and evaluate the themes and patterns of proverbs one deals with at a click of the fingertip. The main challenge now lies in the non-availability of modern technological electronic research facilities in African theological institutions. In such a case the instrument stands a chance of being a motivating force for the improvement in the research systems necessary among the African institutions. The benefits of which will be a maximum exploit of the treasure invested in such a marvellous device at a very economical price.

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Old Testament Proverbs Studies in the 1990s

Knut Holter

The following is a brief survey of some major studies of OT Proverbs from the 1990s. Only monographs are included. The survey is divided into four groups: introductions, commentaries, studies of the relationship between African and OT proverbs, and other studies.

Introductions

Two very different contributions should here be mentioned. Martin (1995) is written with the undergraduate student's needs in mind, and it serves as a good primary introduction to the book, its collections of sayings, and also to some major research historical lines. Whybray (1995) is a general research history, aiming to give the reader an account of the scholarly study of the Book of Proverbs during the 20th century. And Whybray has certainly succeeded; the book has become an indispensable source for further research on Proverbs. A select bibliography records 3-400 books and articles, and the seven chapters of the book (origin and background; literary and structural matters; 1-9 and 22:17-24:34; 30-31; ideas and theology; dating of the book; texts and versions) give a balanced presentation of the main features of these scholarly contributions.

Commentaries

There is a surprisingly increasing market for biblical commentaries, and this also concerns commentaries on Proverbs. The first, chronologically speaking, is Meinhold (1991), whose two volumes give a fairly detailed analysis of Proverbs. The commentary shows attention for the unifying elements within each unit or chapter, and the role of schools and court in the formation of the book is emphasized. Less detailed is Farmer (1991) and Garrett (1993), which represent the more devotional type of commentaries. Lelièvre & Maillot (1993/1996) give a new French translation, followed by some technical notes, and then a rather detailed interpretation with a broad perspective. As it is to be expected from the late doyen of Proverbs scholarship, Whybray (1994a) has written a thorough commentary, sensitive to details as well as major lines, and with

a balanced discussion of relevant secondary literature. Van Leuwen (1997) and Murphy (1998), at least when compared with Whybray, are somewhat superficial; in Murphy's case this is balanced by nine relevant excursuses and by a good bibliography that follows the house rules of the WBC series. Let finally also Clifford (1999) be mentioned; his commentary is scheduled to be published now in May 1999, and I have therefore not had access to it.

The relationship between African and OT proverbs

The close resemblance between certain African and OT proverbs has been acknowledged for a long time; still, only a few scholars have made particular use of comparative material from Africa in their interpretation of OT proverbs. The first major study doing this is the one by Naré (1986), where Prov 25-29 is read in the light of proverbial material from the Mossi culture of Burkina Faso. Naré is able to point out the existence of several formal and thematic resemblances between the two proverbial traditions; of special importance is a rather parallel concept of God. Another study is that of Nzambi (1992), where (again) Prov 25-29 is read in the light of African proverbial material, this time from Congo. Nzambi focuses on formal characteristics of the two, and he argues that Prov 25-29 originated as sayings among the people. A third study is that of Golka (1993). He criticizes the traditional claim that OT proverbs originated as literary works in official circles (schools, court) during the monarchy, under influence of international (Egypt, Mesopotamia) wisdom literature. By comparing OT proverbs to proverbial material of traditional Africa, Golka concludes that OT proverbs rather derive from a tribal society – that of the Israel of the period of the Judges. This enables him to refute three assumptions which have dominated traditional interpretation of OT proverbs; (i) that there were schools in ancient Israel, (ii) that a professional class of wise men taught in these schools, and (iii) that their teaching consisted of the moral standards of the civil service.

Other studies

Also a number of other topics have been discussed throughout the 1990s. The sociological and compositional background of Proverbs has been investigated from different perspectives. According to Steiert (1990), the affinities of Proverbs with Egyptian wisdom has been overemphasized;

Proverbs, he argues, finds its place more securely within Israelite tradition than what has generally been recognized. Westermann (1994; German version 1990) argues that the early collections in Prov 10-21 and 25-29 have their background in the oral traditions of Israelite village communities rather than in schools or the court. Snell (1993) attempts at reconstructing the history of the composition of Proverbs, emphasizing the role of repetition of verses, half verses, and word combinations. Whybray (1994b) argues that 10:1-22:16 and 25-29 are the core collections of the book, and that all collections reflect a long process of composition. Scoralick (1995) examines the criteria for the generally accepted conclusion that 10:1-15:32 forms a unit; better criteria are needed, she argues, and then provided by her. And Harris (1995) attempts to show how parts of Prov 1-9 draw upon earlier traditions from the Pentateuch and Prophets. Also linguistic aspects of the Proverbs have received attention. Schneider (1990) studies translation technical questions, especially focusing on parallelisms. McCreesh (1991) examines various examples of sound patterns or wordplay. And Wehrle (1993) examines the syntactic and semantic function of the examples of "better than"-sayings in Proverbs.

A large number of thematic studies have also been published throughout the 1990s. The theology of Proverbs is investigated by Boström (1990), who argues that its concept of God forms an integrated part of the OT. Also Lelièvre (1993) has investigated the theology of Proverbs; its concept of Yahwism, it is argued, is characterized by a stronger preference for religious tolerance than the rest of the OT. Hausmann (1995) studies different aspects of the anthropology – man *and* woman – of Proverbs, reading the texts against a wider cultural background, not least that of Egyptian wisdom. Maier (1995) studies the "strange woman" of Prov 1-9, arguing that the texts quite literally reflect the need of parents and teachers to warn young men against immoral women. Baumann (1996) focuses on woman Wisdom in Prov 1-9; it is interpreted as a personification of the feminine, a heavenly being somehow parallel to YHWH. The question of wealth and poverty has been investigated by Whybray (1990), who argues that 10:1-22:16 and 25-29 reflect the social and ethical values of small farmers, whose risk of poverty was real, whereas 1-9 and 22:17-24:22 reflect an urban society with little concern for the poor. Also Washington (1994) investigates wealth and poverty; in his case the question is studied in both Proverbs and Amenemope, however, without making any detailed comparison

between the two. Delkurt (1992) investigates how certain ethical topics (parents/children, man/woman, lazy/diligent, poor/rich) are treated in Prov 10:1-22:16 and 25-29. And, finally, Estes (1997) takes Prov 1-9 as an educational handbook, attempting to describe the pedagogical theory and view of education that underlies these chapters.

Conclusion

OT Wisdom literature was for many years a stepchild of biblical scholarship, receiving surprisingly little attention – at least when compared to for example the Prophetic or Pentateuchal literature. In recent decades, however, this has changed, and the increasing interest for Wisdom literature in general, and not least Proverbs, reflects the methodological and hermeneutical innovations of recent OT scholarship.

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Early Encounters with the Bible in Africa

Historical, methodological, and hermeneutical analysis of the transactions between the Bible and indigenous African communities

Gerald West

This title is a working title for a collaborative research project which I hope will attract the interest and participation of colleagues from around the continent. I am in the process of negotiating a publishing contact for a book in this area. Allow me to outline the project.

In attempting to chart the contours of the interface between African biblical hermeneutics and Western biblical hermeneutics I have been driven to delve more deeply into the historical dimensions of this encounter. The African American biblical scholar Vincent Wimbush has claimed, somewhat provocatively, that the array of interpretative strategies forged in the earliest period of the African American encounter with the Bible are foundational: all other readings would in some sense be built upon and judged by them. The beginning of the African American encounter with the Bible has functioned, according to Wimbush, "as phenomenological, socio-political and cultural foundation" for subsequent periods.¹ The Bible, "understood as the 'white folk's' book, was accepted but not interpreted in the way that white Christians and the dominant culture in general interpreted it".² Basic to Wimbush's claim, and this is the provocative bit, is that the reception of the Bible among African Americans can be analysed separately from the reception of Christianity; Wimbush's interpretative history of the Bible among African Americans provides compelling reasons for analyzing the reception of the Bible as distinct from but related to the reception of Christianity.

In the extensive literature on the early encounters between Christianity and Africans there are hints in this regard, but no extensive treatment of the transactions between Africans and the Bible. Mention is often made of Africans using the Bible against the missionaries, and indigenous appropriations of the Bible are cited as grounds for the rise of

¹ V.L. Wimbush, "Reading texts through worlds, worlds through texts", *Semeia* 62 (1993) 129-140, 131.

² V.L. Wimbush, "The Bible and African Americans: An outline of an interpretative history", C.H. Felder (ed.), *Stony the road we trod: African American biblical interpretation*. Minneapolis (1991) 81-97, 89.

independent and indigenous churches.³ The point I am making here is important. Historical accounts of the encounters between Judaism and/or Christianity and Africa are rich and detailed in their analysis of most aspects of these transactions, but consistently exclude the Bible. Fortunately, we do have the suggestive interpretative history of the transaction between the Bible and African Americans constructed by Wimbush, mentioned earlier. Wimbush proposes five major types of readings of the Bible among African Americans. Wimbush's research has a hermeneutical and a historical dimension in that he correlates each major type of reading with a particular historical period. His research identifies, delineates, and analyses the major types of African American readings of the Bible from slavery to the present (Wimbush 1991:84). While there are many significant differences between African American transactions with the Bible and indigenous African transactions with the Bible, there are also many striking similarities which make Wimbush's analysis heuristically valuable.

An analysis of the transactions between Africa and the Bible, particularly the early encounters, is not only of historical value. If Wimbush is right in asserting that the array of interpretative strategies forged in the earliest encounters of African Americans with the Bible are foundational in that all other African American readings are in some sense built upon and judged by them, then such analysis has tremendous hermeneutical significance for our current context. I would hope that our research, by means of archival research and personal interviews, would generate a series of case studies, providing a "thick" description of the transactions between particular communities and the Bible. In my own context I will follow the tracks of scholars, like the Comaroffs, for example, who have already offered "thick" descriptions of the reception of Christianity in South Africa.⁴ My concern would be to focus on the Bible, an aspect of the encounter neglected by the Comaroffs.

I see this component of the research as being strongly collaborative and interdisciplinary and so invite colleagues in other parts of Africa to

³ Cf. K. Bediako, "Epilogue", Y. Schaaf (ed.), *On their way rejoining: The history and role of the Bible in Africa*. Carlisle (1994) 243-252; N. Ndungu, "The Bible in an African Independent Church", H. W. Kinoti & J. M. Waliggo (eds.), *The Bible in African Christianity*. Nairobi (1997) 58-67; L. Sanneh, *Translating the message: The missionary impact on culture*. Maryknoll, N.Y. 1991.

⁴ J. & J. Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa*. Chicago 1991.

participate in the project by contributing case studies from their own contexts. These case studies could then be incorporated into an edited volume. Colleagues may contact me by mail or by email. I look forward to your comments, suggestions, and contributions.

The Earth Bible

Reading the Bible from the perspective of the Earth

Gerald West

I have been asked to act as a consultant on this project, a project co-ordinated by Norman Habel from Australia. I share the details of the project with you and invite you to participate if you are interested. The aims of the project are as follows:

- ♦ to develop ecojustice principles appropriate to an earth hermeneutic for interpreting the Bible and for promoting justice and healing of the earth;
- ♦ to publish these interpretations as contributions to the current debate on ecology, ecoethics and ecotheology;
- ♦ to provide a responsible forum within which the suppressed voice of the earth may be heard and impulses for healing the earth may be generated.

The editor, Norman Habel, has invited me to act as a consultant because he is particularly concerned to have an African perspective on these matters. So please take up the challenge! Our voice should be heard, particularly as I believe our reading practices and theologies have much to contribute. The first volume, on approaches and principles, seems to be fairly well developed already, but the editor is looking for contributions for the following two volumes. Volume 2 is ecojustice readings of Genesis and volume 3 is ecojustice readings of the Gospels. Those who want to offer contributions on Genesis would need to respond quite quickly. Articles should be no longer than 5000 words.

Future volumes include ecojustice readings of Wisdom literature, Paul's writings, Psalms, Luke/Acts, the Prophets, Apocalyptic texts, etc. So there is plenty of scope for all. Anyone interested in the project can contact me or Norman Habel (nhabel@senet.com.au).

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Conferences

- ♦ University of Stellenbosch, South Africa: The Department of Old and New Testament at the University of Stellenbosch organises a workshop on the topic "Old and New Testament studies in Africa: Learning from the past and planning for the future", May 14-15, 1999. Four sessions will be held on the following aspects: (i) Old and New Testament studies and Bible translation in Africa; (ii) Old and New Testament studies and the economical and political contexts in Africa; (iii) Old and New Testament studies and the cultural contexts in Africa; (iv) Looking ahead – planning for the future. Participants include well known scholars such as John Mbiti (Switzerland), Steve Breck Reid (USA), J.O. Akao, Chris Manus, Modupe Oduyoye and Justin Ukpog (Nigeria); Tewoldemedhin Habtu, Joseph Muutuki and Victor Zinkurati (Kenya); Knut Holter (Norway); Daan Cloete, Bernard Combrink, Bernard Lategan and Gerald West (South Africa). For further information: Prof Hendrik Bosman, Department of Old and New Testament, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, Matieland 7602, South Africa; e-mail: hlb1@maties.sun.ac.za
- ♦ The 1999 annual conference of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS) is scheduled to be held 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.
- ♦ The Old Testament Society of South Africa and the Dutch Old Testament Society will have a joint congress from August 25-27, 1999, at the University of Pretoria, Theology Building. Main papers will be read by Johannes De Moor, Jurie le Roux, Wim Beuken, Hendrik Bosman, Gerrie Snyman, and Edward Noort. For information: Nina Grundlingh, Department of Biblical Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0002, South Africa; e-mail: ngrundli@ccnet.up.ac.za

- ♦ The Southern African Society for Semitics invites to its annual conference on the campus of the University of the North, August 23. and 24. For information: Andre Conradie or Jacob Chabane, Semitic Languages, University of the North, P.O. Box X1106, Sovenga 0727, South Africa; e-mail: Conradiea@unin.unorth.ac.za or Chabanej@unin.unorth.ac.za

- ♦ A symposium on "Africa and the Old Testament" will be organized in Nairobi, October 13-16, 1999, by Kenyatta University, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, and School of Mission and Theology (Stavanger, Norway). The organizers will invite speakers from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and Norway. Six sessions will focus on the following topics: (i) OT studies in Africa: The present situation; (ii) Finding Africa in the OT; (iii) Using Africa to interpret the OT; (iv) Using the OT to interpret Africa; (v) Translating the OT in Africa; (vi) OT studies in Africa: The future. For information: Dr Victor Zinkuratre, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, P.O. Box 24205, Nairobi, Kenya; e-mail: victor@iconnect.co.ke

- ♦ The 1999 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) will take place in Boston, Massachusetts, November 20-23, 1999. Amongst a large number of sections, groups, seminars, and consultations, one notices that the "Section on Bible in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean" will specifically address factors of race, ethnicity, gender, and culture – as these figure in the texts or shape the reading of the texts. For information: Society of Biblical Literature, 825 Houston Mill Road, Suite 350, Atlanta, GA 30329, USA; e-mail: sblexec@emory.edu – or you can visit the SBL website: <http://www.sbl-site.org>

Research

- ♦ Emory University, USA: Dora R. Mbuwayesango (from Zimbabwe) completed in 1998 her PhD thesis *The defense of Zion and the house of David: Isaiah 36-39 in the context of Isaiah 1-39* (Supervisor: Prof John H. Hayes). The dissertation is an exegetical analysis of four narratives found in parallel versions in Isa 36:1-39:8 and 2 Kgs 18:13-20:19, which focus on the role of Isaiah in the Assyrian crisis. The scholarly consensus is that the Isaiah version is a reworking and abridgement of the Kings texts. An examination of the speech of Rabshakeh (Isa 36:1-22 || 2 Kgs 18:17-36), however, indicates that the themes and ideas in the speech correspond closely to those in Isa 1-35 concerning the Assyrian crisis. The speech of Rabshakeh may be considered a commentary on Isaiah's advice and prophecies concerning the Assyrian crisis. This indicates that there is a need for another model for explaining the relationship of the parallel texts of Isaiah and Kings. The present study tests this initial insight over the whole body of material, Isaiah 36:1-39:8 || 2 Kings 18:13-20:19, concluding that the four narratives are indigenous to the Isaiah tradition. Address: Hood Theological Seminary, 800 West Thomas Street, Salisbury, NC 28144, USA; e-mail: 102624.245@compuserve.com
- ♦ Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo: Abbe Etienne Ung'Eyowun Bediwegi is writing a doctoral dissertation entitled *La vocation du prophète des nations: Une lecture africaine de Jr 1,4-19*. This is a study of the call narrative of Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-19); the reference in its title to Jeremiah as "prophet to the nations" (cf. Jer 1:5) reflects some of the particularity of this prophet, and the subtitle points out the African context of the researcher. The two first chapters investigate the literary and theological function of the call narrative within the book as a whole, and the third chapter relates it to different religious and social phenomena in contemporary Africa. Address: Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, B.P. 1534, Kinshasa – Limete, République Démocratique du Congo.

- ♦ University of St Andrews, Scotland: Rev Bankole Davies-Brown (from Sierra Leone) is working with a PhD thesis on the Testament of Solomon; a tentative title is *An examination of the Solomon traditions in the Testament of Solomon* (Supervisor: Prof James R. Davila). The Testament of Solomon is written in Greek, dated to the 3rd century C.E., and the main story is based on I Kings 1-11 and II Chronicles 1-9. It describes how the great and wise king Solomon built the temple of God with the aid of demons, but it also describes Solomon's apostasy and how the spirit of God left him. The present project is a comparative study between the Testament of Solomon and documents of late antiquity: The LXX; Josephus; the Old Testament Apocrypha, such as Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit; Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, such as LAB (Pseudo Philo), Enoch, Aristobolus, Life of Adam and Eve; Christian material: NT; Jewish material: Mishnah, Midrash, Tosefta, Babylonian incantation bowls and amulets. The project will try to trace the development of the various Solomon traditions in the Testament of Solomon which are also extant in the aforementioned documents of late antiquity. Address: St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, KY16 9JU, St Andrews, Fife, Scotland; e-mail: bd5@st-andrews.ac.uk

- ♦ University of Stellenbosch, South Africa: Gerrit van Steenberg, a translation consultant working in Malawi and Kenya, commenced with his doctoral research in January 1999. The title of his project is: *Incongruent world views in Bible translation: The translation of Biblical lexical items referring to negative moral behaviour in the book of Isaiah into Pökoot* (Supervisor: Dr Christo van der Merwe). The study seeks to develop a theoretical frame of reference in the light of recent developments in semantics (especially within cognitive and anthropological linguistic circles) for the analysis of terms referring to negative moral behaviour in the book of Isaiah. This is supplemented by a similar analysis of terms used in the traditional religion of the Pökoot aiming to develop criteria for an informed choice in the translation of the Bible into Pötook. Address: P.O. Box 740, Blantyre, Malawi; e-mail: vansteenbergen@malawi.net

- ♦ University of Stellenbosch, South Africa: Dr Louis Jonker has initiated a project on *The influence of different contexts of social transformation on Biblical interpretation*; the project is sponsored by the South African Research Council, and its duration is January 1st 1999 to December 30th 2000. Members of the project team are Dr Winston Kawale (Nkhoma, Malawi), Dr Joel Manda (Zomba, Malawi), Prof Arie van der Kooij (Leiden), Rev. Andries Daniels (Stellenbosch), and Dr Louis Jonker (Stellenbosch). The project aims to investigate how different contexts of social transformation influence the strategies that are being applied for the interpretation of the Bible. Four case studies (in different contexts) will be done: (i) The case of apartheid theology as expressed in the document "Race, people and nation" of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa; (ii) the case of justice, reconciliation and church unity as expressed in the Belhar Confession of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa; (iii) the case of ancestor religion as expressed in ecclesial decisions and statements of the Reformed Churches in Malawi; and (iv) the case of homophilia as expressed in ecclesial decisions and statements of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. After the description of the hermeneutical strategies that were utilized in the formulation of policy in each of these cases, a comparison will be made between them to determine how the different contexts of social transformation influenced these strategies. Two colloquia on the topic of "Social transformation and biblical interpretation" will be held. The first will take place during September 1999 in Stellenbosch, and the second during April-May 2000 in Leiden. Address: Dr Louis Jonker, 11 Buitekring Road, Stellenbosch 7600, South Africa; e-mail: lcj@maties.sun.ac.za

- ♦ University of Cape Town, South Africa: Prof Yehoshua Gitay and Prof S.C. Satyo are working with a project entitled *The Xhosa people and the Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Study*. The Xhosa people feel close to the Hebrew Bible; this is in terms of characteristic phenomena that are found in the Hebrew Bible which characterise as well the literary and cultural nature of the Xhosa people. Stylistic and literary phenomena such as metaphorical language, metaphors regarding wild animals (lions, for example), genealogical lists, narratives regarding kings, heroes, and more are subject matters and motifs which enable the Xhosa people to feel at home with the

Hebrew Bible. How does it "work"? How does the Xhosa people respond to the (Hebrew) Bible literature and story telling? How do they respond as sympathetic readers who find in the Hebrew Bible "their" literature? This is a field study to be studied by Prof Satyo of the University of Cape Town, expert in Xhosa language and literature, and Prof Gitay of the Hebrew Section of the University of Cape Town, who specialises in the realm of Hebrew Bible rhetoric and poetics. Scholars who are interested in participating in this research (Xhosa and Zulu) are invited to contact Prof Gitay. Also scholars who work in the field may contact us, submitting publications and references. Address: Prof Yehoshua Gitay, Hebrew Section, Beattie Building, The University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa, fax: 27+ 21 685 55 30, tel.: 27+ 21 650 2950, e-mail: Gitay@Beattie.uct.ac.za

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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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