

A Twenty-first Century Pentecostal Hermeneutic for Africa and Beyond

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Introduction

Hermeneutics, in the broad sense, can be defined as a reading of Scripture to discern the meaning of biblical texts in their original cultural and religious contexts.¹ But this is just the first step which, more specifically, is called “exegesis.” Sam Oleka, acknowledging the wide gap that exists between the biblical world and contemporary Africa in terms of time, culture, history, language, and literary style, states that “the Bible demands interpretation in contemporary Africa” for adequate understanding and effective obedience.² Holding a similar view in the Western Hemisphere, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart claim that one’s interpretive methods must begin with the “then and there” of the text’s message (exegesis) and move to the relevant implications of the same meaning brought into the “here and now”³ called “hermeneutics,” in the narrow sense.

In Africa, where religion is extremely influential on people’s social consciousness and no atheists exist, the Bible, since its arrival in the late nineteenth century, has been read and interpreted through African and Western missionary eyes.⁴ In many cases, the African interpretation differed significantly from the missionary reading due to a more intuitive grasp of the cultural dynamics in the text and a greater appreciation for the supernatural powers referenced in its pages. As the twenty-first century unfolds with the tremendous growth of the church in Africa coupled with her burden to disciple her own people and an aggressive mission commitment to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth, African biblical hermeneutics will have a great impact on the future of global Christianity. What will her hermeneutics look like?

Africa: the Center of World Missions



In this lecture, four questions related to African Pentecostal hermeneutics will be considered.

Key Issues

1. What is hermeneutics?
2. What are the major interpretive systems in Africa today?
3. How are African Pentecostals approaching the text?
4. Is there another hermeneutical model that is more germane to African Pentecostals?

First, is her understanding of hermeneutics adequate? Second, what are the major interpretive approaches presently employed in African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches propounded in the continent's Evangelical and Pentecostal seminaries and have a significant impact on the people in the pews? Third, how are Pentecostals, in particular, reading the text in their churches? Fourth, is the interpretive model employed by Pentecostals adequate for the challenges they will face in the twenty-first century as they further the expansion of the kingdom of God in Africa, take the lead in the global mission to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth, and expand their influence in the academy as the discussion continues concerning the inspiration, truthfulness, and trustworthiness of the Holy Bible—God's self-revelation in written form—and its interpretation? The beginning place is a fresh consideration of the meaning of hermeneutics.

The Meaning of Hermeneutics

The meaning of hermeneutics is in flux today. As Richard E. Palmer notes, "The very definition of the term hermeneutics has become the subject of vehement controversy."⁵ Oleka claims that hermeneutics is the establishment and study of the principles, guidelines, and rules for interpretation.⁶ For him, hermeneutics is primarily methodology. All principles are based on the grammatical-historical approach to biblical interpretation. The goal of hermeneutics is the discovery of the author's intended meaning located in the text.⁷

Historical-Cultural, Grammatical Hermeneutics employed by many Evangelicals and Pentecostals

- ✓ Meaning is determined by the author.
- ✓ Authors were fully “conscious” of what they wrote.
- ✓ They “willed” to express their message using “shareable” words.
- ✓ Their written words conveyed the inspired, God-breathed meaning they had received through revelation.
- ✓ Analyzing the historical and cultural context of the original audience and the grammar of the text assists the interpreter to approximate the author’s meaning.

To unveil the meaning, the first step, he says, is to employ textual criticism to determine the exact text of the original author. Searching for the most original, authoritative, and accurate manuscript is based on the presupposition that the Holy Spirit was active in the production of the biblical autographs in a way different from their preservation and reproduction.⁸ While superintending the tedious hand-written duplication of the texts, God did not eliminate the possibility of human error in copying nor did he prevent occasional modifications in the wording as copyists attempted to clarify what they considered ambiguous due to their particular theological presuppositions. Thus, textual criticism is a necessary prayerful and scholarly exercise. Fortunately, most of this grueling work has been successfully accomplished by various Bible societies.

The second step for the hermeneut, according to Oleka, is the consideration of higher critical issues such as the author, recipients, date, historical-cultural context, purpose, and sources of information supposedly selected and edited by the inspired author. One should study the literary features of language, literary context, genre and style, and figures of speech.⁹ Noting the larger literary context of thought units, books, and testaments can assist in clarifying meaning. The interpreter should examine the geographical locations of author, audience, and the episode being studied; history and culture of the action described and those of the author and audience; political, economic, and sociological conditions; and spiritual concerns evidenced in the text—all of which assist in reconstructing the occasion the author was addressing.

Once the author’s meaning and purpose are approximated, the interpreters must convey this identical meaning to the contemporary audience considering the

implications both for the listeners and for themselves. Those who explain the meaning of the text must not stand as idle spectators merely interpreting from a safe, indifferent distance. They are participants who enter vicariously into the events that happened or the lessons taught so that they may lead their generation into the same experiences and instructions.¹⁰ After the meaning is contextualized, the hermeneutical process must conclude with practical application because the Word of God is not intended merely to be heard, but obeyed (see Matt. 7:24-27).

Application is essential to Hermeneutics

- Hear and obey.
- Application must consider the similarities and differences between the original audience's cultural contexts and that of the contemporary audience.
- The more similar the cultural-social-spiritual contexts, the more directly one can apply the truth.
- The more different, the more cautious one makes application (for example: women covering their heads or being "silent," men lifting up holy hands; 1 Cor. 11; 1 Tim. 2).

Samuel Ngewa summarizes his perspective on the meaning and method of hermeneutics: "I advocate that the approach to the Scriptures as the source for African theology be that of first attempting to know the meaning of a text in light of what the author intended to communicate to his original readers. Only after that has been done will we, with accuracy, apply the text to our situations."¹¹ He cautions African theologians to formulate their systems on exegesis rather than the cultural milieu, whether African or Western, for exegetically-based biblical doctrines belong to the Christian Church universal.¹²

Ukachukwu Chris Manus says that the text is intended to communicate what an author wants to say.¹³ Hermeneutics involves the art and science of discovering what the human author means by considering the importance of every word and phrase, symbols, and conveying the synthesized meaning to one's audience using local contextual language and cultural symbols to make the passage relevant to the listener.

Fee and Stuart state that the aim of good interpretation is getting at the plain meaning of the text.¹⁴ The first step is exegesis, a historical study to locate the intended meaning of the author in his context. One should look for the author's message, purpose, and flow of thought. The second major step is "hermeneutics," using their

nomenclature, referring specifically to contextualizing the original meaning into new circumstances. A text means what it meant because meaning cannot change. A text cannot mean what it never meant. They emphasize the importance of noting cultural dissimilarities, when comparing the ancient and modern cultures, in order to avoid inappropriate application.

Interpretation involves . . .

▣ Exegesis (*step 1: then/there*)

■ Historical & Grammatical Process

- Author's words (content) **WHAT IS HERE IN THE TEXT?**
- Author's purpose **WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?**
- Author's flow of thought (how did he connect his thoughts and unpack his material) **WHY IS IT LOCATED HERE?**
- Historical context: audience, issues **FOR WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?**

▣ Hermeneutics (*step 2: here/now*)

- Lessons (move from inductive to deductive)
- Implications (principlize the text; patterns of meaning)
- Extended meaning (recontextualize - put the lessons into a new and different historical and cultural context)

For Robert H. Stein, who stresses locating the author's conscious, willed, intentional communication by his using shareable language and ideas, the goal of hermeneutics is to fully grasp that meaning enshrined in the text.¹⁵ From the author's conscious meaning, the interpreter configures the author's unconscious meaning, that same pattern of meaning implied for occasions beyond the particularity of the text. Stein encourages the interpreter to recognize implications and patterns of meaning that establish principles with universal relevance. To understand the text correctly is to grasp the author's willed meaning conveyed in his written words. This approach assumes an objective, fixed, identifiable meaning that can be mastered by the interpreter. How one responds to the meaning, whether to accept or reject, is a matter of "significance," the value one assigns to the inspired message.¹⁶

J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays caution the reader not to create meaning from a text.¹⁷ One seeks to find the meaning already embedded in the text. The meaning is discovered in the text, not created in the mind of the reader. Once the meaning is determined, the exegete must principlize the timeless lessons based on the specifics of a passage in its historical particularity. These theological principles are contextualized and made applicable for one's particular audience. Mark L. Strauss claims that every act

of reading is an act of interpretation.¹⁸ When people read Scripture, they are reading God's authentic revelation, but the message has come through "weak human subjects, using imperfect human language, copied and passed down by fallible human beings, and subject to the limitations of human culture and experience. While these limitations mean the message does not reach us in perfect or pristine form, it reaches us as the true and authentic Word of God, a trustworthy message from him."¹⁹ The goal of reading is to "discern the heart of God and the mind of Christ. This discernment allows us to think God's thoughts after him and to determine his truth and his purpose in the changing world around us."²⁰ Hermeneutics, for Strauss, involves reading, interpreting, discernment, contextualization, obedience, and application. Strauss wisely cautions that the reader "doesn't presume authority over the text but submits to its instruction and conforms to its values."²¹

Palmer insightfully observes that hermeneutics is more than methods, and rather "the study of understanding, especially the task of understanding texts."²² Hermeneutics, then, could be considered not only the art and science of interpretation, but understanding—understanding another human being: the readers' attempts to understand and comprehend what another is communicating. Interpreters decode the author's language, which serves as the medium of communication in order to understand the message. How do people come to understand each other as they communicate: what is the process? Anthony C. Thiselton explains understanding in terms of the overlapping of "horizons"—one being the author's and the other, the reader's.²³ The horizon consists of one's historical vantage point including language, experiences, spiritual realities, culture, interpersonal relations, and worldview. The horizons never fully overlay each other to become one, but as they overlap or fuse, understanding is created.²⁴

One may be uncomfortable with this definition of hermeneutics, the study of understanding, because it swings the pendulum of attention from the author-text dynamic, where inspiration occurred and meaning was consciously inscribed in the text, to the text-reader dialectic, where the role of the interpreter is given more attention as readers exert themselves to decode and understand the communiqué. Considering both the author-text and the text-reader aspects of hermeneutics implies that there is no communication without understanding and there is no understanding without a person reading or hearing the message followed by an active deciphering of language in order to grasp what has been conveyed.

Who does hermeneutics and when?

- All of us
- All of the time
- We are always looking, listening, and interpreting what is going on around us
 - What did they say?
 - What did they mean?
 - What is that car ahead of me going to do?
 - What is that politician really saying?
- Hermeneutics is part of being a human, part of the human condition, a human attribute.

Most Pentecostal-Evangelical hermeneuts give the bulk of their interpretive attention to the human author's role in writing the Bible as opposed to the involvement of the exegetes in determining meaning, except for acknowledging their presuppositions and biases that impede understanding. The authors, using their own worldviews, languages, and cultural perspectives, received God's message as inner revelations and burdens in their hearts and minds and then, using their unique, personal attributes and inspired by the Holy Spirit, penned God's words using their very own words. Some scholars speak of the dual authorship of the Bible—the divine and human authors, which gives Scripture both its supreme authority and eternal relevance due to divine authorship and demands interpretation because of the historical occasionality and human dimensions of the text.

This aspect of human participation, not only in writing, but also discovering and creating meaning is highlighted when considering intertextuality, when a later biblical author imported a passage from an earlier inspired writer to explain a recent event or to proffer a new rationale for an innovative belief or practice. For example, when Peter delivered his Day of Pentecost sermon, he altered Joel's inspired text (Acts 2:17-21/Joel 2:28-32) by replacing words ("last days" for "afterwards"), making additions ("God says" and "they will prophesy"), reversing the order (old men will dream dreams/young men will see visions) and selectively eliminating the final phrases of the original text (only the first line of Joel 2:32 is included in Peter's sermon).

Peter's Redaction of Joel 2

This is THAT . . .

Does Acts 2 fulfill Joel's prophecy?

In the last days (**afterwards**), **God says**,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people
Your sons and daughters will prophesy
Your young men will see visions
Your old men will dream dreams

Last days, God says: additions by Peter

Order reversed

These changes are attributed to the creative inspiration of the Holy Spirit working in Peter. He was able to take an inspired Old Testament text, bring it into a new context, manipulate its words and aspects of its meaning, and creatively deliver a new, contextual meaning and message to his Jerusalem audience. He did more than merely discover established, inscribed meaning; he created new meaning. One might say he played loosely with the Old Testament text. But when it comes to

Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days
And they will prophesy. (added by Peter)

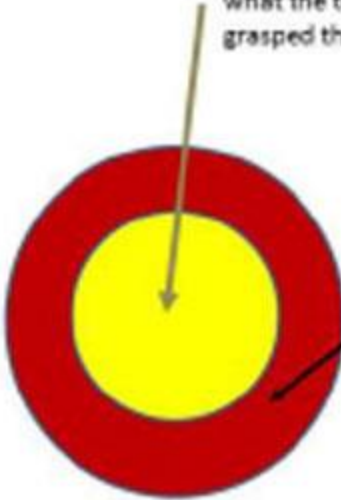
The means of receiving prophetic messages are
visions and dreams.

Peter adds the final phrase reemphasizing the
fact that the outpouring of the Spirit produces
prophesy (prophetic speech: glossolalia and
mother tongue language)

contemporary interpretation, the hermeneutical rule of Evangelicals and Pentecostals is that interpreters participate minimally by merely decoding and understanding the message. Does interpretation require some creation of meaning by the reader as the text is investigated, the implications formulated, and contextualized meanings proposed?

Conscious and Unconscious Meaning

The conscious meaning of Matthew in his Gospel.
The meaning is bounded by his consciousness—what he meant is what the text means—no more, no less. This is the meaning he grasped that was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.



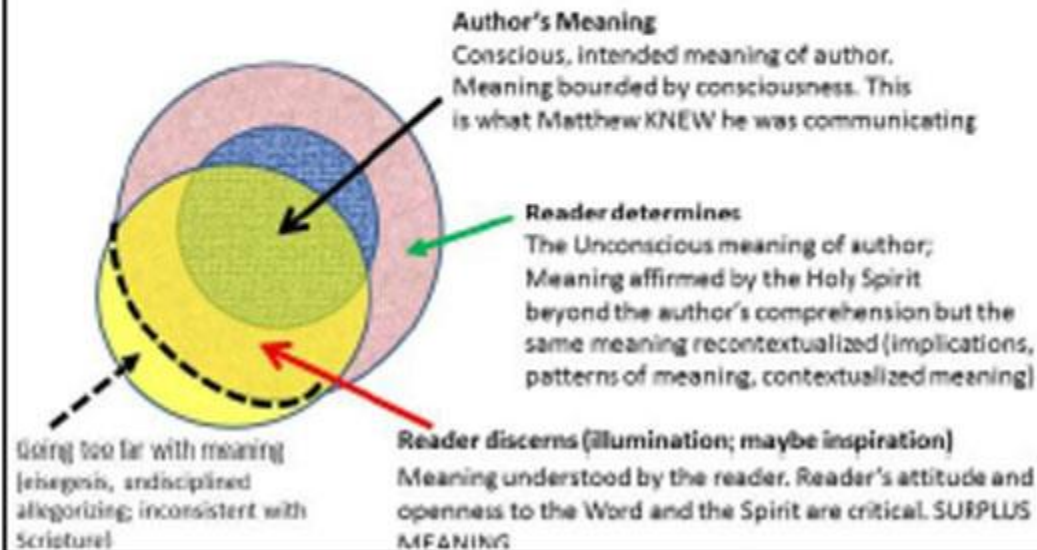
TWO DIMENSIONS OF UNCONSCIOUS MEANING

Unconscious meaning communicated by the author. The text has implications or an extended meaning beyond Matthew's conscious intent.

The **PLENIOR** meaning affirmed by the Holy Spirit beyond the author's comprehension. No one can fully grasp the mind of God nor His revelation. God communicates more than Matthew knew and realized. This could be called a **SURPLUS of MEANING**. This dimension of God's communication could surpass implications and provide new and relevant revelation for the contemporary reader.

The idea being suggested is not an appeal for unbounded creativity, otherwise known as allegorization or spiritualization that ignores the inspired historical meaning grounded in the text, but it leaves room for the Holy Spirit to provide contemporary meaning beyond the original author's conscious meaning similar to what Peter did with Joel's words. In the same way that the New Testament writers reinterpreted the Old Testament through the lens of the resurrected Lord, the Holy Spirit can employ modern readers in Africa and beyond to exegete the text using traditional methods and then enlarge or extend the meaning or illumine new particular meaning to address new realities emerging in the twenty-first century that have never previously existed. The same God who spoke into the particularities of the past will speak relevantly to the new conditions because He still speaks to the pressing needs of the human heart.

Conscious and Unconscious Meaning



Jesus used parables to force His audience to actively listen and participate in filling in gaps of unstated meaning. In all communication, but especially with poetry and figures of speech, there are terms and phrases that have some degree of indeterminacy. There are intentional gaps in the communication and some aspects of purposeful ambiguity that anticipate the listener creating and completing the meaning. It seems that the Bible demands active engagement and even creativity to understand God's intended message for the existential moment and be confronted with the convicting and transforming power of the Spirit. In actuality, when one deduces implications, configures patterns of meaning, proposes extended meaning, deduces theological principles, and engages in contextualization, the interpreter is creatively going beyond the author's intended meaning for his audience in order to carry a modified, possibly transfigured meaning into unfamiliar territory for the sake

Is all the meaning located in the text?

- ▣ **Is interpretation just about FINDING meaning inscribed in the text?**
- ▣ **Can meaning exist without someone to decode and interpret? Does one only unpack meaning without altering or affecting the meaning?**
- ▣ **Does one grasp all the meaning that is located in the text (intended by the author)?**
- ▣ **Could God say more through the inspired, written words than the author intended to communicate?**

of God's contemporary people.
Amos Yong comments:

Central to the Christian tradition is the conviction that theological understanding is a gift of God the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-16) whereby the interpreter relies on the gracious (charismatic) activity of the Spirit to reveal and illumine divine truths. This requires the interpreter to be open to the unpredictable movements of the Spirit who "breaks in to" (or "breaks through") the interpreter's situation and enables interpretive activity to commence in and through the same Spirit. ... Awareness of the historical situatedness and social locatedness of the interpreter has raised one of the central hermeneutical questions of our time: how is it that truly novel interpretations emerge? ... Such novelty emerges in part through the creative faculty of the imagination. The imagination is not only world-affirming (re-productive) but also world-making (creative). ²⁶

While the West typically prefers to keep interpretation as a cognitive, intellectual exercise, it should be noted that communication and understanding involve more than intellect. God's revelation to the biblical authors and His communication to contemporaries, both through Scripture and through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, involve more than the mind; it includes the affective and the physical. Understanding affects being and is holistic. As one considers the sacred text, is it enough to mentally grasp the message? It seems the reason Christians love and read Scripture is not simply to intellectually know what has been written and to decode the meaning. It is to know the Communicator. Because most Pentecostals and Evangelicals believe the Bible is God's self-revelation ²⁷ where God speaks to His people through words inspired by the

Holy Spirit, in one's attempts to understand the text, the reader endeavors to know and experience God. Does one read the book to understand the message apart from knowing the Author of the book? One reads to know Him in whom is Life, to learn His ways, and then to love, be transformed by, and serve Him. Palmer's expanded definition of hermeneutics integrates well with Clark H. Pinnock's "Scripture Principle," which asserts:

The Bible is the primary and fully trustworthy canon of Christian revelation, the reliable medium for encountering and understanding the God who seeks to transform all persons who read the sacred text into the image of Jesus Christ. In this regard, when we affirm the term "inerrancy," we basically mean the belief that Scripture never leads one astray in regard to what it intentionally teaches.²⁸

If hermeneutics is understanding, and if understanding leads to personal relationship with the Divine, hermeneutics is more than epistemology—how we come to know and what we know. The ultimate objective of hermeneutics surpasses a mere cognitive, intellectual knowing and understanding of the triune God. Intimate, personal, relational knowledge of Him resulting in the transformation of the reader into the image of Jesus Christ through the inner working of the Holy Spirit is the supreme purpose of hermeneutics. As a result, hermeneutics is not only epistemology, it is ontology—a study of being. In conclusion, hermeneutics is the pursuit of a holistic understanding of the divine Author of the Book, who reveals himself through the historical particularities of Scripture in order that people will be changed by the Spirit to be more like Jesus and serve His Kingdom purposes.

Major Interpretive Approaches to Scripture in Africa Today

Interpretive Methods in Africa

- ▣ Literalizing
- ▣ Allegorizing
- ▣ Evangelical
- ▣ Proto-Evangelism, Pro-ATRs
- ▣ African Initiated Churches (AICs)
- ▣ Intercultural Hermeneutics
- ▣ Environmental-Earthkeeping
- ▣ Feminist
- ▣ Reconstructionism
- ▣ Africana

Literalism

What could be labeled a radical literalism is used by sincere readers of Scripture in Africa who interpret the text as though it is fully inspired and authoritative, but came directly from God to them. There is no concern for or even awareness of human authorship or historical context. The text has meaning independent of what the human author intended to convey. Robert Stein refers to this approach as “semantic autonomy.”²⁹ Yet the Africans who approach the text this way are not like the Western interpreter who sees Scripture as an independent work of art that has its own independent existence and emanates meaning apart from a person who reasoned, thought, and wrote to convey a message. For many African Pentecostal practitioners, there is inspired meaning in the text, but the author is God, and He is communicating to them in their situation. The human author functioned merely as God’s scribe and is irrelevant in determining the meaning of the passage.

At times, interpreters demonstrate sensitivity to the literary characteristics of the text in terms of emphases or repeated terms or phrases. They may distinguish between referential or literal speech acts and commissive or figurative language.³⁰ But the message is interpreted through the lenses of the immediate cultural, social, and spiritual context—God’s Word given directly to the contemporary audience.

Allegorization

Allegorization is practiced frequently across all denominations in Africa. This approach depends on the creative imagination of the reader who envisions spiritual truths in the

text without considering the historical or literary contexts or authorial intent.³¹ Michael Kyomya reports that the allegorical method “takes things out of context and spiritualizes them. It relies on ideas triggered by coincidences and remote associations.”³² For example, African students report sermons on David’s battle with Goliath (1 Sam. 17:40) where the five stones represent the five wounds of Jesus, the five letters in the name J-E-S-U-S, the five-fold gifts in the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers; Eph. 4:11) or the five books of Moses. Among many congregants there is an assumption that the more ingenious the interpretation, the more spiritual the preacher. Creative allegory plus charismatic delivery usually guarantees large crowds and great enthusiasm.

Evangelical Interpretation

An example of Evangelical hermeneutics, which is pervasive in Africa among Pentecostals and Evangelicals who have received Bible school and seminary training, is provided by Michael Kyomya. In the introduction to his African-published text, *A Guide to Interpreting Scripture: Context, Harmony and Application*, Darrell L. Bock, Kyomya’s mentor from Dallas Theological Seminary, writes, “Kyomya expertly opens up how to read the Bible with an eye to finding its message, not creating one of our own, and thus it is a joy to commend this book.”³³ Kyomya, like Bock, asserts that interpretation is not about what a text means to the reader as thoughts are “triggered” from the examination of the text—this meaning is “wholly subjective” and lacks “objective control in a recognition of the plain sense of the text set in its historical context.”³⁴ The proper meaning of the biblical text is what the author intended.³⁵ Using the historical-grammatical method, the reader seeks the plain, normal meaning of the words, respecting rules of grammar and guidelines for interpreting figures of speech. Kyomya states that this method “believes in the supernatural and that Scripture is inspired by God. It takes Scripture at face value—it accepts what the text says and does not explain it away.”³⁶

Biblical interpretation requires keen observation and the asking of many questions of the text.³⁷ Two contexts are critical to consider as one attempts to locate the meaning in the text: the literary context and the historical. Of the two, Kyomya indicates that the literary is more significant.³⁸ While the historical context augments the literary context, the literary takes precedence. While words have a range of possible meanings, when a word is employed in the text, it has only one meaning. The literary context will help determine the meaning of the referents and establish the flow of thought.

Kyomya’s interpretive scheme corresponds exactly with Evangelical hermeneutics from the West such as Daniel M. Doriani of Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri; Robert H. Stein, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky; and Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, Massachusetts. Kyomya emphasizes two significant contexts as does Doriani: the literary and the historical. The literary context includes the written text consisting of words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and surrounding paragraphs. The reader is able to grasp what any competent reader would understand who attentively studies the text.³⁹ Regarding the historical context, one considers the culture, customs, language, beliefs, history of the characters in the story, and that of the author and original audience in order to determine the author’s intent in meaning, purpose, and what the audience might have heard as they read and heard the words for the first time.⁴⁰

Scripture interprets Scripture, and Scripture is in harmony with itself.⁴¹ Kyomya recommends finding biblical texts that have a cultural-historical context similar to the contemporary one being addressed so that the lessons and principles derived from the text are relevant.⁴² He also advises the interpreter to examine a topic across the broad panorama of Scripture to see all that is written on the subject. Because Scripture interprets Scripture and because Scripture is in harmony with itself, one can integrate all that is said concerning a particular subject to be sure one's message is true and trustworthy. While some biblical statements may seem to contradict others, the Bible complements itself, provides a unified meaning even though there are diverse approaches to issues, and includes progressive revelation.

Kyomya does not outline specific procedures for moving from text to principle or from exegesis to hermeneutics, but simply encourages the interpreter to grasp the overall lesson found in a passage, verify that this lesson is presented elsewhere in the Bible, and then make appropriate application for the listener. Fee and Stuart stress that biblical interpretation must start with exegesis and move to hermeneutics, first learning to hear the original meaning in the contexts of its own day,⁴³ because "a text cannot mean what it never meant ... in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken."⁴⁴ Doriani proposes that one determine the original meaning of a passage; find the principle behind the words, actions, instructions, or illustrations in the text; apply the principle to a similar situation for a contemporary audience; and verify the conclusions by comparing them to other Scriptures.⁴⁵ While Doriani, Stein, Fee, and Stuart are more detailed in their methodologies, their procedures and conclusions are very similar to Kyomya.

Oleka stresses the necessity of interpreting the meaning of the Bible and transferring that meaning into the African cultural context without doing violence to the biblical text. While Kyomya is silent about the role of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process, Oleka comments, "The key to unlocking the power of Scripture is the intelligent and rational illumination of the Spirit of God to our minds and hearts."⁴⁶ He explains that Jesus knew His instructions to the disciples were incomplete, but because the disciples were not ready to comprehend all that He could teach them, He promised to send the Holy Spirit who would further teach them and interpret all aspects concerning the truth of the Son of God. The Spirit came to help them recall what Jesus taught and to lead them into new areas of divine truth.⁴⁷ Today, the Spirit continues to help Christians learn and interpret truth properly so as to understand and apply it in their daily lives. As the text is read, the interpreter needs to be aware of his or her own biases or pre-understanding that can alter the intended meaning and prevent one from listening to God's message in the text.⁴⁸

Evangelical interpretation in the African context always includes application, which is usually contextualized for the audience. In fact, it is not uncommon for a sermon to be almost exclusively application with little accompanying exposition. Kyomya, however, comments that proper application must be based on proper interpretation and must compare the context of the passage with that of the audience.⁴⁹

Robert Stein states that the meaning of a text is what the author consciously intended or purposely willed to say by his text; the meaning of the text is controlled by the author.⁵⁰ But while holding to this traditional Evangelical approach of Stein's, it is a

little surprising that Kyomya claims that human and divine authors “never contradict each other, although sometimes the divine author intends a referent that is grander and deeper than the human author realized.”⁵¹ But he is quick to explain that this grander, deeper meaning is found in prophecies, types and prefigurements, such as the sacrificial lamb ultimately referring to Christ. Fee and Stuart speak of lessons that are explicit (only these can be normative)⁵² or implicit (clearly implied without actually being stated), but add that narratives, whether from the Old or New Testaments, usually do not teach any doctrines, but record what happened.⁵³ It seems the Evangelical, highly rational approach prefers to limit inspired meaning to what can be determined by the interpreter to be consciously willed and explicitly expressed intent located in propositional genres.

Consistent with Western Evangelical hermeneutics, texts have one meaning, according to African Evangelicals. Sam Oleka states, “There is only one interpretation to every given Scripture text but there could be several applications to it.”⁵⁴ Likewise, parables have one main point and possibly several sub-points.⁵⁵ Doriani proposes that parables have one main point seen through many perspectives.⁵⁶ Stein claims that a parable has one basic point and that details are added “to provide local color and interest, but they do not carry with them a corresponding reality.”⁵⁷ If the interpreter presses the details, he or she may generate more meaning than the author intended and cloud the main message of the parable. Doriani describes three types of details in parables and other components of Scripture: the essentials, the accidentals, and the teasers.⁵⁸ The essentials provide details for the story and provide the historical and literary structure to support the flow of thought. Accidental details make the story interesting, but are not essential and play no role in the text. The teasers simply add color but are seldom important to the story line. While many Africans in Evangelical and Pentecostal training centers would acknowledge these instructions, they would view this perspective as minimalistic. In turn, they would find deep truths and multiple truths in the details.

Stein notes that the different evangelists used the same parables of Jesus to convey a particular message to their distinct audiences. But he insists that each evangelist’s meaning or pattern of meaning and the pattern of meaning willed by Jesus, when the parable was actually spoken, are the same even if the application is different due to the context of the readers.⁵⁹

Kyomya urges Christians to read Scripture for themselves to guard against false teaching—a noble aspiration in the midst of oral cultures, but challenging when one in three adults (63 percent) and 47 million youths (ages 15-24) are illiterate.⁶⁰ According to African Pentecostal practitioners, many Africans do not enjoy reading. This reality is reinforced with the African proverb: If you want to safely hide money, put it in a book.⁶¹

Proto-Evangelism, Pro-African Traditional Religion Approach

A generous, grace-filled examination of African Traditional Religion (ATR) has been the aspiration of African scholars like John S. Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, and Jomo Kenyatta⁶² who attempted to dignify the rich, cultural heritage of Africa’s people trampled and scorned by Western colonialists, civilizers, and christianizing missionaries. In the context of the radical critique and utter rejection of African religions by Western missionaries, along with their belittling perspective of African cultures, customs, and languages, these

African "Christian" scholars sought to explain ATRs and provide respectability for the religious systems that preceded the coming of Christian envoys. Ukachukwu Manus succinctly defends the African perspective: "African traditions and cultures possess rich values which must be guarded and jealously defended. Africans need to affirm, appraise and appreciate their past in order to fully appreciate their present and future predicament in a world that is fast shrinking through technological advances in travel and telecommunications."⁶³

While missionary ethnographies portrayed the traditional concepts of God as defective and deistic, Mbiti describes God as Creator, holy, all-powerful, the keeper and upholder of the universe, totally transcendent, but also very immanent, a theistic rather than deistic view of God.⁶⁴ Mbiti writes, "God is outside and beyond [the universe]. At the same time, since he is also its sustainer and upholder, he is very close to the universe."⁶⁵ However, he admits that "God cannot be explained, he cannot be fully known ...people know only very little about God ... his real nature remains a great mystery and a great marvel."⁶⁶

At the "center" of the universe are human beings created by God. They serve as mediators between God and the created order, including fellow human beings, spirits, and nature, to maintain the harmony and order instilled in creation by its Maker. Because people were created by God, they are religious and their African religion dominates all aspects of life and thinking.⁶⁷ Mbiti states, "Africans are notoriously religious."⁶⁸

Without giving the details of how it happened, African Traditional Religion recognizes a separation between God and people. Many myths and traditions describe some type of offense made against God, which has created the distance.⁶⁹ However, in the gap between the abode of God and the earthly home of people is the realm of the spirits consisting of lower deities, spirits, ancestral spirits, angels, demons, and impersonal powers. Mbiti stresses that these powers are merely remembered and honored by people, but not worshipped. People both pray directly to God, he claims, and appeal to the members of the spirit realm to intercede with God on their behalf.

A group of special human mediators communicate with the spirit world. They go by a host of titles, including priests, shamans, witches, sorcerers, mediums, seers, prophets, diviners, and medicine men or women.⁷⁰ It is believed that some of these specialists are called to this role by the spirits themselves. Others are trained to function by or inherit the capacity from veteran specialists. Sam Oleka mentions that there continue to be many diviners and mediums today.⁷¹

According to ATR, God gave humans moral guidelines to govern their relationships with him, their immediate and extended families, and tribes. The rules and values are taught through repeated rituals and internalized in order to maintain great respect and fear for God, preserve the well-being and dignity of the community, safeguard their symbiotic relationship with nature, and insure mutually beneficial bonds with the spirits, especially the ancestral spirits called the living dead.⁷² Breaking taboos through ignorance, neglect, innovation, or intentional rebellion is viewed as offensive acts against deceased ancestors and results in judgment from the ancestral spirits and ostracism from family and friends. Sacrifices to the angered spirits and conformity to societal norms

reestablishes harmonious relationships and replaces death, disease, drought, storms, and curses with life, health, rains, fertility, peace, and blessings.

Even if people convert to Christianity, Mbiti claims, they do not completely abandon their traditional religion.⁷³ They may be practicing Christians, but when crisis comes, they revert to the traditional ways of seeking to know who has caused their plight and the solutions for neutralizing the destructive powers unleashed against them. Intervention and intercessions are made with the inhabitants of the spirit realm to reestablish wholeness, harmony, and blessing.

Byang H. Kato has leveled stinging criticism against perspectives like those of Mbiti. While acknowledging that there is an abundance of general revelation about the nature of God, salvation alone comes through God's special revelation found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the living Word, and recorded in the Bible, the written Word.⁷⁴ "General revelation does not, and cannot, bring salvation."⁷⁵ Rather than the cause of people's problems being offended and capricious spirits, he asserts that "all human tragedies come as a result of sin."⁷⁶ The spiritual craving and worship of spirit beings, according to Kato, expresses humanity's innate search for truth. This spiritual hunger is satisfied only when Africans encounter the incarnate Christ raised from the dead. He appeals for Africans and foreign envoys,⁷⁷ who have allowed the Word of God to judge and destroy every element of culture that is incompatible with biblical Christianity, to proclaim an undiluted, non-syncretized, contextualized gospel. African evangelists must refute universalism and pluralism acknowledging that Jesus alone is the "Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6) no matter how unpopular this message may become.⁷⁸ For Africans who have accepted Jesus as Savior, he admonishes them to "remain Africans wherever their culture does not conflict with the Bible. It is the Bible that must judge the culture. Where a conflict results, the cultural element must give way."⁷⁹ And he appeals to Africa's Christian scholars to contribute to global Christian theology that benefits the Church universal rather than squandering their time defending African Traditional Religions which are "incompatible with biblical teaching."⁸⁰ Pius Tembu, affirming Kato's position on some of the rituals upheld by African Religionists, comments, "Nasty practices in the culture are baptized but not transformed"—they take on Christian forms, but still retain traditional, spiritual significance.⁸¹

Pentecostal Christianity has been well-received by ATRs because it comes as the gospel of peace and power—peace with God through the sacrifice He provided in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and power through the Holy Spirit over demonization, sickness, and spiritual assaults. God's Spirit is available to indwell every Christian life and gift them with abilities to build up the community and create unity. Rather than condoning the ATR belief that death is merely the translation of the human spirit from the domain of the living to the realm of the living dead, where the spirits of the dead are believed to be fully present and active among the living, death for the Christian is the safe and instant passage into the presence of Jesus Christ.⁸² Biblical morals and ethics serve to safeguard the sanctity of life, family, and tribe, and call for a responsible preservation of nature and the environment. Coupled with its commitment to indigenous church principles and cultural respect, Pentecostalism provides a Christian worldview similar to their proto-gospel perspective, but with the holy and discerning power of the Spirit to deliver from spiritual bondage and transform people into the nature of Christ. Pentecostalism has been quick to adopt indigenous worship styles that are meaningful

and appealing and offers Christian rituals as visible, tangible expressions to complement their subjective faith.

African Initiated Churches

The interpretive scheme of the African Initiated Churches (AICs)⁸³ involves the appropriation of the biblical text in their own ways based on their worldview, training, and experiences. In all cases, the goal is to relate the Bible to their immediate cultural context with minimal influence from Western values and tutelage. Mark R. Gornik explains that the premise underlying all dynamics in the AICs is that what one encounters in the church is founded in Africa by Africans for Africans, culturally intelligible to the African worldview, lead and organized by Africans, and unique and independent from Western forms and structures when it comes to ecclesiology.⁸⁴ While presenting an African perspective of God and the gospel, John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II comment that the AICs emphasize the importance of prophecy and the prophetic movement, moral rigor in the lives of their adherents, daily experiences with the power of the Holy Spirit to thwart the works of spiritual and physical enemies,⁸⁵ and fervent prayer.⁸⁶ In the words of the members of the Organization of African Instituted Churches, the OAIC Manifesto declares:

The Independent Churches were attempts by African Christians to live our Christian faith in our own national garb without an *a priori* theologizing. We sought to establish a Christianity of the Bible as we saw it, without Western additions and in harmony with our own cultural heritage. We attempted to come to grips with the traditional beliefs and practices and worldviews implied; to make the Christian faith come alive to our own thought processes and culture.⁸⁷

Although the AICs originally may have been the result of a protest movement against missionary leadership, doctrine, and practice, a breakaway from missions-founded churches, or the secession of one African leader from another for either spiritual, leadership, financial, or social reasons, these churches are unique in their “constructive reinterpretation of Christianity on African terms.”⁸⁸ Most founders of AICs report that revelations, prophecies, or dreams directly from God propelled them into leadership. The AICs could be viewed as the metamorphosis of Ethiopianism, which remonstrated against what African Christians considered a Western captivity and perversion of the gospel. Rather than function now as a protest movement, the AICs are pursuing an authentic African cultural identity and spirituality rooted in indigenous translations of the Bible that address the hopes and fears of Africans. These exigencies include divine provision and prosperity in the face of debilitating poverty, physical health and security, protection from demonic schemes, political justice, and the deliverance from tribalism and racism. They have revised the three-self church model using the terminology of self-motivating, self-contextualizing, and self-critical.⁸⁹ Added to the three-self model is a new missional and cross-cultural thrust, which has resulted in African-initiated churches being planted across Europe and the United States and churches in Africa becoming more multicultural and less tribalistic.⁹⁰

In general, both Western missionaries and the African leaders of missions-founded churches have been critical of the AICs’ doctrines and practices.⁹¹ In some cases, their doctrines seem unorthodox or deviant with an extra-biblical overemphasis on angels, the demonic, prophylactics against the evil powers of the spirit world, deliverance

required of all believers, overemphasis on prosperity,⁹² and extreme views regarding divine healing. The Manifesto responds: "In spite of the interpretation many in the Western world give to the AICs, most of us are stable, growing churches with a Christian doctrine based on the Bible as sole authority, a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit, faith in the God of the Bible and confidence in its promises."⁹³ While recognizing the general lack of Bible education among their leaders, the AICs believe they have presented a helpful perspective in terms of a holistic worldview that avoids the typical Western compartmentalizing between the sacred and profane, spiritual and material, the supernatural and natural, the living and the living-dead, the church and the marketplace, and the individual and the communal life of the church.⁹⁴

One must be gracious in evaluating the AICs as they attempt to contextualize the gospel for the African setting. Regarding the merging of the gospel and African culture, Pobe rightfully observes that culture is the solvent of religion.⁹⁵ In some cases, their doctrines and practices clearly do not align with Scripture. Because of their independent nature, they lack accountability for their leadership styles and structures, finances, doctrines, and practices. However, in others, they are biblical and responding to human need with a greater compassion and sensitivity to the supernatural activity of the Spirit than traditional Pentecostals or Evangelicals. It could be that some of the criticism is driven by jealousy due to the exponential growth of the AICs, which has drawn members from the mission-founded and Pentecostal fellowships. Some traditional Pentecostals have learned from the AICs and now are employing AICs' content and methodology in their attempts to respond to felt needs by preaching more frequently on prosperity, protection, promotion, and divine health. Enson Lwesya's evaluation as an Assemblies of God educator, pastor, and missiologist is helpful. He observes that the AICs are committed to prayer, evangelism, missions, salvation in Christ alone, repentance, Bible-centered preaching, and holy living; they simply have a few areas where they lack balance.⁹⁶ In general, the concern of African Pentecostal practitioners is that the AICs not only preach the gospel, but place an inordinate emphasis on tangible, material blessings such as healings, prosperity, and promotion. Large crowds are attracted because every service is an event; the leaders are very charismatic and promise blessings, but little is said about obedience to the moral laws of Christ, service, spiritual fruit-bearing, sacrificial giving, or taking up one's cross and following Jesus no matter the cost or degree of suffering.⁹⁷

Intercultural Hermeneutics

Intercultural hermeneutics, developed by Ukachukwu Chris Manus,⁹⁸ begins the biblical interpretive process by examining one's own culture, value system, worldview, and contextual experiences and proceeds with the reading of a biblical text from the indigenous perspective to draw out lessons and principles relevant to the reader's situation. Manus claims that African norms, values, principles and insights, suppressed for decades by European and North American academics and clergy, must take preeminence in the reading of Scripture in order to effectively address material, moral, and spiritual problems that beset contemporary Africans.⁹⁹ He reinforces Mugambi's assertion that each generation must critique inherited dogma and practices as to their contemporary significance. Some doctrines remain relevant; others need to be updated. Other doctrines need to be replaced due to changes in context and circumstances.¹⁰⁰ This method involves trained interpreters working with ordinary readers to examine what Scripture says regarding contemporary issues. Ordinary readers are those who do

not belong among the elite, but are poor, survive on the periphery of society, come from the slums or rural settings, yet possess unbending faith in Christ.¹⁰¹ Once the cultural context is thoroughly examined, particular needs are identified that require a biblical response which can lead to transformation.

A text is pursued that seems to correlate to the chosen problem in the people's life situation. Regarding the biblical passage, emphasis is placed on the historical, cultural, social, political, and spiritual context from which the interpreter can determine the relevance of the passage for the existential concern. If the text's historical context has adequate similarities with the contemporary setting, the trained reader involves the ordinary readers in examining the text and identifying common socio-political, economic, and spiritual realities.

To help make the passage more relevant, the trained African expert selects a story, myth, parable, or proverb from the local culture that addresses similar issues. This component of folklore is presented along with the reading of Scripture, allowing the ordinary readers to recall their traditional beliefs, values, and social norms by which they can recognize common themes in both the folklore and the biblical text. The indigenous story brings out aspects of the biblical story when the two are compared. Manus believes the selected folk story serves as an interpretive key to re-reading the biblical text in the audience's own context and enhances their ability to discover spiritual insights that will help deal with their dilemma. Because there are common factors in the biblical story and the folklore, Christianity possesses emic meaning for them. Manus calls this aspect of intercultural hermeneutics the folklorist approach.¹⁰² Once the folk component is given and the biblical text read, the community is encouraged to ask questions of the biblical text that can provide insights in addressing their problem. The text is read with African eyes, asking, "What does the Word of God have to say in our contemporary African setting?"

As the biblical passage is analyzed, the trained reader emphasizes the historical context of the text, going "behind the text." Then the text is studied phrase by phrase blending insights from the biblical contextual perspective with those from the ordinary African contemporary point. Lessons and principles are formulated. Application is stressed. Rather than starting with universal church dogmas followed by searching for local application, the readers begin with the problems they face and then locate texts that speak meaningfully to those in that particular dilemma.¹⁰³

Environmental Hermeneutics

While still in its nascence, the earth-healing, eco-theological movement is growing, especially in the southern cone of Africa. The African Association of Earthkeeping Churches,¹⁰⁴ spearheaded by M. L. "Inus" Daneel, sees Christ's salvation not only intended for human individuals, but their relations with others and with nature. Solomon Zvanaka explains, "Earlier perceptions of God's salvation were limited to soul winning, targeting human persons alone, but the extension of salvation suggests that the entire earth-community (humans, animals, trees, the land, water, etc.) has a share in the event."¹⁰⁵

On one hand, this is a welcomed initiative on the continent that has suffered greatly from both colonial exploitation of natural resources and ongoing deforestation and

environmental pollution. Earthkeepers believe their mission mandate includes the liberation of literally all creation, including the environment, from what Daneel calls “the war on trees.”¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, Daneel’s approach has encouraged African Initiated Churches to embrace African Traditional Religions. ATRs already baptize in local rivers, fast and pray on mountain tops, retreat to wildernesses for fasting, and celebrate ritual festivals in the forests. They have quickly embraced Daneel’s form of Christianity. His hermeneutic has been well-received by some AICs, which already have a deep appreciation for nature and the symbiotic connections between ancestral spirits and the earth. But the Earthkeeping movement blurs the lines between a contextualized gospel and one that is syncretistic.¹⁰⁷ Eco-theology establishes an alliance between pastors, bishops, chiefs, spirit mediums, and local villagers and needs to be evaluated carefully for its biblical validity. For example, a common event that epitomizes Christian Earthkeepers is tree-planting Eucharist celebrations. Following the confession of sins against God, fellow-humans, spirits, and nature, with a tree sprig in one hand and the sacraments in the other, the participant finds reconciliation with God and nature as the naked, scarred earth is re-clothed.¹⁰⁸

Feminist Gender Reading

African women, along with some male advocates,¹⁰⁹ are increasingly addressing issues such as their place in ministry and in the church, Christian women in African culture, women in Scripture and their significance to God’s Kingdom, and theology, in general, as it relates to the dignity of women. The voiced concerns of women are gaining increased attention as more women find opportunities in the AICs for leadership, public ministry, and the employment of their spiritual gifts for the good of the believing community.¹¹⁰

Rejecting radical Western Christian feminism where gender identity and role definition are abandoned, Teresa M. Minga calls for a measured reformation of African patriarchal and male-dominated systems in the Christian struggle for the emancipation of and justice for women.¹¹¹ She notes the ambiguity of the missionary message that reinforced a chauvinistic interpretation of the Bible while advocating against polygamy, female circumcision, and widow inheritance. African female believers today prefer a Christology that views Jesus as a personal friend who provides solace and grants dignity; a pneumatic Jesus who dispenses His Spirit upon the lives of all who follow Him, both women and men, so that they can be empowered to participate in the mission of God; and Jesus as an “iconoclastic prophet” who judges against the status quo and champions the call for liberation and justice for all who have been marginalized, undervalued, exploited, abused, trafficked, and enslaved.¹¹²

Teresa Okure examines the pericope of Jesus raising Jairus’ daughter from death and simultaneously healing the woman with the twelve-year flow of blood (Luke 8:40-56).¹¹³ She notes that the woman with the hemorrhage was culturally unclean and contaminated anyone or anything she touched, including the hem of Jesus’ robe, yet Jesus’ sanctifying and healing power restored her to health and acceptance in society.¹¹⁴ His interview with her following the miracle reinforced her courageous act of faith, which caused her to boldly and desperately breach legal taboos. Jesus publicly acknowledged her wellness, secured her social status as a “daughter of Abraham,” and established a personal relationship between himself and this woman who had previously been an unidentified person amidst a great crowd.

The twelve-year old daughter, still a child and dependent, was loved by her father, but he was impotent to alter her situation. After her resuscitation from death, Jesus warned the family not to broadcast the miracle. However, the child's very life among those who knew of her demise testified to Christ's power over death, His love for a young girl, His concern for the restoration of the family, and His provision of hope for a blessed future as adulthood would soon dawn.

Okure summarizes that both incidents were clouded in hopelessness except for the presence of Christ. Each case required people to arise, overcome scorn and isolation, confront religious traditions, and determine to approach Jesus in faith. Okure appeals to women, in spite of social and ecclesiastical hindrances, to follow these biblical examples and rise above intimidation, inferiority, and prejudice through the acceptance and power of Christ. He can restore them to their rightful, God-given place in society and in the church. "For Africa will not arise unless its womenfolk, the mothers and bearers of life, arise. ... May God give us the will to arise and the desire genuinely to help one another and the whole continent to arise."¹¹⁵

After reviewing the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the four Gospels and Paul's Epistles, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike petitions each woman to "stop playing it safe and influence the world by affecting it with her dynamic response as Mary did."¹¹⁶ She reports that Mary faithfully fulfilled her role as a mother, endured poverty and foreign domination, suffered from false accusations and social stigmatization, and yet praised God for His saving, liberating, and dignifying intervention (see Luke 1:46-55). She was a freethinking, active, daring woman who unilaterally offered herself to God and His service. She functioned as a theologian pondering the significance of her personal revelations and experiences regarding her Son (1:29; 2:19, 51). She remained humble, continued to learn from her divine offspring, and in the totality of her feminine dignity played a key role in God's salvation history. For African women, "Mary will be the *exemplar par excellence*."¹¹⁷ As a result of scholarly and practical efforts, more and more women are having opportunities to use their God-given abilities to serve the church and society. While still facing hurdles, doors are opening.

Reconstructionism

Jesse Mugambi has taken the lead in propagating reconstructive hermeneutics.¹¹⁸ While liberation hermeneutics was the interpretive approach before and during the time of Africa's battles for political liberation from colonial and ideological powers with Moses and the Exodus providing the motif for reading Scripture, Nehemiah and the post-exilic rebuilding of the nation of Israel have become the paradigm for interpreting Scripture now that political liberation has dawned. New Testament support for reconstruction comes from Jesus and His disciples who established believing communities that thrived and multiplied throughout the Greco-Roman world as the Roman Empire slowly collapsed. For Manus, a disciple of Mugambi, Jesus of Nazareth is the "master reconstructor of both the spiritual and the social wellbeing."¹¹⁹

Mugambi identifies the corruption and nepotism of African leaders, civil wars, and ethnically inspired conflicts as the major internal eroding forces retarding the benefits of political liberation and independence that came in the middle of the twentieth century.¹²⁰ The external powers, which impede restoration and must be overcome, are imperial domination, globalization, and Christian missionary expansion.¹²¹ These three

alien powers continue to prevent African nations, people, cultures, and churches from developing their own identities, socializing their people and nations, cultivating their own cultures and languages, and establishing their own prosperous economies. Self-identity, self-perception, self-description, and self-determination must be restored to the African people cruelly stripped from them by Euro-Americans. Globalization is viewed negatively as exploiting African people and resources, marginalizing and pauperizing the continent, and making Africans the “worst victims and losers in the implementation” of this economic and ideological agenda.¹²²

Because Mugambi believes that religion is at the core of people’s identity, he is sharply critical of modern missionary efforts that he claims have brought the Bible to Africa as a condemnation and negation of African culture.¹²³ In his opinion, missionaries attempt to disciple African converts into the image of their Euro-American mentors. Using foreign languages as the medium of training alienates the African student from the daily church life of his or her parish ultimately making the pastor and the Christian faith culturally distant from and non-indigenous to the local people. He seems convinced that the Western missionary enterprise is eternally linked to imperialism and will never be able to extricate herself from its usurping, exploitive, destructive, and pagan traits.¹²⁴ Restorationists report that “the missionaries, aware of the subjugation of the African peoples by the colonists, launched a crusade of christianizing the Africans they had encountered,” relying on the colonialists’ political, military, and economic might.¹²⁵

The goal of the reconstructive hermeneutic is the rebuilding of Africa’s political, social, spiritual, moral, and economic landscape and the healing of her nations, peoples, and identities.¹²⁶ Africa’s sons and daughters are responsible to rebuild the continent from the rubble of vicious wars propagated by the West and offer hope and affirmation for people downtrodden for centuries by external and internal tyrants.

While christianizing colonizers capitulated to temporal power, intolerance, and oppression, Africa’s reconstructive hermeneutic hopes to assert her own cultural-spiritual insights that will not only reform and rebuild Africa, but may lead “to the re-evangelization of the North Atlantic societies, which have become post-Christian during the twentieth century.”¹²⁷ Mugambi is confident that African spiritual innovators, freed from the shackles and influences of the West, will bring healing and restoration to Africa and the world as they read the biblical text from their immediate cultural and historical contexts. Africa’s self-esteem, dignity, and integrity will be healed by a vigorous study of the gospel.

Africana Hermeneutics

David Tuesday Adamo interprets the Bible looking for references to Africans, African civilizations, and African kingdoms concerning their participation in and impact on God’s salvation history.¹²⁸ His approach to the text is intended to counter the European-American perspective that dominated biblical scholarship in the twentieth century—removing, marginalizing, overlooking, and de-Africanizing the presence of Africa and Africans in Scripture and maintaining the view that “black Africa has no history before the introduction of western civilization by the European.”¹²⁹ Adamo, Thomas Oden,¹³⁰ and Tokunboh Adeyemo¹³¹ highlight the presence and contributions Africans, and in particular sub-Saharan Africans, have made to the metanarrative of Scripture, the development of ancient civilizations referenced throughout the Bible, and the

genesis of early Christian thinking. Africa's early cultures, languages, and international trade impacted the Mediterranean Basin and Fertile Crescent flowing northward from the confluence of the Blue and White Nile located on the southern extreme of the biblical "ends of the earth" (Matt. 28:20). Adamo writes, "Africa and Africans existed, played an important role and have made their presence felt not only in the ancient known world of Asia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, but also ancient Israel."¹³²

Adamo thoroughly examines such terms as Kush (Cush, NIV), Punt, Nehesi, and Ethiopia, which are found in Egyptian and Sumero-Akkadian inscriptions. He concludes that Kush refers to the ancient kingdom south of Egypt that ruled the regions of modern Sudan, Darfur and Kordofan from the seventeenth century B.C.E. to the Christian era.¹³³ From Kush came such biblical personalities as Moses' wife (Num. 12:1),¹³⁴ the rescuer of Jeremiah (Jer. 38:6-14; 39:16-18),¹³⁵ and African armies hired to ally with Judah to defeat Assyria (2 Chron. 3:8; 12:3-9; 32:9-15; 1 Kings 18:19-21).¹³⁶ Punt lies between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea.¹³⁷ Nehesi, a term found in Egyptian hieroglyphics, means "a black man or negro."¹³⁸ Ethiopia is derived from the words translated burnt-faced and refers to any black person.¹³⁹ Adamo observes that the use of "Ethiopia" roughly corresponds to Cush, Punt, and Nehesi.¹⁴⁰

Moses' use of the Table of Nations (Gen. 10), with references to tribes in Africa and beyond, is an early ethnographic description of real peoples and places with whom Hebrews had contact.¹⁴¹ According to Adamo, Nimrod (Gen. 10:6-12) could be an African. While Adamo admits that no exact identification of his identity and location can be determined, he is mindful that an ancient hero with a name similar to Nimrod exists among the Yoruba people of Nigeria.¹⁴² The Queen of Sheba, who came to Israel seeking to establish trade relations, originated from Africa, south of Egypt, rather than somewhere in Arabia (1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chron. 9:1-12).¹⁴³ Adamo is convinced that the prophet Zephaniah, son of Cushi, was an African who also was considered a full Israelite (Zeph. 1:1, 2:12).¹⁴⁴

Africa is clearly evident in the New Testament as the baby Jesus becomes an exile in Egypt where His parents seek refuge from Herod's mercenaries. An African, Simon, assists Jesus on the way to the cross (Matt. 27:32-33; Mark 15:21-22; Luke 23:26).¹⁴⁵ Africa is present at the first Pentecostal outpouring (Acts 2:10). Philip is led by the Holy Spirit to share the good news with the Ethiopian eunuch who returns home with great joy (8:27, 39). The first significant missionary-sending church has two Africans in the leadership team: Simeon called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene (13:1). One of the earliest Spirit-empowered preachers and apologetes is Apollos from Alexandria (18:24-19:1). And two Alexandrian-owned ships transport Paul to Rome from Caesarea (27:6; 28:11). One can only speculate regarding the lasting impact Paul's life, words, and miracles made on the African owners, captains, and crews. Truly God is the God of the nations, who has made all people in His image, holds them all accountable for the divine revelation they have received, and desires for all to be saved and freed from the power of sin through faith in Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior.

Thomas Oden references the significant contributions Africans made in the early centuries of Christianity until the veil of Islam descended beginning in the eighth century, muffling their impact and facilitating Eurocentric scholars to overlook the impact Africa had in grounding Christianity in both the Western Catholic and Eastern

Orthodox Churches. He also notes the influential evangelistic impact the African church must have had along the two great river systems of the Nile, whose mouth is the home of Alexandria (the Nile River runs over 4000 miles from south to north) and the Madjerda, which flows into the Mediterranean at Carthage (the Madjerda is approximately 300 miles long flowing through Modern Tunisia and Algeria).

Current African Pentecostal Readings

Pentecostal churches, by definition and tradition, emphasize an ongoing personal relationship with the Holy Spirit flowing out of a post-salvation encounter with the Spirit called "the baptism in the Holy Spirit." This encounter, which matures into a lifestyle of walking with the Spirit, empowers the person to verbally declare the gospel to the spiritually lost. The baptism in the Spirit enables the individual to function with charismatic gifts to edify the body of Christ, and enhances one's capacity to live holy. Pentecostals emphasize life in the Spirit, an ordinary,¹⁴⁶ consistent reading of Scripture, small groups for Bible study and accountability, prayer, demonstrative worship, testimonies, personal holiness, and apostolic function. Whether Pentecostalism in Africa originated from the centrifugal thrust of the Azusa Street Revival (1904-06) or was a separate and distinct move of God among people already dwelling in Africa,¹⁴⁷ this faith movement "has an innate ability to make itself at home in almost any context."¹⁴⁸ The vast majority of the earliest Pentecostal missionaries to arrive on African soil were committed to indigenous principles and partnership. Pentecostal churches were established with the expectation that they would be self-leading, self-supporting, and self-evangelizing. Many of the pioneer missionaries lacked a high degree of formal, theological seminary education while believing in the importance of Bible school preparation, the expatriate representatives of Christ more quickly trained and entrusted indigenes with pastoral leadership and preaching. Because Western Pentecostals believed in God's power to heal sickness and deliver the demonized, the missionary worldview was much closer to the local African Traditional Religious worldview than their Evangelical counterparts who brought to Africa a well-trained, theistic, cessationist, holistic modernistic perspective. For the African churches founded by Western Pentecostal missionaries, there was much less trauma and anger as the independence movement encompassed the continent beginning in the 1950s.

The majority of Traditional Pentecostal African churches maintain a healthy partnership relationship with its founding expatriate mission organization. The African church takes the lead, but requests assistance from the mission in terms of joint financial ventures, Bible school and seminary teachers, development of educational materials, and experts who are particularly skilled in areas of relief, development, and compassion ministries.

African Pentecostal Hermeneutics

- Read Scripture
- *Pray*
- Study and meditate on passage
- *Pray*
- Grammatical-historical consideration
- *Pray*
- Literalize – God is speaking directly to me/us
- Allegorize – for deeper impact and greater relevance
- ***Pray AND preach/teach AND apply***

In terms of biblical interpretation, African Pentecostal practitioners hold a very high view of the Bible as the Word of God. In preparation for teaching and preaching, the Bible is studied from a historical-grammatical perspective. Along with rational study, considerable time is devoted to prayer for spiritual insights into the meaning and application of the biblical message. The Bible is interpreted by blending sound exegesis and hermeneutics— looking for the author’s original meaning and implications that can be principlized and contextualized. At times it includes some over-literalization and limited amounts of allegory, but they spend the majority of the preaching time applying the lessons rather than explicating the text. Believers express a passion for ongoing Bible training, evangelism, discipleship, missions, and displays of the supernatural power of God. Educational opportunities are increasing for ministry-focused individuals and many Pentecostal denominations are placing greater stress on higher degrees of formal training. However, the vast majority of African Pentecostal pastors have earned an entry-level diploma for credentials and ministry, fewer are pursuing a bachelor’s degree, and even less are studying in master’s and doctoral programs.

A Twenty-first Century African Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Made to Travel

The challenges African Pentecostals will face in the next century, if the return of Jesus is delayed, are daunting. Pentecostal practitioners observe that their churches attempt to preach Christ and the crucified life along with balanced biblical doctrines, but they note that without a strong emphasis on healing, prosperity, promotion, and protection, adherents depart seeking churches where such blessings are promised. Unfortunately, too often, the leaders of these charismatic high profile worship centers fleece their

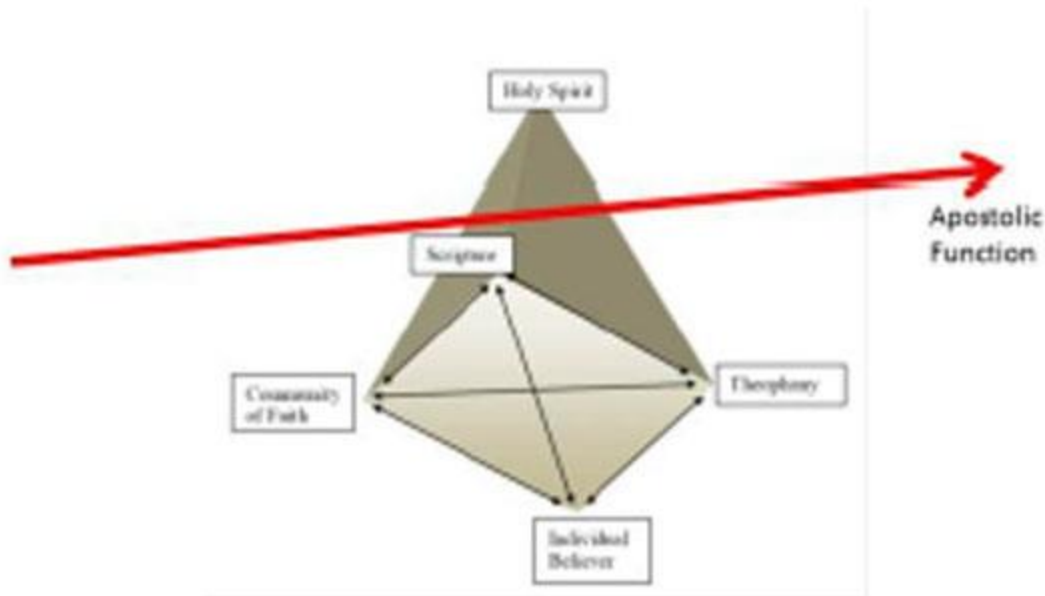
parishioners and fail the tests of biblical balance in terms of the full counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27), moral integrity, financial accountability, and servanthood.

Western and globalizing influences with their beneficial and detrimental features continue to sweep over the continent. Emphases on trade, health, and education appeal for the creation of new open markets, provide new medical technologies in the battle against HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, and offer subsidies for school buildings, educational materials, and international scholarships. However, economic negotiations usually benefit the Western partners more than the Africans except for a few political and financial elitists. Medical aid is helping with the HIV/AIDS pandemic, but the antiviral drugs continue to be cost-prohibitive for most victims. Condoms are distributed by universities and health organizations, but the caution is limited to "safe sex" rather than morally motivated abstinence and marital faithfulness. Meanwhile, in some countries, prostitution is being considered as a legal, lucrative profession while human trafficking increases.¹⁴⁹ Clean hospitals, safe clinics, professional medical assistance, and medications remain too expensive for the majority of ordinary citizens. Meanwhile some churches display the tendency to look exclusively to scientific methods for cures rather than to a miracle-working God or implement an approach where there is a prayerful, spiritual administration of drugs and medical assistance. Influences from the West for more education provide more seats for already overcrowded and inadequate facilities, but the education is increasingly secular, anti-Christian, pluralistic, anti-supernatural, humanistic, and anti-traditional African social values. Those who earn scholarships often join the ranks of the "brain drain," which depletes some of Africa's best by relocating them permanently in the West. In other cases, they return, but their views may be radicalized towards secularism, socialism, postmodernism, pluralism, ecumenism, Afrocentrism, and cessationism. There is a great need for African Pentecostal Christians to develop their own training materials that are scholarly, boldly Pentecostal, culturally African, affordable, and readily accessible.

The Church of the twenty-first century must address issues such as tribalism, biblically-guided political engagement, gender equality, a balanced ministry of evangelism and compassion, Pentecostal servant leadership, and a biblical assessment of African religions and traditional cultural practices. Due to time and space limitations, these topics will be considered at a later time.

This study will conclude by proposing an African Pentecostal hermeneutic that is fully biblical, culturally African, and unashamedly Pentecostal while being non-elitist, reliant on the Holy Spirit, and practical. This hermeneutical model is based on the first-century church's hermeneutical scheme described by Luke in Acts 2 and Acts 15 (see Figure 1). In both cases, urgent spiritual and cultural issues demanded that the church community address what they recognized as God's initiative at work within their social milieu. The model is diagrammed below in the form of a pentagram with the idea that each of the five vertices, which represent the key components in the hermeneutical process, mutually interface with each other forming ten dialectical relationships in what is called a pentadactic model. At the five points of the pyramid are the Holy Spirit, Scripture, theophany, the community of believers (the church), and the individual. The entire model is intended to have a missional purpose that functions to empower the church to fulfill the Great Commission, and the discipling of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20).

Pentadactic Model for Biblical Interpretation



In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit is present overseeing and orchestrating the entire momentous occasion. Suddenly there is a theophany where God manifests himself in objective forms as wind, fire, and *glossalalia*. A community of about 120 praying believers constitutes the church. This event is not the formation of the church because the body of believers, who loved, obeyed and worshipped Christ had already formed. The 120 are praying and obeying Him as they await the fulfillment of the promise. They experience the Holy Spirit directly, powerfully, and individually when they are filled with His presence. One individual among them, Peter, steps forward and speaks to the gathering crowd. He explains the theophanic encounter from Joel's text which he paraphrases and modifies under the Spirit's guidance. His exposition enlightens both those who directly experienced the Spirit's indwelling and those who are gawking. The ultimate purpose of this outpouring is the missional proclamation of the gospel that results in over 3000 conversions (Acts 2:41, 47). Related to the pentadactic model, the text provides the five components of the hermeneutical model: the Spirit; theophany; the individual interpreter, Peter; the Scriptures, Joel; and the community of faith, 120 Spirit-filled believers.

Acts 2 Model

How did God reveal himself and His will as He transformed lives?

- ✓ Spirit (outpoured and dwelling among His people)
- ✓ Theophany (wind, fire, tongues)
- ✓ Community (120)
- ✓ Individuals (Peter)
- ✓ Scripture (Joel 2:28-32)

The account of Acts 15, which has been previously examined by Kenneth Archer,¹⁵⁰ John C. Thomas,¹⁵¹ and Amos Yong,¹⁵² is organized into a tridactic model for interpretation which includes the Holy Spirit, Scripture, and Community. While the five aspects identified in the pentadactic model are present, these authors only discuss three. In the Acts 15 historical context, there had been numerous theophanies as the Spirit, outside of the church and without her endorsement, actively healed and embraced Gentiles such as at Cornelius' house and others throughout the missionary travels of Paul and Barnabas. In determining the Lord's will for the New Testament church regarding the inclusion of Gentile believers as full-fledged members in the body of Christ without circumcision or living Jewishly, James selected and explicated Amos 9:11-12 to help resolve the conflict. The conclusion, reached by the community, was that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and them to fully welcome the Gentiles who responded to the gospel message with repentance and faith. Each of the five contributors involved in this hermeneutical scheme will be discussed below.

Acts 15 Model

How did God reveal His will to the church regarding their acceptance of Gentile converts? Did they need to become Jews and live Jewishly?

- Holy Spirit (It seems good to the Holy Spirit and us)
- Theophany (testimonies of miracles among the Gentiles)
- Individuals (Barnabas, Paul, Peter, and James)
- Community (apostles and elders)
- Scripture (Amos 9)

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is placed on the top vertex of the pentadactic diagram to emphasize that for a robust Pentecostal Trinitarianism, the Spirit must be recognized as the creative breath of God that still sovereignly operates over all of God's creation as wind (John 3:8). He mediates the presence and work of the other members of the Godhead, draws people to and glorifies Christ, reveals the will of God, inspires and illumines Scripture, enlivens individuals and the church, and manifests divine power to the honor of the Father.

The Holy Spirit communicates through Scripture as He opens one's spiritual eyes to understand the written revelation, but it should be noted that the Holy Spirit's work precedes that of reading and understanding Scripture, both in the life of an individual and historically in the inscribing and canonizing of the Holy Bible. Before the Bible was, the Spirit was present. The Spirit continues to work directly in the lives of people to grant revelations of God and of His will. While the Spirit is not bound to Scripture when it comes to communicating with people and manifesting himself both inside and beyond the believing community, He often takes the words of Scripture to speak to people, but, the Spirit can speak *tabula rasa*.

Jesus said to His disciples that the Spirit would come after His departure and teach them all things and remind them of everything He had said to them (John 14:26). He added in His words to them,

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 16:12-15).

John's text indicates that the disciples had information overload at the moment due to the amount of truth they had received and the stressful circumstances they faced. After Jesus' departure, the Spirit was promised to come and continue the teaching process. They not only needed reinforcement of what they had received, the Spirit would further reveal the Persons of the Godhead, God's will, and His ways.

The "all truth" promised by Jesus Christ exceeds the Book and any collection of books or libraries. John himself reports that all he observed could not be written in his evangel (John 21:25). All that belongs to the Father, which has been given to the Son, is revealed by the Spirit to the people of God. The Spirit's revelatory teaching will continue into the eschaton. The dialectic with Scripture assures the Church that God does not contradict himself in His ongoing revelation, which requires the Church community to evaluate individual insights received from the Spirit. God's revelations through the Spirit will catalyze the Church to ever-expand its mission to the unengaged until Jesus returns. God's Spirit will lead the mission through supernatural manifestations, some which are spectacular, others unnoticed by the public eye.

Paul states that the Spirit enlightens human understanding in order to grasp the revelations of God (1 Cor. 2:10-16). While both Evangelicals¹⁵³ and Pentecostals¹⁵⁴ argue that one's mental capacity to understand Scripture depends on rational ability and educational training, Paul seems to differ. Stein claims that the educated unbelieving scholar can grasp the meaning of any biblical text. The problem for the unregenerate is in "significance." While understanding the message, it has little value or importance for that scholar. Gordon Anderson claims that the text has a fixed, objective meaning that all can equally access. He asserts that the possibility of the Spirit identifying deeper meaning is elitist and preposterous. Like Stein, he says the work of the Spirit is a matter of meaningfulness not meaning.¹⁵⁵

Paul's perspective is: "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God [the Spirit who knows the thoughts of God], that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Cor. 2:11, 12). He explains, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). This statement certainly agrees with Stein and Anderson that the Spirit affects significance and meaningfulness: "they are foolishness to him." But it says more—the Spirit aids understanding and discernment. Paul concludes with the rhetorical question: "Who has known the mind of the Lord . . . we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). His words imply that others do not have or know the mind of the Lord and lack His enablement for understanding and discernment. One could further speculate that the more one is filled with the Spirit, the greater one's ability to understand the mind of God. Could this perspective explain how many African Christians, including some who are illiterate, have such profound insights into the Person and will of God because they daily walk in the fullness of the Spirit? The dialectics in the pentadactic model between

Spirit, individual, and Scripture reveal the benefits of being filled with the Spirit when one examines Scripture. The more one is filled with the Spirit, the more one has knowledge of God and His will; the more one humbly listens to the Spirit and the written Word, the greater the understanding and discernment of the mind of the Lord. Simultaneously, the Spirit is able to speak to the community on behalf of the individual both with historical perspective and with present day wisdom and gifts of revelation. Because the Spirit is missional in equipping and compelling God's people to witness for Jesus Christ, the working of the Spirit through Scripture, to the individual, and to the community will have as her ultimate purpose the mission of the "bride of Christ" in preparing all creation for Christ's return.

God's pattern of revelation in the Old Testament combines the objective and the subjective.¹⁵⁶ He revealed himself and His will to Moses and the nation of Israel through the objective word, the Ten Commandments written by His finger on stone, and the experience of His self-revelation in the fire of the burning bush (Exod. 3:2-4), the pillar of fire and cloud (13:22), and the fire that rested on the top of Mount Sinai (Deut. 9:10). For the remainder of the Old Testament period, God inspired men to keep a running record of His salvation history and to record his prophetic declarations which supplemented His abiding presence among His people.¹⁵⁷

On the Day of Pentecost there was the subjective experience of supernatural, spiritual manifestations (fire, wind, tongues) accompanied by the proclaimed, objective word (Joel 2:28-32). In Acts 15 there were testimonies of the Spirit's activity among the Gentiles, the exposition of Amos 9, and the collective communal discernment of what God was saying and doing in history. While Pinnock correctly asserts that "the Bible is the primary and fully trustworthy canon of Christian revelation," it is not the only means of God's self-revelation.¹⁵⁸ One manner does not trump the other, but they dialectically give fullness to the panorama of God's Person. Pinnock observes, "The Bible was given not as an end in itself but as a medium through which one can come to know and love God."¹⁵⁹ The Bible leads to one encountering the saving and the baptizing presence of the Holy Spirit, experiences which are verified by Holy Scripture, and experiences which, in turn, verify Scripture, exegesis, and doctrine.

Scripture

As was stated earlier, the Bible is viewed highly as God's inspired Word. This written revelation is an act of God's self-revelation, sanctification, and inspiration.¹⁶⁰ As one reads, he or she is exposed to the very real

What is the Bible?

John Webster, Holy Scripture

- ▣ **The Bible is an act of God's self-revelation.**
- ▣ **The Bible is an act of God's sanctification.**
- ▣ **The Bible is an act of God's inspiration.**

presence of the Holy Spirit who reveals God to the reader and exposes the reader to the penetrating light of God. The interpreter exegetes the text as the text exegetes and examines the reader. Because the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the words of people made capable of bearing the message of God, the contents must be taken seriously and handled faithfully. To do so, a grammatical-historical approach is the way to begin unpacking the meaning. One should note the literary and historical contexts of the passage. From exegetical, historical study, and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the exegete discerns what the original author consciously willed to communicate on behalf of God to His audience. From the particularity of the occasion, the hermeneut can inductively approximate the meaning and carefully display it as a general, timeless principle. In this way, the interpreter is decontextualizing the specifics of the message to deductively establish a principle. As this truth is brought to bear in other situations, it is recontextualized to the specifics of a given cultural setting. Applications, based on the similarities between the original culture and the contemporary one, can be drawn—the greater the similarity, the more direct the application while the greater the distance, the greater care one must employ so that meaning supersedes form.

Because the Bible is the written Word of God, unique from all other books, three special considerations must be given to its content. One, the Bible possesses a "surplus of meaning potential."¹⁶¹ Second, Holy Scripture is not always as precise as the Western mind may prefer. Third, hyper-rationalism and extreme objective criticism can corrupt one's understanding of the Word of God.

Because of humanness, finiteness, and fallenness, no one can fully know God; no one can grasp His full revelation; and no one can fully or adequately deliver all God's

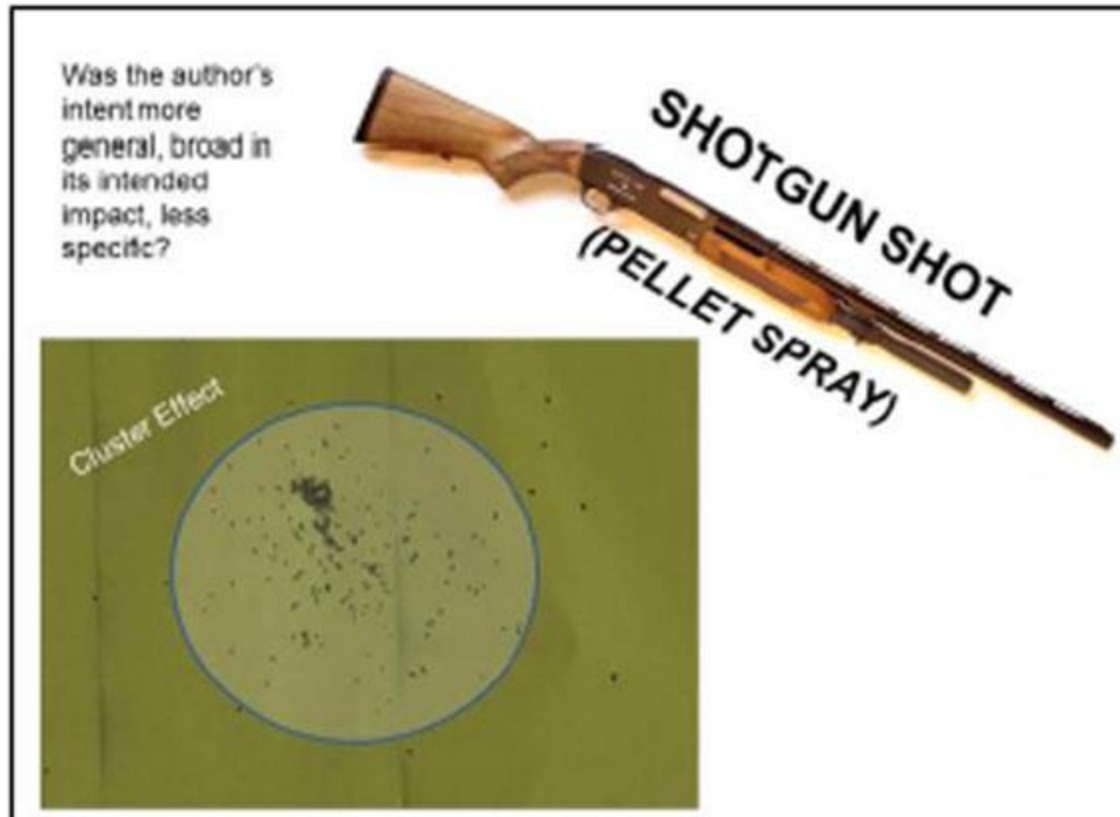
message to His people. While the Bible's revelation, sanctification, and inspiration guarantee the trustworthiness and adequacy of the message in leading people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, these functions do not mean that God's authorial envoys grasped everything He revealed to them or communicated everything He wanted them to say. Because God's ways surpass human capacity, it is certainly possible that God can communicate His will through the inspired words that surpasses the conscious, willed communication of the human author. Pinnock writes, "God has spoken in the Scriptures, but God also speaks through them today in ways that the original writer may not have intended. In saying this, we are simply confessing our faith in the Spirit as alive and active in bringing out from the Bible the ever-relevant Word of the Lord."¹⁶² While one anchors the meaning of the text in the willed intent of the author, God is able to expand that message into contemporary contexts that extend the chain on the anchor to almost breaking. The goal in interpretation is not creativity or ingenuity, but being faithful to God, to His written Word, and to His people. Meaning is not as tightly packaged, nor can it be as neatly minimized, as the contemporary Evangelical and Pentecostal scholar might prefer. The Spirit who moves beyond the limits of rational thinking and preference can take the Word and occasionally blow into new domains of meaning to accomplish His purposes. One needs to make allowance for and appreciate the illumined mind that blends Spirit and text, and acknowledges revelations that are subjective and objective, past and present, to serve as God's prophetic voice for today's audience.



Precision or exactness is not a characteristic so highly valued in Africa or sought from the Bible as it is among some Western scholars. With a large percentage of the Bible being in the genre of historical narrative and poetry, the interpreter must accept the fact that he or she is not working with propositional, universal, timeless statements.

This was not God's preferred method of communication. Not only are the Bible's literary genres imprecise with the litany of illusions and figures of speech; the exactness of historically recreated contexts are somewhat speculative. Even with the Epistles, as Fee comments, it is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation. The bystander does not know exactly what the person on the other end of the call is saying.¹⁶³ On the other hand, God has communicated in history to specific audiences and situations through anointed prophets and apostles. Their written messages conveyed intended meanings. However, as Chuck Kraft observes, "No receiver of a message ever understands exactly what the communicator intends ... human beings settle for approximate understandings ... as long as they are reasonably close ... I believe that the Holy Spirit, as He assists in interpreting His Word, works in terms of such an allowable range."¹⁶⁴ Study, hermeneutical tools, inductive and deductive reasoning, prayer, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit provide messages consistent with Scripture, the Spirit, the community, and the activity of God so that one can confidently declare "the Word of the Lord."

Concerning rational, critical, scientific approaches to the text, Pinnock cautions, "Our modern exegesis is so scientific that it is impoverished. ... The idea that a text has only one meaning is a modern, scientific prejudice that does not correspond either to the Bible's own view of itself or to the Christian experience of using Scripture."¹⁶⁵ One's attempts to atomize the text may ignore not only the breadth, but also the depth of meaning that far surpasses critical analysis. Balance between the objectively and subjectively determined meanings symbolized by the ancient schools of biblical interpretation located in Antioch and Alexandria may be the way to unleash afresh the potential of Scripture as one relies both on study and Spirit.



Individual Believers and Community

The individual as a member of the faith community is an essential aspect of life and hermeneutics in Africa. One needs the other for socialization and creativity, for encouragement and accountability. Paul, Peter, and James had their communities to whom they spoke and to whom they were accountable. At the same time, these individuals called their churches forward beyond traditions and accepted cultural norms. A higher standard externalized by inspired voices challenged them to continue to refine their faith, doctrine, and practice. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, standing in the midst of the believing community, served as the spokesperson to interpret God's word to the onlookers. His single voice, particularly Spirit-inspired to creatively choose and interpret the Joeline Pentecostal text, presented a unified message that served the Church and the world. James rendered the same service to bring unity to a divided community of faith in the Acts 15 context and gave missional direction for future outreach. These individuals were embedded in community, but stood apart when necessary to deliver a reformational and transformational message for the Church.

The Church will always need prophets who confront mediocrity, carnality, and legalism. At the same time prophets need churches to call them to account. The community of faith needs to support the prophet's pursuit of the will of God for the church and the prophetic appeal to the political powers of nations for justice, righteousness, compassion, and reconciliation. Churches also provide the individual with historical and traditional perspectives, which can moderate extremism, radical individualism, and impractical abstractions.

Churches need to integrate the interpretive experts with the ordinary readers because the Bible is a community document. In the local church setting, the scholar and lay person mutually serve and balance each other. Practicality, relevance, and application must be the ultimate goals of the pentadactic hermeneutic that mobilizes the prophethood and priesthood of all believers to participate in ministry while all the spiritual gifts endowed on each one by God are in operation.

Africa has the tendency to marginalize the individual until he or she emerges as an important leader. The Church must become more sensitive to the potential of emerging leaders and foster their growth in hermeneutics and servant leadership. Rather than being intimidated by the potential of youth, women, or those from peripheral ethnic groups, wise and godly leaders need to invest in these individuals, listen to their insights, encourage them in study and spirituality, and provide safe opportunities for both success and failure.

Theophany

- Tangible evidence of God's presence and power
- God's favor and approval manifest
- God's presence revealed objectively and subjectively

Theophany

By theophany, one is called to acknowledge the sovereign and powerful involvement of the Spirit in accomplishing God's purposes in the world. Just as the Spirit hovered over the face of the earth at creation, the Spirit is powerful to move people, create *ex nihilo*, give life, impart healing, and bring judgment. He works within the Church among believers, and in the world among those beyond the human voice of grace. The Spirit is not harnessed by the Church's agendas, traditions, or prejudices, whether expressed inside or outside the community of faith. The Church needs to observe and listen to the Spirit and follow where He leads. The way that the Spirit came at Pentecost was

unexpected. Neither the Church nor the unbelieving community was prepared for the Spirit's unorthodox activity. When the Spirit waited for the arrival of Peter and John to be outpoured on questionable Samaritan believers (Acts 8:17), the Spirit had an agenda not preconceived by the leading apostles. How could they argue against Samaritan inclusion in the Jewish body of Christians when it was they who laid on hands and witnessed their infilling and empowering for mission? The same was true for Peter in the household of Cornelius (10:45).

In Acts 15, James called the Church to follow the Spirit's agenda by summarizing the testimonies of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, as the Spirit swept multitudes of Gentiles into the kingdom of God. There are times that the proclamation of Scripture will precede the miraculous moving of the Spirit, but often times, the order is reversed: miracles and Holy Spirit theophanies open people's hearts to attend to a new message being externalized. Wise is the church that notes the move of the Spirit, graciously evaluates what is heard and seen by the objective truth of Scripture, prayerfully consults the mind of the Spirit, listens to the counsel of prophetic individuals, and acts to accelerate the expansionary intentions of the Spirit rather than hinder Him.

APOSTOLIC FUNCTION

Alan Johnson

- Going where Jesus is not known
- Going in apostolic teams
- Going to the unengaged ethnolinguistic groups
- Going to provide a relevant rendering of Jesus— a contextualized message that the recipients can see, hear, understand, and experience
- Going to make disciples from among these people groups
- Going to plant indigenous, missional churches that reproduce

Apostolic Function

Apostolic function refers to the mission of God's Church to penetrate every geographical and ethnic boundary where the gospel is unknown for the purpose of planting the church and establishing an indigenous body of Christian believers.¹⁶⁶ Viewing the world geographically and ethnically seems to be the basis for Jesus' prophetic declaration: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world [geographically] as a

testimony to all nations [ethnically], and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14, NIV). Whether one has an apostolic gifting (Eph. 4:11) or not, the entire Church is called and empowered by the Spirit to participate in the fulfillment of the Great Commission— evangelizing and discipling the nations (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19-20). Everyone is to be part of the function whether by going, sending, or praying.

Christ Jesus came to redeem people and build a Church that withstands the assaults of hell. He gave the members of His Church the keys to the Kingdom (Matt. 16:13-27). In spite of the forces that are unleashed by Satan and his dominions, the Church, under the banner of Messiah Jesus, is to move forward making disciples of all ethnic-linguistic people groups until Jesus returns. While Church maintenance is necessary in terms of helping the weak and struggling, whether young or old in the faith, the mission must never be compromised. The Church is to proclaim His name where it is unknown. A robust, pneumatic hermeneutic will empower and mobilize a healthy Church to engage the unreached peoples of this world with the good news of the gospel followed by signs and wonders (Mark 16:20).

Conclusion

The Spirit of Jesus was outpoured so that His Church, including the African Pentecostal Church, might better know Him, serve Him, and accomplish His mission, which is to seek and save the lost. Empowered by the Spirit, sustained by the nutrients of the Word of God, guided by God's revelations through Word and Spirit, and following the winds of the Spirit, the Church of Africa has all she needs to accomplish her mission. In the twenty-first century, the Church of Africa, empowered by the Spirit and grounded in the Word of God, will reach out holistically to the world with a fresh excitement and with spiritual, contextual flexibility that will astound and instruct Western pastors, missiologists, biblical scholars, and theologians as African Pentecostal practitioners joyfully work and bleed in the harvest fields of the unengaged peoples, glorifying God and making disciples while they faithfully await His return.

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Endnotes

1 J. N. K. Mugambi, "Foundations for an African Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, eds. Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko S. Maluleke, and Justin S. Ukpong, 9-29 (Nairobi: Acton, 2001), 1.

2 Sam Oleka, "Interpreting and Applying the Bible in an African Context," in *Issues in African Christian Theology*, ed. Samuel Ngewa, Mark Shaw, and Tite Tienou, 104-125 (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1998), 104.

3 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 23-29.

4 John S. Mbiti reports that "all African People believe in God" (45) and that "the belief in God is found everywhere in Africa" (35). As a result, "Religion is found in all African peoples" (14) who are "notoriously religious" (30). See John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1991).

5 Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1969), xi.

6 Oleka, 104.

7 Ibid., 106.

8 Ibid., 105.

9 See Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993); *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984); and Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

10 Oleka, 107.

11 Samuel Ngewa, "The Validity of Meaning and African Christian Theology," in *Issues in African Christian Theology*, ed. Samuel Ngewa, Mark Shaw, and Tite Tienou, 49-55 (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1998), 51.

12 Ibid., 53.

13 Ukachukwu, Chris Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches* (Nairobi: Acton, 2003), 32-35.

14 Fee and Stuart, 18.

15 Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 29-39.

16 Ibid., 43-48.

17 J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Journey into God's Word: Your Guide to Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 14-15.

18 Mark L. Strauss, *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 44.

19 Ibid., 43.

20 Ibid., 12.

21 Ibid., 42.

22 Palmer, 8.

23 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980). Gadamer describes "horizon" as the range of vision a person has from a particular vantage point. It includes experiences, worldview, language, history and culture. The overlapping or "fusion" of two horizons

generates understanding. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 301-305.

24 Strauss, 44-45.

25 Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London, England: Methuen, 1984), 25.

26 Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 222.

27 John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

28 Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 11.

29 Stein, 18-19.

30 Stein indicates that referential language passes on information and facts. It is more precise and literal. This use of language describes reality the way it is perceived and appeals to the mind. Commissive language is indirect, poetic, conveying emotions, and attempts to evoke a response or decision as it appeals to the heart. Stein is also careful to state that these two language acts are not mutually exclusive. See Stein, 73-78.

31 For a description of the allegorical method, see Michael Kyomya, *A Guide to Interpreting Scripture: Context, Harmony and Application* (Nairobi: Hippo Books, 2010), 19-23.

32 Ibid., 23.

33 Ibid., x, xiii.

34 Ibid., 11-12.

35 Ibid., 14.

36 Ibid., 26.

37 One should interrogate the text with questions such as who is speaking, what words are being used, how are the words used (are their rules of grammar that need to be employed to ascertain the intended meaning), how are the ideas connected (flow of thought), where are these words spoken, what is the atmosphere or attitude of the audience, when and where did this incident take place, and does the paragraph have an introduction, conclusion or key word that connects it with the preceding thought. See Kyomya, 28-34.

38 Kyomya, 56-8.

39 Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1996), 31. 44.

40 Ibid., 31, 44.

41 Kyomya, 63.

42 Fee and Stuart assert, "Whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e., similar specific life situations) with the first-century hearers, God's Word to us is the same as his Word to them." See Fee and Stuart, 75.

43 Ibid., 71.

44 Ibid., 30.

45 Doriani, 144-146.

46 Oleka, 109.

47 Ibid., 109.

48 Kyomya, 67-68.

49 Ibid., 69-75.

50 Stein, 20-21.

51 Kyomya, 17.

52 Fee and Stuart, 119-125.

53 Ibid., 106,

54 Oleka, 108.

55 Kyomya, 22.

56 Doriani, 166-167.

57 Stein, 140.

58 Doriani, 22.

59 Stein, 144-6.

60 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Adult and Youth Literacy: Global Trends in Gender Parity." UIS Fact Sheet, September 2010, No. 2,

http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/Literacy/Fact_Sheet_2010_Lit_EN.pdf
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61 This proverb was quoted by Hannington Mutua, Kenyan student at the East Africa Graduate Studies Centre, July 2011.

62 Mbiti, 7-10; E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1975); Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938).

63 Manus, 9.

64 Mbiti, 35, 40, 54-59.

65 Ibid., 43.

66 Ibid., 59.

67 Ibid., 10.

68 Ibid., 30.

69 Ibid., 84-86.

70 Ibid., 153-164.

71 Oleka, 115.

72 Mbiti, 124-30.

73 Mbiti, 14-15.

74 Byang H. Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa* (Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1985), 22.

75 Ibid., 19.

76 Ibid., 17.

77 Kato rejects the concept of a moratorium on Western missions in Africa. He acknowledges their failures, but notes they were only messengers. The message from God is what saves and transforms. While encouraging missionaries to come from abroad, he appeals to the African Evangelical church to promote self-reliance and become more missionally-minded and missionally active. See Kato, 38-39, 45-46.

78 Kato, 29-31.

79 Ibid., 42.

80 Ibid.

81 Pius Tembu, personal interview, Nairobi, Kenya, September 30, 2011.

82 African Religion does not speak of a heaven or hell, a better or worse place. Death simply means the transition from the domain of physical living to that of spiritual existence. While the living continue to remember and honor the dead ancestors, it is believed that their spirit remains nearby and is extremely influential in all aspects of daily life. After five or six generations, the spirit joins the realm of ghosts and loses personality and identity. See Mbiti, 125-130, 200-201.

83 AIC can also stand for African Independent Churches, African Instituted Churches or African Indigenous churches. Pobee and Ositelu prefer that the acronym AIC represent African Initiatives in Christianity. See John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 4.

84 Mark R. Gornik, *Word Made Global: Stories of African Christianity in New York City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 28.

85 C. Peter Wagner and Joseph Thompson, eds., *Out of Africa* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004), 78-99, 105-119.

86 Pobee and Ositelu, 12-18.

87 John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, eds., "The OAIC Manifesto," in *African Initiatives in Christianity* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 68.

88 Gornik, 29.

89 Pobee and Ositelu, 56. Self-motivation deals with the concept of money; self-contextualizing addresses the propagation of the gospel in terms that are relevant to the audience; and self-critical addresses the need for leadership and governance with an openness to prophetic inspiration and evaluation.

90 Wagner and Thompson, 34, 38-55, 120-133.

91 See Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

92 It is important to mention that some of the AICs present a balanced, biblical perspective on prosperity. David Oyedepo stresses that God is one's heavenly Father, not his heavenly banker, as he describes his seven pillars of Kingdom prosperity that include giving, working, applying wisdom, trusting God, waiting for God's timing, speaking in faith, and giving thanks. See David Oyedepo, "Kingdom Principles for Kingdom Prosperity," in *Out of Africa*, ed. C. Peter Wagner and Joseph Thompson, 187-202 (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004).

93 Pobee and Ositelu, 69.

94 Ibid., 70-71.

95 Ibid., 28.

96 Enson Lwesya, personal conversation, Lomé, Togo, December 2, 2010.

97 Small Group Interview, Dodoma, Tanzania, June 19, 2011.

98 Manus.

99 Ibid., 1. He reports that some Western missionaries "used the Bible to terrify African converts with hell-preaching sermons designed to make Africans docile and subservient to white settlers" (16).

100 Mugambi, 18.

101 Manus, 35.

102 Manus, 22-30.

103 Mugambi, 17-19.

104 Larry L. Rasmussen, "Bishop Moses and the Trees," in *Frontiers of African Christianity: Essays in Honour of Inus Daneel*, eds., Greg Cuthbertson, Hennie Pretorius, and Dana Robert, 69-74 (Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa, 2003), 69.

105 Solomon Zvanaka, "Bishop Moses, The Earthkeeper," in *Frontiers of African Christianity: Essays in Honour of Inus Daneel*, ed. Greg Cuthbertson, Hennie Pretorius, and Dana Robert, 55-68; Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa, 2003), 56.

106 M. L. Daneel, "Christian Mission and Earth-Care: An African Case Study," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35 (2011): 135.

107 See Daneel, 130-136.

108 Zvanaka, 64-65.

109 Jackson Nyanda, dean of students at the Assemblies of God Bible School, Dodoma, Tanzania, is currently writing his doctoral dissertation for Pan-Africa Theological Seminary, Lomé, Togo, advocating the ordination of women in ministry within the Tanzania Assemblies of God which would require an amendment to their constitution and by-laws.

110 See Mike Okonkwo, "Sustaining the Move of God," in *Out of Africa*, ed. C. Peter Wagner and Joseph Thompson, 56-77 (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2004). He describes how God spoke to him about ordaining women, read of women leaders in the Bible, and recognized women in his ministry who demonstrated God's calling and anointing for ministry and leadership. In spite of the general belief that "women must remain silent,"

he called for their ordination. "Women now stand at the helm of both churches and ministries of great repute" (62-63).

111 Teresa M. Hinga, "Jesus Christ and the Liberation of Women in Africa," in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, eds. Mercy A. Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, 183-194 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 185.

112 Ibid., 191.

113 Teresa Okure, "The Will to Arise: Reflections on Luke 8:40-56," in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, ed. Mercy A. Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, 221-230 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).

114 Ibid., 222-224.

115 Ibid., 230.

116 Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Mary the Pilgrim of Faith for African Women," in *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, ed. H. W. Kinoti and J. M. Waliggo, 165-178 (Nairobi: Acton, 1997).

117 Ibid., 177.

118 Mugambi, 9-29.

119 Manus, 4.

120 Mugambi, 12.

121 Mugambi, 13.

122 Manus, 3.

123 Mugambi, "16-20.

124 Ibid., 20-21. Mugambi describing the imperialistic training programs implemented in Africa following the Berlin conference of 1884-1885, writes, "The imperial education system is always designed to inculcate attitudes of inferiority on the colonized and superiority on the part of the rulers" (23). He adds that the dominant agenda for the modern missionary enterprise is globalization, liberalization, and privatization (24).

125 Manus, 6-7.

126 Mugambi, 25.

127 Ibid., 27.

128 David T. Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

129 Ibid., 1.

130 Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

131 Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Is Africa Cursed? A Vision for the Radical Transformation of an Ailing Continent*, rev. ed. (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2009).

132 Adamo, 2.

133 Ibid., 12.

134 Ibid., 67-73.

135 Ibid., 112-114.

136 Ibid., 95-112.

137 Ibid., 15.

138 Ibid., 18.

139 Ibid., 29.

140 Ibid., 34-35.

141 Ibid., 63-64.

142 Ibid., 63-64.

143 Ibid., 87-94, 168.

144 Ibid., 116-119.

145 Adeyemo, 43-48.

146 Ordinary is used for the reading of Scripture by the laity who lack formal, biblical training and distinguishes these readers from the trained, seminary and Bible college graduates who practice a grammatical-historical reading of the text with an alertness to authorial intent and literary and historical contexts.

147 Ogbu Kalu, in *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), viii, xi, claims that "African Pentecostalism did not originate from Azusa Street and is not an extension of the American electronic church."

148 Gornik, 32.

149 Nairobi Mayor George Aladwa and the city council are currently considering legalizing prostitution because of the significant tax revenues that could be gleaned from the trade. See John Ngirachu, "Kenya: Nairobi Mayor Hints at Legalising Prostitution," *Daily Nation* (February 3, 2012), <http://allafrica.com/stories/201202060232.html> (accessed March 26, 2012). The vetting of chief justices for the Kenyan Supreme Court has included the possibility that the individual would be in favor of legalized prostitution. See "Mutunga Leads High Court Judges Vetting," *The Star* (July 5, 2011), <http://www.internewskenya.org/summaries.php?id=1925> (accessed March 26, 2012).

150 Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community*. London, England: T & T Clark, 2004.

151 John Christopher Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 41-56.

152 Yong, 2002.

153 Stein, 69-71.

154 Gordon L. Anderson, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Paraclete* 28/1 (1994): 1-11.

155 Ibid., 13-22.

156 See Rickie D. Moore, "Deuteronomy and the Fire of God: A Critical Charismatic Interpretation," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (1995): 28-33.

157 Pinnock, 80.

158 Ibid., 11.

159 Ibid., 111.

160 Webster, 2003.

161 Pinnock, 71.

162 Ibid., 83.

163 Fee and Stuart, 55-87.

164 Charles H. Kraft, "Interpreting in Cultural Context," in *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Roy B. Zuck, 245-257 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1996), 248-249.

165 Pinnock, 218-19.

166 See Dr. Johnson, *Apostolic Function in 21st Century Missions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2009).

Updated: Friday, June 16, 2006 10:22 AM