

The colonial presumptions of universal norms that serve to undercut Africans' interpretive agency in Bible studies are well-exposed in this work. To decolonize and exorcise the demon of racism in academic biblical studies, the writer has employed a limited number of technical terminologies. *African Biblical Studies* takes the reader on an upsetting journey through the historical context of academic biblical studies, illuminating how it is intertwined with contemporary colonialism. It provides a thorough and well-informed overview of the major theories in African biblical studies by tracing the connections between the development of the field of biblical studies and European colonialism. In doing so, the author discusses the history of colonialism and provides some examples of how biblical studies may be decolonized.

The book is divided into three parts to contribute to the decline of Western hegemony in biblical studies. Part I, *The Bible, Colonialism, and Biblical Studies*, contains three chapters: Chapter 1, "Introduction"; Chapter 2, "Colonialism and the European Enlightenment"; and Chapter 3, "Western Biblical Study and African Colonialism." Part II, *The Bible, Colonial Encounter, and Unexpected Outcome*, also contains three chapters: Chapter 4, "Bible Translation as Biblical Interpretation: The Colonial Bible"; Chapter 5, "The Bible and African Reality"; and Chapter 6, "Emerging African Postcolonial Biblical Criticism." Part III, *African Biblical Study: Setting a Postcolonial Agenda*, contains eight chapters: Chapter 7, "Decolonizing the Bible: A Postcolonial Response"; Chapter 8, "The Bible and Postcolonial African Literature"; Chapter 9, "Rewriting the Bible: Recasting the Colonial Text"; Chapter 10, "Eschatology, Colonialism, and Mission: An African Critique of Linear Eschatology"; Chapter 11, "Ordinary Readers and the Bible: Non-Academic Biblical Interpretation"; Chapter 12, "Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible in Africa"; Chapter 13, "Christology in Africa: 'Who Do You Say I Am?'; and Chapter 14, "Conclusion: Towards a Decolonized Bible Study." The book concludes with a bibliography, author name, subject, and biblical references indices.

In the introduction, Mbuvi bemoans the assumption that there is a single, standardized discipline of biblical studies that everyone follows and agrees upon and that this discipline is assumed to represent an accurate, unbiased interpretation of the Bible. This viewpoint has been prevalent since the advent of biblical studies in Europe more than a century ago. He says that as Europe rose to become a superpower with the ability to conquer, rule, and name far-off regions, it provided the tools and the language that the academic community used to create an interpretation of the Bible. According to Mbuvi, colonialization solidified this process by establishing a

link between the center and the periphery and the colonizer and the colonized. Then, the European “center” could pen the history of its foundation, growth, and conquest of remote centers of the then-known world. He goes on to say that the colonial ambition to civilize, market, and Christianize others in the colonies also became justified by the Europeans’ racist vision of the African peoples and their religio-cultural reality as lacking in reason and virtue. The Europeans served as the morally acceptable messengers of God, the empire, and the Bible. To give a “universal” reading of the Bible that would speak for all peoples everywhere, biblical studies adopted the imperializing mission.

The relationship between colonialism, the Enlightenment, and biblical studies is established in Part 1 of the book. Mbuvi argues that the Bible was central to Western literature, distinguishing between enlightened Europeans and unenlightened Africans. It was considered un-Christian and uncivilized in a “dark continent” setting, labeling native religious practices as unredeemable. This colonial thinking, to Mbuvi, aimed to impose a Westernized Bible on the colonized, distorting and destroying their historical heritage. Hence, incorporated into the missionary fundraising was the urgent need to illuminate African communities from their “deep darkness.”

Mbuvi argues that because of the discipline’s continued failure to recognize or meaningfully confront its deeply ingrained racist origins, biblical studies is deeply entangled with, and still promulgates, a Western colonial vision. He pointed out that missionary proficiency in Africa is generally questionable due to a lack of academic credentials, with exceptions like Dr. Schweitzer, Kraft, and Livingstone. Mbuvi closely examined the twentieth-century Western icon Albert Schweitzer in this part. He argues that Schweitzer personifies the triple nexus of colonialist, missionary, and biblical scholar, and that his academic, medical, and missionary work was motivated by racism and white supremacy. Similar to many European missionaries in Africa, Mbuvi argues further, Schweitzer displayed a mix of contradictory views about Africans. He saw them as individuals who could receive the Bible and achieve salvation. Yet, he also depicted them in derogatory and racist ways, regarding them as inferior to white Europeans and even as having animal-like characteristics. Even though Schweitzer actively participated in the colonization and dehumanization of Africa, he is nevertheless hailed as one of the finest Bible scholars of the 20th century.

To expose the cover of colonial kindness as a mere travesty of imperial imposition of meaning, part two begins by exposing the unrecognized harmful effects of the colonial translation of the Bible into the African vernacular. Via the vernacular Bible translation, it exposes the vilification of

African religious reality and the imposition of Eurocentric texts, translations, and perspectives. The final chapter in this portion includes postcolonial African biblical criticism, which not only challenges the attempt to translate the Bible into vernaculars but also pushes back with its critical assessment and hermeneutic of restoration.

The foundation of African biblical studies is incorporated in part three as a postcolonial strategy that fundamentally reacts to the colonial project, rejecting the limited biblical scholarship advocated in Western academia. That is a rejection of any direct imposition of presuppositions governing Biblical Studies in the West in addressing African concerns. African biblical studies encourage accepting a wide range of biblical interpretation strategies. This section, which is broken up into seven chapters, highlights the various tenets of African biblical studies. It begins with its decolonization of the Bible and moves on to cutting-edge approaches to Bible reading exemplified in creative African literature. Finally, it rewrites the Bible with the goal of liberating and decolonizing the biblical text. Alongside resistance to the colonial imposition, methodologies that emphasize “ordinary” readership, gender, and sexuality and African Christology illustrate the unique approach that African biblical scholars have propounded in the last half a century, working from the “margins.” A glossary defines the book’s technical terms. A specialist’s understanding is not needed to follow this book’s ideas.

One weakness of this book is Mbuvi’s over-generalization. For instance, he states that nearly all PhD candidates in Biblical Studies at Western academic institutions find that proficiency in the German language is the principal modern language prerequisite for the degree. Also, he seems to be more focused on identifying racist behavior or statements from European missionaries to Africa to the almost neglect of their contribution to Christianity on the continent. In my opinion, he needs to be more balanced.

This volume should interest all who practice biblical studies today. I recommend it as a must-read for all academics interested in reclaiming the field of biblical studies for the historically marginalized non-Western readers and biblical scholars, particularly those of African origin. Even beyond the realm of biblical studies, this book has the potential to become a touchstone for contemporary postcolonial struggles. It forces academic biblical research to engage in self-interrogation by investigating its reading, interpretation, and education practices and the relationship between the Bible and oppressive systems worldwide. However, care should be taken not to

see Western biblical studies as a mere colonial project, thereby throwing the baby with the bath water.

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