

**INTERFACING
BIBLICAL
HERMENEUTICS
IN TEXTUAL
CONTEXTS AND
SOCIO-CULTURAL
ENVIRONMENTS**

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DEDICATION

I am very glad to dedicate this book to the Lord Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Nike, Rt. Rev. Dr. Christian Onyeka Onyia, and his wife, the President of Nike Diocesan Women Ministry, Bar. Mrs. Nneka Onyia. I have not, as yet, found a better way of appreciating the immense love they have shown to me and my family. May the Lord, in his abundant mercies continue to bless and uphold them, Amen.

PREFACE

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles and methods of textual interpretation. It derives from the Greek verb *hermeneuo*, meaning, to interpret, or as the first person singular present indicative active verb form shows, I am interpreting, or I interpret. Hermeneutics deals with the principles, rules and regulations of interpreting sacred texts. In recent times, hermeneutical procedures have been broadened to include both verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as semiotics, presuppositions and semantics. Hermeneutical tools are today widely applied in the humanities, especially law, history and theology.

Hermeneutics as a discipline is closely related to exegesis. Both share a common concern for exploration of textual meanings. However, while hermeneutics is a much broader discipline dealing with the principles, methods and models for interpreting texts, exegesis takes those principles and methods into the specific texts for purposes of “leading out” meanings. (Exegesis derives from the Greek word *ex-egomai*; the root, *ago*, means to lead, while the prefix *ex*, is the form of the preposition, *ek*, before a vowel, meaning, out.)

Over the years, the discipline of hermeneutics has grown from basic orthodox patterns and systematic, doctrinal and dogmatic interpretation, through the era of historical-critical methods to the

rise of social context hermeneutics. This era of social context hermeneutics has taken the expedition away from its traditional domains to areas where the models are directly confronting existing cultures and interrogating existing axioms, thus discovering and rediscovering cultural orientations within the contexts of societal dynamics. When we speak of culture today, we do so, not in the conventional context of reversion to retrogressive societal orientations, but in recognition of swift societal dynamics amidst threats against, and efforts at ultimate societal survival and enrichment.

Social context hermeneutics has opened up large vistas of hermeneutical avenues and, it must be admitted, released hermeneutics from the shackles of dogmatic limitations, otherwise referred to as fixation. Life is not fixed but dynamically responding to the tempos of socio-cultural and economic challenges and threats to survival. As the perplexities of life enlarge, so does the search for life's meanings and interpretations. The secularizing trends of modern society will not succeed in, nor be the better for it in its attempt at, relegating or ultimately vitiating the axioms of the Biblical text. Rather, it is a challenge to generate new interpretative models that directly confront societal threats, as has been eloquently demonstrated in the successes of the social context theologies. We are happy that at last our hermeneutical models are directly addressing the challenges confronting us and exciting new models are ingeniously presenting us with new vistas of creative meanings.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING HERMENEUTICAL MODELS

What is Hermeneutics?

According to Brown and Schneiders (1990), the Greek word, *hermeneia* (a noun) which forms the root of the word, 'hermeneutics',

Covered a wide scope of interpretation and clarification – a scope that modern scholars are trying to recapture and expand in their understanding of the hermeneutical task. First, it can refer to interpretation by speech itself, in as much as language brings to expression and interprets what is in one's mind (conscious and unconscious), or even what constitutes one's identity, being, and person. (We should conceive of this process dynamically, not statically; for not only does an established intention or identity find precise expression in language, but in the very act of linguistic communication, one's identity and intention can grow or even come into being.) In biblical discussion, we must struggle with the added complexity of the capacity of (human) biblical language to bring to expression God's "mind", "will", and "person", (terms used analogously of God). Second, *hermeneia* can refer to the process of translation from one language to another – a process that goes beyond the mechanical equivalents of

words and enters into the issue of transference from one culture or world view to another. Third, *hermeneia* can be used for interpretation by commentary and explanation, which is a more formal aspect. (p. 1147).

The essence of perspective rendering arises here especially as we call to mind, for instance, that many early Christians knew the Old Testament not in its Hebrew original form, but in the Septuagint Greek form, that is, a perspective of it that has already undergone linguistic and socio-cultural mediation and transference. Similarly, the Gospels communicated Jesus' message, not in his own Semitic tongue but in Greek. Even specific aspects of translation can be from an unintelligible language to an intelligible one. A typical illustration of this is found in 1 Corinthians 12:10, which deals with a charismatic gift of tongues (*glossolalia*), with a revelatory dimension.

Although modern hermeneutics concerns itself with the meaning of the written Biblical texts, however, it is important to realize that initially, neither the Israelite community, nor indeed the early Christian community was a "religion of the book". A set of experiences regarded as a divine deliverance from Egypt, the selection of a people, the formation of a covenant, and the promise of a land, gave identity to Israel's religious orientation long before there came the written accounts of the experiences, which, in the course of time grew into the Torah or the Pentateuch. Similarly, a religious community was formed around the belief in God's

eschatological presence and action in Jesus Christ, long before there were the written Gospels. In fact, the early Jewish Christians were in an intermediate position even before they had widely circulated writings of their own composition. In this interregnum and even after, the task of relating Jesus to the already accepted writings of the Hebrew and Septuagint canons (later described by the same Christian community as the Old Testament) was a major hermeneutical task. This hermeneutical assignment, it must be acknowledged, was assiduously pursued by the early Christian community, and resolved to the finite conclusion, expressed in the simple dictum which we relate to, today, as if it has always been there from the very outset; *ho Iesous estin ho Christos* ((John 20:31), (meaning, that Jesus of Nazareth, a well-known historical personality, having satisfied all the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew classical prophets, is the Messiah (Anointed One, Greek, Christos) whom the Hebrew classical prophets had prophesied about). This resolution remains the greatest hermeneutical contribution of the early Christian community, and without this resolution, a yawning gap would have existed till today between the operations of God in the ancient times and the religious experiences of the Christian community.

Hermeneutical Models

We are concerned here with introducing and appraising hermeneutical models and perspectives, with a view to proposing the direction of the hermeneutical expedition in the next decade

and beyond. Context hermeneutics, that is, hermeneutical models shaped by historical, political and socio-cultural circumstances, have given rise to a vast array of context theologies, namely, Liberation Theology, African Theology, Black Theology, Feminist Theology, Decolonization Theology, Motivational and Inspirational Theology, and so on. These could be rightly referred to as reactionary or revolutionary theologies which contain in themselves polemic or conventional postures that take hermeneutics away from its traditional (objective) domains, creating segregational tensions which escalate, rather than resolve the perceived situation being reacted to, or contended against.

When we speak of reactionary or revolutionary theologies, and hence, by that token, reactionary and revolutionary hermeneutical models that produced them, we unwittingly ascribe to the conventional hermeneutical models the status of standard models, whereas those models are (or at least could be) reactionary or revolutionary in themselves, being products of prevailing socio-cultural contexts. We know, at least that the earliest hermeneutical models were basically devotional and were content to dwell in a deluge of uninterrogated assumptions or presumptions. We know therefore that the Eurocentric historical-critical hermeneutical models arose as an initial effort in the era, and as a product of scholasticism, to interrogate the assumptions or presumptions that, subjected to the light of empirical evidence, were already beginning to crumble. For instance, did Moses write the Pentateuch? Did only one author compose the Pentateuch? Could a man have written

about his death and burial? In what perspective of historiography would you classify the expression, “In the beginning, God created”, especially in the realization that the man who was reporting the incident, assuming he grew to maturity immediately upon creation, was created on the sixth day, but was reporting events that took place some five days before he came into existence? What do we make of the curious duplications in the narratives, for instance two different creation narratives (Gen. 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b to the end)? What do we make of the anachrostatic expression, “to this day”, (Example, No one knows where Moses was buried to this day) in the text suggesting that the author was presenting the account in retrospect? What do we make of the consistent use of the different divine names in the different segments or pericopes of the text; for instance, *'elōhim* is consistently used in Gen.1:1-2:4a, and from 2:4b till the end of the periscope at the end of chapter three, Yahweh *'elōhim* is consistently used? And so on.

That Eurocentric historical-critical hermeneutical model formed the framework for conventional Biblicism till today has long been admitted. Adamo (2005) has succinctly stated that;

My candid opinion is that colonization of biblical studies began with the establishment of Bible Colleges, Seminaries and Universities in Africa by the missionaries. These Bible Colleges and Seminaries became places where priests, pastors and evangelists were trained. During the early period, the teachers in these colleges were missionaries from the Western

world. Their methods of teaching were Western. In their enthusiasm to teach students how to communicate the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, they also taught western culture and ways of life. All students must learn how to interpret the Christian Scripture the way it is interpreted in the West. African culture and religion were not important and therefore were not taught to the students. (p. 21).

Even more important to Adamo's position is the content of the theology of the Western Missionaries. This is what African Biblical Scholars have come to describe as Colonization hermeneutics because it is a hermeneutical model which started with a fundamental objective of utterly annihilating every facility of the African background, to the extent that to be truly converted to Christianity, one had to be converted to European culture.

African Biblical studies, and hence, as enabling, formulating instrument, African Biblical hermeneutics, have ever since arisen as credible indigenous perspectives of interpreting the text. In fact, it is to the founding fathers of the African Indigenous Churches (AIC's) that the credit must go for the formulation of what can be called the indigenous African reading of the missionary Christian Bible. In other words, the missionaries came to Africa with the Bible and their version of Eurocentric Christianity based on their perspectives of interpreting the text. The indigenous Africans received the Bible from the missionaries and reinterpreted it to suit the African

indigenous socio-cultural challenges and religious aspirations. Thus, Adeogun (2005) affirms that;

The method applied by some Aladura churches is the application of the principles of hermeneutics, as a key to unlock the meaning of the Bible in relation to the African world view. In these churches, spiritual and physical liberation are intertwined; the malfunction of the one affects the other. These churches consider spiritual liberation as a way to the success of humankind, socially, economically. (p.182).

There is so much to the reactionary hermeneutics of the African Indigenous Churches that deserves mention. First, it embraced the Eurocentric missionary Christian faith. Next, it identified that its religious perspectives and aspirations run counter to those of the indigenous Africans, for indigenous pre-Christian Africans do indeed have religious orientation and aspirations, definite and definable, contrary to the aspersions and vituperations cast on the African religious roots by the Eurocentric Christian missionaries. Next, the African Indigenous Churches (having now fully embraced the Eurocentric missionary Christian faith) patiently read the Christian Bible (since they have received sufficient Western education, even though such education is cast in the Western colonialist world view that sees nothing good in the African). And strangely as it may seem, the African Indigenous Churches applied their indigenous hermeneutical models and tools in the Christian Bible and found out that even the Bible of the Eurocentric

missionary Christian faith spoke to the indigenous African situation. That was how the indigenous African Christians formulated the character, liturgy, theology, and hermeneutical models of the African Indigenous Churches, a variant of the Christian faith diametrically and dialectically detracted from and opposed to the Eurocentric missionary Christian faith.

Adeogun (2005), summarizing the character of the hermeneutical models of the African Indigenous Churches, stated that from thence, African liberation has come to be a term in doing Contextual Biblical Studies because it makes the problems of the people the central axis in praxis and discussion” (P.181). The operation in the African Indigenous Churches is purely personalized and centered on meeting the need and aspirations of the individual persons involved, unlike that of the Euro-Christian missionary churches in which everyone is lost in the deluge of self-expression (as in modern Pentecostal ecstatic and prophetic mesmerisms) rather constitute a total nuisance. Even till today, the mainline churches still consider individual self-expressions as in prophetic pronouncements, visions and ecstatic mesmerisms (such as speaking in tongues) a complete nuisance.

Decolonization thus became the pronounced aspiration of African indigenous Christian hermeneutics. To begin with, we can now confidently speak of hermeneutical models that are truly and indigenously African. West (2005) quoting Ukpon (2000)

assiduously captures the character of African Biblical hermeneutics (interpretation) thus;

First, African biblical interpretation is predominantly interested in the historical and sociological dimensions of the biblical text. Second, African life biblical interpretation is always aware of the ambiguous history of the Bible's arrival in Africa and so is constantly attempting to assert itself over against the dominant discourses of western imperialism and colonialism. (p. 69).

The reference to decolonization hermeneutics is a conscious recognition by the African Biblical scholars, at least in part, of the existence of colonial intent either in the Biblical text itself (through a reactionary redactive means) or in its hermeneutics by the Eurocentric theologians. It is in this regard that Oladunjoye (2005) observes that;

Some scholars have seen Christianity as a bulldozer, leveling the jungle of the uncivilized world in order to allow the builders of imperialism to come and build. Even some missionaries taught that Africans had to be westernized before becoming Christians. Desmond Tutu, on the other hand sees the attitude of the colonial interpreters of the Bible as exploitation through colonialism and neocolonialism. The Africans were taught to despise everything African at the time of conversion. (p. 5).

Mosala (1989) looks at the Biblical text itself (not just its hermeneutical models) to highlight colonial intent;

The Bible is an ideologically layered product of a series of historical struggles, and so what is left of the voice of landless peasants and other marginalized sectors has been co-opted and represented by the discourse of the ruling elites (West, 2005, p. 65).

Dube (2000) states the matter rather categorically; “The Bible is itself an imperial and patriarchal product”. (West, 2005, p. 65). Thus, the reaction of African biblical scholars both to the Biblical text itself and to its Eurocentric hermeneutics has been many and varied, ranging from the one extreme of outright repudiation and rejection, to the other extreme of contextual re-reading. Decolonization hermeneutics is therefore, at least in part, an attempt to see both that the Bible speaks to the African socio-cultural situation, and to highlight how it does.

Our aim here is to, at least, attempt to propose the direction in which African and indeed socio-cultural context hermeneutics will proceed in the next decade and beyond. Having studied the basic principles of Biblical hermeneutics, what do we make of it in our multiple socio-cultural, historical and political environments with all its nuances and challenges? Non-Western beneficiaries of Western education have often been accused of revolving around the basic principles, axioms and maxims which they memorize, turn around in their minds, even translate to local facets, but do not

progress beyond that. It has often been argued that the bane of the underdevelopment of the third world, in spite of the large volume of existence of Western education and its beneficiaries, is the fact that these beneficiaries have no clue for translating these basic principles and axioms into facilities and instruments for dealing with their local challenges, whether it be in engineering and technology, medicine and pharmacy, or arts and humanities.

In proposing the direction for the application of our vast facilities of hermeneutics in dealing with Africa's underdevelopment, I take a cue from Professor Manus' hint, quoted in Oladunjoye (2005);

The Bible having been brought to us Africans by the Colonial Church, has been read to us with the eye of the colonial and missionary slaves. In our post-colonial and post-modern contexts in Africa, re-reading the texts often implies letting African religio-cultural, the socio-political and economic situations of Africa to interface with the Bible. In other words, the location of African biblical scholarship is the social, political, and ecclesiastical contexts of Africa and real life issues. Biblical scholarship belongs in the church and the community, not only in the academy. (p. 6).

This may seem to have the same orientation with what some strands of scholars commonly propose as enculturation hermeneutics. Even this enculturation hermeneutics has acquired diverse forms, depending on the extent of detraction from the locus

that the exegete is prepared to allow, within the ambient of traditional religious sentiments. Even scholars who propose an adaptation of liturgical procedures using local facilities are content to consider that a sufficient act of enculturation. If that was all that the African Indigenous Churches did, changing the language of Euro-Christian Mission Churches to local language, and engaging local musical instruments, that would hardly have earned them any mention in enculturation hermeneutics. However, as is evident, they brought in whole structures of African personality into the faith and made the Scriptures to speak to the African religious tensions and aspirations. That is holistic enculturation.

In interface hermeneutics we bring the elements and phenomena face to face with each other, in a situation in which the concepts themselves acquire new contextual connotative meanings in the new socio-cultural circumstance. Thus the *yesua* and *soteria* or salvation of the Old and New Testaments would, translated into the African context, acquire such meanings that liberate him from his socio-economic quagmire, rather than stop at a euphoric, forlorn, unrealized expectation of the other-worldly condition of eternal bliss, in the hope that this new understanding will begin, in the here and now, to attack and dismantle the unjust structures of greed and exploitation, including the tyrannical exploitative church leadership and theology that breed the socio-economic crises of deprivation and impoverishment.

CHAPTER TWO

ORTHODOX AND ENLIGHTENMENT BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

In this chapter, we look at orthodox biblical hermeneutics which became rather thoroughly developed in the Enlightenment period, and therefore suffered an accidental indenture at the hands of Enlightenment philosophy, to the extent that today, when we talk about orthodox biblical hermeneutics, if we are not careful, we present Enlightenment biblical hermeneutics because, admittedly, the Enlightenment era took upon itself, the task of articulating biblical concepts, and in so doing, coloured it with its traits. This is in fact what has happened with much of biblical concepts. Such concepts are defined within certain periods of learning in which they have been articulated and documented, and in addition, such periods have coloured such concepts with the prevailing philosophical orientation and disposition, such that it is no longer possible, except with careful study, to deliver such concepts from the encapsulating philosophical character of the period in which they have been articulated. For instance, when you say “eschatology”, you are already speaking in the language framework of 1st Century AD Greek, and by implication, New Testament philosophical framework; (eschatos – Greek second declension masculine noun for “last” or last things). But, ironically, for purposes of fundamental definition, you must necessarily go to the Old Testament in search of the concept that clearly owes its origin to a New Testament framework or thought. If you now say to a

person that within the historical *terminus ad quem* of the Old Testament, all that is known about the last things, that is life in the hereafter, is the *Še'ōl*, he will argue that it is not so. In the argument, he would lean heavily on the books and redactional interjections placed in the Old Testament later than the historical period of the Old Testament. Such books and interjections, referred to as apocalyptic writings, have their origin in the later second century BC, a period referred to as “Inter-testament”, beyond the historical dating of the last event of the Old Testament, which is Ezra’s national (endogamy) reforms. Because of the character of the period in which the Jews faced persecution, possibly as a result of the Anti-Semitic reactions generated by Ezra’s endogamic exclusivist reforms, the apocalyptic writers predicted the soon collapse of the kingdoms of the persecutors and a coming future bliss for the persecuted, as they endured in the faith. It is these features of the apocalyptic writings that are interpreted as eschatological and, in any case, the period of such writings is beyond the Old Testament.

So, anyway, in this section, we shall attempt to make out what biblical hermeneutics was like, prior to the Enlightenment period in which, admittedly, a lot of Biblical exegetical issues became carefully articulated and documented. We shall now see how that period ended up bringing a preposterous colouring to orthodox biblical hermeneutics, and in fact presenting Enlightenment biblical hermeneutics as the authentic orthodox biblical hermeneutics.

1. **Orthodox Biblical Hermeneutics**

Orthodox biblical hermeneutics actually encompasses both the theory and methodology for all forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal. Orthodox biblical hermeneutics stems from a standpoint of firm belief and utmost confidence in God. In other words, it is wholly theistic. It is conducted from the context of basic relationship to, and dependence upon God. It is hermeneutics done from the basic standpoint of the Bible as revealed word of God. Such fundamental position and disposition governs and characterizes the entire hermeneutical expedition, affecting and influencing its ethos, its devices and its deductions. In other words, the outcome (theology or doctrinal position) precedes the process. It is, if you don't mind, a hermeneutical procedure done from answer to question. In other words, it is a hermeneutical process done from a fundamental position in which certain theological conclusions or deductions are taken for granted. In biblical orthodox hermeneutics, the outcome cannot be other than the basic theological and doctrinal axioms resolved ab initio, prior to the hermeneutical process.

Orthodox hermeneutics does not intend to confront or investigate God's word. As St. Anselm put it, in his book, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, orthodox biblical hermeneutics is done from the standpoint of belief in the Bible as God's word. It is not an effort to understand in order to believe. It is that having believed,

one seeks deeper understanding to consolidate that already accepted as fact.

Orthodox biblical hermeneutics seeks to understand, first, what the scripture communicated to the original audience, and secondly, what timeless principles and applications there can be for the contemporary audience. The objective is basically to help one grow in confidence to read and study the Bible as God's word.

Orthodox hermeneutics consists of four basic components, namely;

1. Understanding the historical and cultural context of the text.
2. Understanding the literary context of the text.
3. Making observations around the text and
4. Drawing valid contemporary applications from the text.

We can look at these in some details.

1. **Historical and Cultural Context: The Setting of the Text.**

This preliminary hermeneutical step asks questions about the book as whole; the author, the audience, the dating of the book, the purpose for its writing as well as its theme. Although in most cases, questions surrounding the authorship and dating may be conjectures supported by some references, however, the outcome becomes valid for understanding the text.

2. **Literary Context (That is the Literary Style)**

It is now believed that to some extent, the literary style of a text can give very valid information about its authorship and dating. Styles are often associated with prevailing philosophical ethos. For instance, the Gospel of John opens up with the expression; “In the beginning was the word (logos) and the word was with God, and the word was God”. This alone has helped a great deal in assigning Hellenistic character to the book, and this speaks volumes of its authorial background, dating and intended audience. The Bible contains many biblical styles or genres, and one book may contain many of these styles.

3. **Observation (The Content of the Book)**

Here, we are concerned with the details of the technical content of the text. An awareness of this detailed content provides much information for its interpretative process.

4. **Application (The Contemporary, Present-day Application of the Text)**

Here, we identify the situation in present life similar to that in the primary audience that necessitated the text in the first instance. From here, we deduce the contemporary value and validity of the demands that the text makes to its present day audience.

It must be stated therefore that orthodox biblical hermeneutics was primarily for devotional purposes. It was

not an exercise undertaken for academic value. Its ultimate objective was to deepen devotional relationship with God. Issues that tended to create confusion or raise critical questions are rather avoided or deferred until, in the light of other scripture, or with benefit of greater insight or revelation, they could be better understood. The ultimate aspiration of orthodox biblical hermeneutics was to draw out the moral value of the text, in other words, to make the hermeneutical audience more enhanced in terms of conduct and relationship with God.

2. **Enlightenment Hermeneutics**

The 18th century AD became the age of Enlightenment. This is largely because the 18th century was the period of scientific development, as well as the era of technological revolution in Europe. It was an era of great learning and reason. Reason as proclaimed by this era of Enlightenment became opposed to faith. It was an era of investigation of the scriptural claims. This therefore became the era of questioning the scriptural claims until they are justified by valid proof. For these reasons, this period of Enlightenment contributed to hermeneutics the historical-critical methods of textual interpretation. These historical-critical methods include textual criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, source criticism and so on. In this era, the traditional beliefs about authorship of the Bible books were discarded for the documentary hypothesis.

The theologians thrown up by this age became, in the main, naturalist theologians. These naturalist theologians were those who did not want to approach biblical hermeneutics from the fundamental standpoint of belief and faith. It is in fact the other way round. They started the hermeneutical process from the standpoint of unbelief. Being naturalist, they believed that only nature exists, and whatever does not conform to the facets of nature does not exist. Their attitude to the scripture is that it is simple natural events that authors of the Bible narratives disguised and clothed with the garb of mysterious happenings. Their attitude to biblical hermeneutics is to reinterpret the miraculous events as disguised natural events. Some of such naturalist theologians are Julius Wellhausen, Gerrard von Rad, W. Albright, Rudolf Bultmann, Gunther Bornkamm, Jurgen Moltmann etc. In fact, Rudolf Bultmann, a New Testament naturalist theologian started a project of demythologization of the gospel stories in which he set out to reinterpret the miraculous occurrences as over-blown natural events. For instance, the miracles regarding the raising of the dead were interpreted as arising from the special art in identifying and resuscitating someone in coma, an art prevalent in the 1st Century AD Greco-Roman society.

So, the major contribution of Enlightenment to biblical hermeneutics is the removal of the elements of faith in biblical interpretation and elucidation. It was an era in which faith in scripture was discarded and replaced with reason. Ironically this period also became the period of great expansion in learning,

documentation and literature. Much of the literature produced in this period reflected the prevailing philosophical notion of rise of reason above faith. While the preceding era had little or no documentation of its hermeneutical ethos, the Enlightenment era, being an era of learning and writing soon filled everywhere with publications which reflected this hermeneutical position. For that reason, whenever we talk about hermeneutical models, all that is readily available is the historical-critical hermeneutical models produced by the Enlightenment era. It is to the extent that when we talk about orthodox biblical hermeneutics, because the preceding era has little or no write-ups to show what traditional orthodox hermeneutics was, all that one can lay hands on is the historical-critical methods produced by Enlightenment era.

It is also very important to place on record that the Enlightenment era preceded the coming of Christianity into Africa. Therefore, the Euro-Christian churches that came to Africa were actually products of the Enlightenment, the era in which reason was exalted above faith. The Euro-Christian churches that came to Africa were therefore scientific in orientation. They were miles away from the African orientation of belief in mysteries, and recourse to spiritual avenues in the search for solution to the challenges and mishaps of life. The Euro-Christian churches were already exposed to the scientific world in which occurrences were interpreted through scientific models. The world view of the African is that every mishap, and that includes the slightest illness or fever, has a spiritual cause. For these reasons, the indigenous Africans quickly

rejected the Euro-Christian churches, but ironically did not completely reject Christianity. Soon after the establishment of the mission churches, the indigenous Africans, having read the Christian Bible themselves, devised their own Christianity which clearly satisfied the religious aspirations of the Africans.

So, it is important to note that, Enlightenment historical-critical hermeneutical model is not the traditional orthodox biblical hermeneutics. It is instead the first organized reaction to the orthodox biblical hermeneutics.

Secondly, the African hermeneutics, as originally made manifest in the hermeneutical models of the African Indigenous Churches, was not necessarily a reaction against orthodox biblical hermeneutics. It was instead a reaction against the Enlightenment historical-critical hermeneutical model which threw the faith of the Bible overboard and exalted reason over and above faith. When we place issues in the right perspectives, then it is possible to classify the aspirations of the hermeneutical models appropriately. Then it is possible to appraise reaction hermeneutics correctly.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERROGATING THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL HERMENEUTICAL MODELS

According to Collins (2016), historical criticism is the name usually given to what may be termed “mainline” biblical criticism over the last three centuries or so. Historical-critical methods are those which take account of the fact that the biblical texts were written long ago in a cultural matrix very different from our own, and hence attempt to understand the texts first of all in the context of that ancient setting. Historical considerations are a necessary part of that discussion because it requires at least an approximate idea of the time, place and circumstances of composition. The goal of this enquiry however, is not necessarily historical in a narrow sense. It might just as well be the theology or rhetoric of the text seen in the light of its historical context.

Historical-critical hermeneutical method dates back to 1753 when Jean Astruc first published the thesis that Moses composed the Pentateuch from two ancient memoirs, and that the key for discerning the memoirs lies in the use of the divine names, *Yahweh* and *'elohim*. Alexander Geddes followed up the indication and identified two written sources to the Pentateuch, namely, the J (Yahwist source, dated 10th to 9th Century BC) and the E (Elohlist source, dated 9th Century BC). The third source called the D or Dtr (Deuteronomist source dated 7th to 6th Century BC) was later identified, and lastly, the P (Priestly source, dated 6th to 5th

Century BC). In 1864, Julius Wellhausen in his, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* concisely articulated the nearly one hundred years of study of the sources (called Source Criticism or Documentary Hypothesis) of not just the Pentateuch but also of the entire Old Testament. An investigation which initially started by interrogating the presumption of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, held for nearly three thousand years from the tenth Century BC to the 18th Century AD, continued to broaden in scope and content until it had created a consummate position held till today regarding the authorship of the Old Testament.

In 1901, Herman Gunkel, a folklorist, opined that the books of the Old Testament were composed from existing oral forms, thus giving vent to a new dimension of historical-critical hermeneutical method called Tradition or Form Criticism, also credited to him, concerned about the existing oral forms that predate the written materials. Redaction Criticism which is complementary to Tradition or Form Criticism examines how the authors of the written materials utilized the oral (or written) forms available to them. Streeter (1924) discussed in detail the synoptic problem in the New Testament, settling the matter of dependency, first of the Synoptic Gospels, in which he established the point of Markan Priority, showing evidence of how Matthew and Luke used Mark and a material, called Q (Quelle, a German word for Source) to compose their Gospel versions. He showed in fact that the version of Mark used by Matthew and Luke was in fact a more crude version, which he called Ur-Markus, and showed evidence of how Mark formed the

profile for Mathew and Luke, a profile which they occasionally deviated from, to accommodate their peculiar materials, and to which they returned afterwards. He further showed that the author of John used Luke as starting material for his composition. Elsewhere, (Uzuegbunam, 2017), we have presented a much fuller discussion on Biblical Criticism in textual exegesis.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the historical-critical hermeneutical framework has interrupted and nearly distorted the nearly three thousand years of traditional devotional hermeneutics that had existed prior to its inception. In the period of preceding the 18th century Enlightenment-based hermeneutical model, biblical hermeneutics took the form of, and had the following features:

1. The Bible as God's Word (d^ebar-Yahweh)

The starting point for doing hermeneutics in the period preceding the historical-critical hermeneutical method was the point of understanding of the Bible as God's word. Thus both derived from, and enhanced the traditional devotional attitude to the Bible. On the contrary, the historical-critical hermeneutical model has fundamentally debunked and demystified this critical axiom, reducing the Bible to mere literature. Rudolf Bultmann, New Testament Redaction Scholar, has in fact gone ahead to carry out a project he titled, Demythologization of the Gospels, (see Jesus Christ and Mythology by Rudolf Bultmann). The crux of his argument is that it was the disciples of Jesus who weaved a theological

Christological (messianic) garment upon an ordinary good man, Jesus of Nazareth. No wonder, Adamo (2005) clearly warned;

I strongly believe that African scholars must not repeat the mistakes of the West in emptying Jesus of his power. (p. 26).

2. The Bible as Sacred Writing (Hagiographa)

Hermeneutics in the period preceding the historical-critical hermeneutical methods started from the fundamental premise that the Bible is sacred writing. What this meant was that its study would both take this axiom into primary account and endeavour to maintain it at all costs. Critics of the historical critical hermeneutical methods have indeed observed that biblical hermeneutics has been approached using the methods and genres meant for secular literature. Indeed, at the onset of the 18th century period of Enlightenment, a clear distinction could still be perceived between the sacred and the secular writings. After the era of historical-critical studies, the dividing line became blurred, sacrificed, as it were on the altars of what was rightly or wrongly conceived as objectivity. Goldengay (1981) had in fact asserted that;

Objectivity, distancing and concentrating on the descriptive may help us to avoid imposing our present beliefs, interests and questions on the text. But faith, involvement and commitment may open us to other

aspects of the text's own concerns and enable us to avoid the barrenness of "objectivity". (p. 23 – 24).

Barren objectivity, that is in fact the price to pay for an empirical historical-critical hermeneutical model which has in fact, in casting asunder the sacredness of the *hagiographa*, entered it with secular literary genres, ridding it of its sacred values.

3. Hermeneutics as Revelational

In the period prior to that of the historical-critical biblical models, biblical interpretation was basically revelational. It was believed and expected to flow from the very source of the scripture which is from above. The historical-critical hermeneutical model took the essence of biblical hermeneutics from the domain of revelation to the domain of sense and reason. By so doing, it broke its vital power of depth and profundity and reduced biblical hermeneutics to an issue of mere mental gymnastics.

4. Hermeneutics from Allegorical Framework

The biblical text itself is saturated with the beauties of allegories and typologies, for instance, the typology of Joseph depicting the suffering Messiah, sold by his brethren; the typology of the scarlet chord of the house of Rehab, likened to the blood of the lamb on the door lintels of the Exodus eve, that warded off the angel of death, culminating in the grand

scheme of the great Passover Lamb slain on the eve of Jewish Passover. It was this beautiful array of glorious allegories and typologies that the faith devotional community reveled in, in the days prior to the critical assault of the sacred literature with the secular devices of the historical-critical hermeneutical models.

The Revulsion of the African Indigenous Church Hermeneutics.

Let it be placed on record that the first and most original reaction to the historical-critical hermeneutical model that left the text completely rid of its power, was the theology and hermeneutical pattern of the African Indigenous Churches. It can in fact be said that the Bible was brought to Africa to be restored of its health and re clothed with its glory which it lost at the hands of the Eurocentric hermeneutical scholars. The African indigenous Christian worshippers took the Christian Bible, the same book that Eurocentric historical-critical hermeneutical models had reduced to mere literature, not any different from any other literature, and raised it to the height of glorious deification. See the height to which the African indigenous Christian worshippers raised the Christian document of faith, in this pictorial elucidation in which Madueke (2000) points to the various ways the book is employed.

The Bible is;

the most widely translated book, it makes a contribution to the construction of indigenous grammars and texts; it

is a basic textbook in primary and higher education; literacy has been closely tied to Bible reading and memorization, it is the most accessible basic vernacular literature text, a story book, a compilation of novels and short stories, a book of prose and poetry, a book of spiritual devotion, (i.e. the word of God), as well as a “science” book that explains the origin of all creatures. In some parts of Africa, the dead are buried with the Bible on their chests, and the Bible is buried with the concrete foundations on which new houses are built. In many African Independent Churches, it is the physical contact between the sick and the Bible that is believed to hasten healing. (pp. 91 – 92).

In other words, irrespective of what value the Euro-Christian missionaries attached to the Bible, the indigenous African Christian congregation embraced it with a glorious sense of certification, a fact which also became central to indigenous African hermeneutics and theology, because you cannot separate a person’s interpretation of a thing from his attitude to it, and vice versa. Indigenous African hermeneutics therefore took on from this holistic embrace of the Bible and built up a wholesome theology which culminated into the restoration of the power and glory, not just of the scripture, but also, more importantly of the faith community that issued it. We shall return to this matter a little more lucidly.

CHAPTER FOUR

HERMENEUTICAL COLONIALISM

African Biblical scholars have variously advanced the thought that the Christian Bible lends itself, or, at least, is lent as a tool for the advancement of the course of colonialism. Oladunjoye (2005) has succinctly argued that:

Some scholars have seen Christianity as a bulldozer, leveling the jungle of the uncivilized world in order to allow the builders of imperialism to come and build. Even some missionaries taught that Africans had to become westernized before becoming Christians. Desmond Tutu the other hand sees the attitude of the colonial interpreters of the Bible as exploitation through colonialism and neo-colonialism. The Africans were taught to despise everything African at the time of conversion. (p. 5).

Pratt (1997) further argued that;

In the early phase of Western expansion, the churches were allies of the colonial process. They spread under the protection of the colonial powers. They benefitted from the expansion of the empire. In return, they rendered special service to Western imperialism by legitimizing it and accustoming their new adherents to accept compensatory expectations of an external reward for terrestrial misfortunes, including colonial exploitation. (p. 3).

On the whole, two different perspective issues have been raised in relation to the association of the Christian Bible with the colonial experience.

1. **In-Text Evidence:** Does the Bible contain materials that are in anyway colonial in orientation; that is supporting unjust structures?
2. **Colonial Hermeneutics:** Is the Bible or portions thereof being interpreted in such a way as to promote the tenets of social stratification and discrimination? It is to these two issues that we shall now turn attention.

1. **Evidence of Colonial Materials in the Bible**

Ukpong (2005) has already sufficiently discussed this matter and so we can firmly rely on his submissions here. According to him; one vital approach in dealing with this hermeneutical colonization is concerned with correcting negative images about Africa and African peoples embedded in certain traditional readings of some biblical texts. He went further to state that;

An important theme in this regard is the so called curse of Ham whose descendants are listed in Gen. 10:1-14 and 1Chron.1:8-16 as the Cushites (Ethiopians), Mizraimites (Egyptians), Putites, and Canaanites. In Gen. 9:18-27, Ham sees the nakedness of his drunken father, Noah, but instead of covering him, reports this to his two brothers, Shem and Japhet who cover their father. According to Hebrew tradition,

Ham has committed an act of great disrespect towards his father. Noah wakes up and learns of the action of his children, he pronounces a curse, not on Ham, but on Canaan, Ham's son who was not yet born. A fifth century Midrash on this narrative places Noah's curse directly on Ham and adds: "Your seed will be ugly and dark skinned". Also, the 6th century CE Babylonian Talmud states, "The descendants of Ham are cursed by being black and are sinful with degenerate progeny". From these came the idea that Africans are black because of the curse of Ham. (p. 41).

This text has been lent to profound use by the Whites in South Africa and South America in support of their subjugation of the Blacks in those places. Ironically, the missionaries who brought Christianity and by implication the Bible to Africa are the kith and kin of the same Whites who colonized Africa and inflicted such untold pains of exploitation and subjugation on the Africans. And as has been shown, these missionaries not only benefitted from the logistic assistance provided by these colonialists and imperialists but also used the platform of the church to provide the atmosphere for fellowship and interaction with these colonialists and imperialists in such a manner that makes it impossible for an objective analyst to effectively draw a line between the missionaries on one hand, and the colonialists and imperialists on the other. In fact, in South Africa, the very same people who brought the church and the Christian Bible were the ones who orchestrated, supported and supervised the ugly Apartheid policy, a form of internal

colonization. It is on record that the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa openly taught that inequality was an act of nature, and that just as God deliberately created the fingers to be unequal, so the inequality between the Whites and Blacks in South Africa was a deliberate act of God.

To begin with, those who are conversant with the genres of Biblical exegesis know that some stories in the Bible are referred to as aitiological. Such stories are those which are deliberately composed in order to, at least, attempt to explain a seemingly inexplicable phenomenon. Thus, the story of Lot's wife looking back to Sodom after the deliverance by the angels, in contravention of the specific warning to the contrary, and consequently turning into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26), was composed in order to explain the seemingly inexplicable feature of the Pillar of Salt. The story of the collapse of the wall of Jericho in Joshua 6 was composed to explain the huge mound of rubbles which the Israelites met on arrival at Jericho. Now, look at the story of the purported curse on Africa. The man who sinned was Ham. Noah woke up from sleep and learnt how Ham had seen his nakedness, and he said; "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" (Gen. 9:25). Anyway, this is even absurd in itself, but in fact portrays the true character of Biblical aitiological illustrations. A man commits an offence, and his father places a curse on his unborn child. This is also a confirmation of the retrospective nature of Old Testament narratives. A man could not be so certain of what would be the name of his son's unborn child, but anyway, the narrator who was

reporting this in retrospect had already known the descendants of Ham and knew the one, out of the descendants, that was not doing well and seemed to be under a curse. Biblical aitiologies actually start from the answer and attempt to raise the matching question. For instance, why is Canaan manifesting the traits of perennial slavish orientation and bondage? It is because his father saw his father's nakedness and made a mockery of him, instead of covering him. That is how Biblical aitiology works.

The gruesome irony of that text, particularly when placed side by side with the hermeneutical 5th century Midrash, is that Canaan (Ham's son purportedly cursed) refers to the thriving area of Palestine or Persian Gulf which accounts for about eighty-five percent of the world's crude oil deposits; and has been massively beautified with the proceeds of crude oil exports to Europe, America and Asia. On the contrary, the son of Ham that is the father of Africa and can be associated with the description "dark-skinned" and (perhaps) "ugly" is Cush.

The Cushites, according to Wikipedia.org, are "a grouping of people who are primarily indigineous to Northeast Africa". So if anybody was cursed in the text or in the words of the hermeneutical Midrash or even the Babylonian Talmud, it should have been Cush, and then, by implication Africans. But thank God, the Bible did not say that God cursed Africa.

The truth is that God never cursed Africa, never came close to wishing to do so, and never will. Africa is a blessed continent. God

blessed Africa and placed all the natural mineral resources under the African soil – gold, silver, precious stones, crude oil, etc. It was in fact these abundant natural resources that attracted the Europeans to Africa, and to be able to freely excavate these mineral resources, they had to use all kinds of mechanisms to subdue the Africans.

The African skin, deliberately the product of years of subjection to the intense scorching heat of the sun, is tough and impervious to a vast array of micro-organisms. You will not appreciate the blessing of the African skin until you see the ravaging impact of skin cancer in Europe and America.

The African environment is not cursed. It is in fact a blessing. It is already clear that in the recent bout of the global pandemic of Covid-19 disease, the only continent in the world where its influence is rated in mere trickles is Africa. The total one-year record of deaths from Covid-19 in Nigeria, in spite of the deliberate escalation to attract foreign aid, still falls short of what was once a daily record of deaths in Italy, Britain or Ecuador. God in deed loves Africa.

The only problem with Africa today is that the African is like a man caught at the middle of the road. Having experienced European values, he wishes that he could suddenly transmutate into a European, which is impossible. On the other hand, the vital tangible and intangible elements of his traditional roots, despicably criminalized and tabooed by the Euro-Christian missionaries, are

exerting a pressure on him, daring him to be “Honest to (his) African Heritage” (Apologies, Prof. Jude Emeka Madu). Needless to say, the African attitude to life is that of endless vacillation. Today, ironically, Africans are travelling all the way back to their traditional religious roots, repudiating years of consolidated Christianization, which, but for some insincere and exploitative activities of some of the missionaries, would have brought him to a place of new discovery.

Europe has totally and finally broken the ethos of the cherished communal life in Africa and left in its wake a generation of Africans who are unleashing on each other the exploitive mechanisms they have acquired from their European mentors. Is it not ironical that in Africa where per capita income, standard of living and quality of life are at the lowest ebb, that is where also you have the wealthiest church leaders in the world? Pastors and church leaders in Nigeria, for instance, are in the midst of the most impoverished congregations whom they recklessly milk and extort in tithes and sacrificial seeds, while cruising about in their private jets. In this regard, church leaders are not doing any better than the political leaders who stash away in foreign bank accounts, huge resources meant for developing the African nations and improving the lots of the people, leaving the people in perennial penury, starvation, illiteracy and disease. If this is the adduced effect of the purported curse on Africa, it certainly makes a lot of sense to agree.

2. **Adapting the Bible to Colonial Interpretation.**

At the centre of African scholars' grievance against the Euro-Christian missionaries is the disdain with which the missionaries appraised the African indigenous religious values, and the avowed commitment of the missionaries to annihilate the African heritage. To justify their action, the missionaries described the African religious roots in the most pejorative and despicable terms – fetish, idolatrous, heathen, magical, idol worship, and so on.

In appraising the missionary styles of the Euro-Christian missionaries in Africa, the easiest starting point is from the product end, an examination of the African product of the Euro-Christian missionary enterprise. A cursory look reveals an African clad in the European garb but still intrinsically and fundamentally, and functionally and even religiously African. He goes to the church on Sunday, but his soul is still in his African religious roots where his confidence is still deeply embedded. Recently, in Anambra State in South East Nigeria, a political god-father was going to invest his money in campaigns for the election of a political contestant to the office of the Governor. As is the practice, the terms of the agreement would be drawn up to show how the contestant would reward the god-father with the State resources when elected. Ironically, the two, contestant and god-father, are Knights of the church, that is, by implication, highly exalted church members. Having drawn up the agreement among themselves, the two men needed to seal it with an oath. And to ensure the unalloyed effectiveness of their

oath, they knew where to go; not to the church altar, nor indeed to the church Bishop, but to the shrine of a popular deity in Anambra State. This is just to show that when the chips are down, the African knows where his religious conscience, confidence and affinity lie.

In its over one hundred and sixty years of existence in Africa, the church has made converts, but the African has remained essentially and intrinsically whom he is and his allegiance remains to his traditional roots. The explanation for this is obvious and those who teach missiological models are already learning, from the Euro-Christian missionaries models, how not to engage the local population in a missionary enterprise. To begin with, because the missionaries were too much in a haste to plant their new religion, they did not care to engender an atmosphere of communication and communion with the indigenous Africans. If they had done that the first thing that would have happened is that they would have been exposed to the religious values and aspirations of the Africans. Because they had no communication or communion with the Africans, they quickly concluded that Africans were a people without religious roots, values and aspirations. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the fact that less than seventy years after the establishment of the Euro-Christian Missionary Churches in Africa, the indigenous African Christians not only rejected the European Christian orientation but also established their own version of the Christian church where their core religious values and aspirations were to be catered for. Next, in their sensitivity to

hermeneutical models, they interpreted the Christian Bible in such a way that it squarely addressed the African roots, challenges and aspirations. So, indigenous pre-Christian Africans had a set of core religious values and aspirations, and when they could not find those values and aspirations in the Euro-Christian Missionary Churches, they resolved not to compromise their religious roots. They created their own versions of the Christian church (called African Indigenous Churches, AIC's) and moved swiftly to use them to address their peculiar religious challenges and aspirations.

For the avoidance of doubt, indigenous African religious facilities had a potency by which the society was ordered and crime was prevented. Recently, as his contribution to the raging debate about how to eradicate corruption that is threatening to wipe out the nations of Africa, General Jerry Rawlings, great revolutionist and one-time Ghanaian Head of State, asked a very pertinent question; "Why swear in potential public office holders in Africa, using the Bible and Quran, when it is clear to you that they have no atom of regard for those instruments?" And he went ahead to suggest; "Instead, take them to swear before their local deities that they will never steal public funds, and if they do, the deities should kill them". Has it not been variously admitted that the African society was much better and more morally ordered in the pre-Christian era than in the post-Christian era? So, at least from that premise, those who wrote off African traditional values as altogether inexistent have clearly missed it.

So, part of what the African biblical scholars consider colonial hermeneutics on the part of the Euro-Christian missionaries is their pejorative and disdainful attitude to the religious roots of Africa, a stance which justified their calculated resolve to wipe out and utterly annihilate everything African in the African society. And you want to ask; with over one hundred and sixty years of the church in Africa, has it now succeeded in wiping out the indigenous religious roots of Africa? The answer, most clearly, is no.

It is a colonial orientation that makes a missionary vastly superior to the people he has come to minister to. Such a missionary then ascends the lofty ecclesiastical heights, far withdrawn from the people, lest they pollute or desecrate him. And from such ecclesiastical heights, he doles out strings “do’s” and “don’t’s”, invoking curses on people who dare disobey the orders. Modern missionaries now know that in a true missionary enterprise, there is no difference between the leader (missionary) and the people. Why was there the need for a betrayer to identify Jesus from his disciples? It was because, ordinarily, you would not be able to tell Jesus from his disciples. What great lesson for the pontifical, plutocratic, callous exploitive leaders that have hijacked the church today. In their own case, you certainly won’t need a betrayer to identify them. From afar, you will be able to distinguish them by their aristocratic flamboyance and their despotic stance, surrounded by multiple slaves who bear modern titles while playing the same ancient slavish roles.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RISE OF SOCIAL CONTEXT HERMENEUTICS

As already seen in hermeneutical colonialism (otherwise called colonial hermeneutics) recipients of the diverse approaches to Biblical interpretation have accused the proponents of these approaches, (and not without cause, anyway) of deliberately applying the tenets of hermeneutics unto discriminatory and exploitative objectives. This has in fact led to the pronounced critical outlook on the Bible as an instrument designed for racial oppression. Some have stated categorically that the laws of the Bible are deliberately designed to hold down the oppressed from taking up arms against the oppressor(s). Thus, the expectation of a blissful life in eternity, for those who remained calm in the face of oppression, is seen as serving no other purpose except the bidding of the callous oppressors.

Over the years, therefore, a stream of social context hermeneutics has arisen specifically for the purpose of addressing these hermeneutical anomalies – subjugations, intimidations and oppressions. The idea essentially is to embattle and utterly resist and subdue any hermeneutical position that grants impetus to oppression. These hermeneutical perspectives have given rise to context theologies that are named after the perspectives, namely; Liberation Theology, Black Theology, Feminist Theology, African Theology, Decolonization Theology, Motivational and Inspirational

Theology, and so on. A few of these hermeneutical perspectives and the main thrusts of their position deserve brief mention here.

1. **LIBERATION HERMENEUTICS**

By far the most popular and most epoch-making of the social context hermeneutics is that which arose in Latin America in the 1960's, the major proponents of which were Julian Segundo (a Catholic Priest) and Gustavo Gutierrez. The situation that led to the emergence of Liberation hermeneutics was the existence of a condition of abject poverty, deprivation and marginalization of the poor by the rich and affluent in the Latin American society. It was rather ironical that both the wealthy oppressors and the deprived and oppressed, downtrodden poor, belonged to the same congregations of the thriving Roman Catholicism in the society. It thus became very clear that there was an ideological sharp divide between the message doled out from the church pulpits and the actual condition of living (particularly the disconnect between the affluent oppressor Christians and the impoverished deprived Christians). It was this situation that catalyzed this new approach of doing hermeneutics in line with the Bible's protection of the poor from the oppressive rich. According to Sabrino (1978), "The poor are the authentic theological source for understanding Christian truth and practice" (p. 56). In other words, liberation hermeneutics represents a slant of biblical interpretation in which the welfare and protection of the deprived, down-trodden poor form the central, focal point. As Bonino (1975) puts it; "God is unequivocally on the

side of the poor” (p. 17). Liberation hermeneutics asserts that the starting point of Biblical interpretation is the point at which the welfare of the suffering, distressed poor is given the utmost pride of place. Thus, this perspective of Biblical interpretation condemned as utterly out of place, the prevailing alliance between the authorities of the church and the ungodly ruling powers of Latin America.

One common feature of liberation hermeneutics which also applies to all the social context hermeneutical models is the resolve to model hermeneutics towards the solution of societal challenges, in this case, the exploitation of the poor by the rich. In other words, social context hermeneutics believes that Biblical interpretation cannot, and should not be done in a vacuum, but must be made to address and redress the existing social anomalies in the society. It is important to place on record that in response to the demands of the proponents of liberation hermeneutics in Latin America, the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of Latin America held in 1968 in Columbia, unanimously condemned the prevailing alliance between the church and the ruling powers in Latin America.

The vital Biblical textual basis for liberation hermeneutics is the Exodus story which contains the practical proof that God takes sides with the oppressed against the oppressors. Liberation hermeneutics, however, interprets the Exodus story as a violent action embarked upon by the oppressed to regain their freedom from the oppressors, thus urging the oppressed not to give in to

oppression. It nonetheless brings God into the picture, in the sense that the oppressed cannot do so much on their own to regain freedom from the powerful oppressors, but would require divine assistance.

It is important, however, to note here that the major failure of liberation hermeneutics arises from its advocacy for violence by the oppressed to regain freedom from the oppressors. Being a social context hermeneutical model, liberation hermeneutics quite often takes hermeneutics outside the rational ambits of Biblical interpretation and ends up as a social movement entirely, advocating and adopting methods and strategies that the Bible certainly cannot endorse. To take hermeneutics out of the text it intends to interpret becomes nothing but an aberration.

2. BLACK THEOLOGY HERMENEUTICS

This perspective to hermeneutics has its origin in the experiences of the Blacks in North America and South Africa who were going through all forms of discriminatory oppression at the hands of their White counterparts. Ironically, they presumably shared the same faith and worshipped in the same faith communities with these agents of class distinction and oppression. Yet, not even the commonality in the community of worship in any way mitigated the oppressive practices of these privileged elements. Black theology hermeneutics thus became a hermeneutical slant to the sporadic Civil Rights (or Black Rights) Movements that sprang

up in North America and South Africa in the 1960's. These societies at the time had one thing in common and that was racial discrimination against the blacks by the whites. Elements of black theology hermeneutics can still be seen in the decolonization hermeneutics being championed in the main by African scholars. A significant component of this perspective to hermeneutics is the feeling that the Bible itself is a colonial document and that it contains textual substance that lends support to the discrimination against the blacks. One of such references is the so-called curse of Noah to his son Ham which, in a complex pseudo-hermeneutical maneuver translates to a curse of the black race. Another common reference is the content of Exodus 12 to the effect that God commanded the Israelites through Moses to borrow items of gold and silver from the Egyptians (Africa or the Black race) at the point of leaving Egypt, and by so doing laid the prophetic foundation for the impoverishment of the black race by Europe and America. The other dimension to this perspective of hermeneutics is the insinuation that the biblical reference to idolatry, graven images, heathenism, is basically a reference to African religious roots. Modern African scholars are already profusely refuting this vituperative and pejorative description of African indigenous religious orientation. The impression that the Black race did not know God, and had no tangible religious orientation prior to their coming in contact with the European missionaries is already being treated as erroneous and highly provocative by the stream of

contemporary African scholars. Parrat (1997) laments this deliberate denigration of the black race, thus:

The worst crime that can be laid at the door of the White man... is not our economic, social and political exploitation, however reprehensible that might be; no, it is that his policy succeeded in filling most of us with a self-disgust and self-hatred. This has been the most violent form of colonialism, our spiritual and mental enslavement, when we have suffered from what can only be called a religious or spiritual schizophrenia. (p. 37).

Black theological hermeneutics thus became the reaction of the black race to the fallouts of the long periods of enslavement of the black race by their white counterparts in North America, South Africa and Europe. Essentially the black race in Europe and North America represent the offsprings of the scores of slaves purchased from Africa and ferried into Europe and North America in slave cargoes. They were second class personnel at that time, hardly qualified to be called citizens of their host nations when they evidently did not share in the rights and entitlements of citizens of those nations. Well, the era of civil rights agitations, complemented with the hermeneutical and theological corollary to the civil rights agitations, have produced a fairer society. Racial discrimination has, at least in principle, been outlawed in North America, and the discriminatory Apartheid Policy in South Africa has been dismantled. South Africa has gained total Independence from their

British colonial masters, and is now under the rule of indigenous leaders.

Black theology hermeneutics has in essence focused on the anti-discriminatory declarations in the Biblical text such as “In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek”. (Gal. 3:28). The slave masters of North America had adopted as a policy a system of de-culturizing and de-religionizing their victims (African slaves) while introducing them to the tenets of Christianity, and employing them as mere tools. The slaves eventually studied the Christian Bible by themselves and then found no tenable biblical basis for the dehumanization that was being meted out to them. Black theology hermeneutics saw through to the existence of an impartial, non-discriminately, just and righteous God, as variously attested to in the Christian Bible. These ideas they advanced over and above the colonial exploitative and dehumanizing practices being meted out to them by their White overlords. However, later, two different perspectives to black theology hermeneutics arose. One was passive, patient and peaceful, believing that with more understanding and commitment to the tenets of the Scripture of the Christian Faith, the discriminatory policies would ultimately collapse. The other stance was rather violent, believing that the unjust structures in society that bred the exploitation of the less privileged by the privileged few on whatever basis would not collapse on their own but would bow to pressure when sufficient pressure is brought upon them. Thus, it would not be surprising that black theory hermeneutics eventual produced the

hermeneutical credence to the spite of wild agitations and violent actions that eventually compelled the operators of the discriminating policies to back down, giving rise to a more egalitarian society.

3. **FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS**

The growing concern and agitations for women liberation gave birth to a hermeneutical component aimed at dismantling the textual elements that hold down women in subjugation and make them accept a position of inferiority to their male counterparts. This is in brief what Feminist hermeneutics is all about. To begin with, feminist hermeneutics started with textual interpretation from the critical standpoint that even the Biblical text, as other documents of faith, is male chauvinistic, and is a deliberate instrument for furthering male domination in the society. God is conceived of, and described as masculine, with a masculine gender pronoun used for him, and there is no modicum of mother figure around him. In the Old Testament, God reveals himself through the patriarchs, and the patriarchal dispensation soon gives way to a prolonged, male-dominated monarchical era. The prophets who stood between God and humans were all male. Even in the New Testament, in the ministry of Jesus, in spite of the huge contributions made by the highly sacrificial women, all the apostles appointed by Jesus are male. Thus, even in the New Testament rather more reformed religious traditions, the elements of male chauvinism are not jettisoned. On a number of instances, Jesus is said to feed four or five thousand men, including women and children, signifying that

women are too insignificant for anyone to expend efforts in counting.

Feminist hermeneutics in fact starts from the standpoint in which the Biblical text, in accordance with the traditions of the environment that gave birth to it, is disdained as structurally patriarchal, calling in fact for its revision in order to eliminate the patriarchal elements inherent in it.

There is no doubt that, not just Israel, but also the entire society of the Ancient near East is fundamentally patriarchal in orientation. In fact, many of them, till today, practice a system of government described as Patrimonialism, a system of government presided over by family heads who are all male. No one dares prescribe democracy in those societies. One king rules until old age and eventual death, and is replaced by a brother or close male relation. In that system of government, some families are treated as royal and they alone must produce the kings, who must be male, even if the only available mature male in the family, at the time of vacancy in the office is an imbecile. This is the same administrative situation found in the Old Testament.

Till today, as a result of the inherent patriarchal orientation of the Biblical text directly inherited by the churches, most churches cannot see the possibility of female clergy. This situation is more predominant in the orthodox churches. The New Religious Movements freely admit women into their clergy but even this situation is not acceptable to many societies.

Whilst feminist hermeneutics seeks a reinterpretation of the biblical text in order to assert the relevance of women, and to eliminate the facets of male chauvinism or patriarchalism domiciled in the text, it would appear that the *terminus ad quem* of its aspiration will be an outright discarding of the Biblical text altogether, in favour of another that is, at least, more admissible of the role and relevance of women in the religious context. The credibility of the product of such a venture remains to be ascertained. It has remained our cardinal assertion that any hermeneutics that will qualify to be described as Biblical hermeneutics, must begin at the point at which the sanctity and centrality of the Biblical text must be acknowledged. A Biblical hermeneutics which seeks an outright repudiation of the Biblical text and its replacement with another has certainly obscured the valid point of critical Biblicism, and could, to that extent, be anything but biblical in its hermeneutical orientation.

4. **REVISIONIST HERMENEUTICS**

The term “revisionism” has been employed in recent hermeneutical studies in two diverse perspectives. The first is the perspective which looks at it, not as a distinct perspective of hermeneutics, but as umbrella term that embraces all hermeneutical positions advocating a radical updating or emendation of the biblical text in line with contemporary challenges. Thus, in a broad sense, revisionist hermeneutics refers

to such recent hermeneutical movements as process theism, and various forms of political and socio-cultural hermeneutics which include feminism, liberation hermeneutics, black theory and third world and other related theological perspectives, including perspectives in African enculturation hermeneutics. What these hermeneutical perspectives have in common is their attempt, or at least advocacy, to reformulate from various critical perspectives the meaning and claims of the Biblical texts, as well as the central theological or doctrinal notions advanced by the text.

The second perspective of application of the term revisionism, and hence, revisionist theology or hermeneutics is the one which refers to the specific formal model of fundamental hermeneutics. In this perspective of use, the term was first put forward by David Tracy, in his work; *Blessed Rage for Order*. This work has remained the primary source for the most refined and detailed exposition of the model. For Tracy, a revisionist fundamental Christian theology is best described as philosophical reflection on the meanings present in common human experience and those present in the Christian tradition.

Revisionist hermeneutics as a formal model or hermeneutical method is characterized by a specific understanding of the web of commitments which define the standpoint of the individual scholar's approach to the Biblical text. This methodological commitment at the level of fundamental hermeneutics finds its

embodiment in the sphere of systematic theology, and to the contemporary hermeneutical and theological movements.

For revisionist hermeneutics, the primary responsibility of biblical theology is unto the community of scholarly enquiry and its respective canons of enquiry, (which include the philosophical, historical, literary-critical, ideological-critical, and so on) as well as the morality of the critical enquiry. Revisionist hermeneutics asserts a commitment to the spirit of enquiry; a commitment to asserting only that for which warrants are provided; and a willingness to follow the evidence wherever it may lead, in the spirit of investigation of the present meaning and defensibility of the truth – claims of that tradition.

Thus, understanding of the hermeneutical expedition is aptly described as revisionist because it represents a critical corrective to the dominant neo-orthodox understanding of the process. In response to Paul Tillich's position that "the task of the theologian is to show that the Christian message contains answers to the questions implied in the human situation", revisionist hermeneutics maintains that such a correlation is insufficiently critical. Indeed it is simply a juxtaposition, as it derives the questions for theology from only one source – the human situation; and its answers from another one source – the Christian message. It falls grossly short in that it does not allow for a correlation and interplay of the principal questions and answers of each source. Thus, revisionist hermeneutics reaffirms the commitment to the principal values,

cognitive claims and existential faiths of classic liberal hermeneutics.

Essentially, the concern of revisionist hermeneutics is the deconstruction or reformulation of orthodox textual meanings. Far from an advocacy for an abdication or a reconstruction of the text, as the name may suggest, revisionist hermeneutics seeks a broadening of the tenets for dogmatic interpretation. Orthodox hermeneutics begins by a dogmatic fixation of the tenets and regions of meaning, a fact which revisionism considers absurd in itself. For revisionism, the exploration of textual meaning should be an ongoing expedition, and in this process, contexts of exploration need necessarily not to be fixatively constrained, but remain elastic as the search for new meanings and new contexts is admitted as an interminable phenomenon.

5. MOTIVATIONAL AND INSPIRATIONAL HERMENEUTICS

“It was a harsh summer, the summer of 1982. For many, it was as if the clock had rolled back to the thirties, the time of the Great Depression. Company upon company declared bankruptcy. Unemployment soared. The ‘severe and prolonged recession’, as it was dubbed by the media sent ripples of depression across America. No one could deny that the country had problems. But the biggest problem we had was our attitude toward the economic problem. Negative thinking spread like a plague through all levels of society. It was not easy to protect oneself from the infection of negative thinking which spread by word of mouth, by conversation

with friends as well as strangers, by television screens and by news reports. It spread quickly because in recessive times, the tendency is to react negatively. Once an organism, a business, a life, or a country is infected with negative thinking, the infection attacks the mind, the heart and the soul like termites that secretly gnaw at the emotional support system. It was in the midst of this national mood that I arrived at the Hilton Hotel in downtown Chicago. I was there to present a motivational lecture at a major convention. Delivering lectures of inspiration as well as on successful management principles was nothing new to me. Each year I travel from coast to coast, giving nearly one hundred talks to doctors, executives, educators, you name it. However, I was particularly fascinated by this engagement. My audience would be members of the Ag-Industry. ("Ag" is, of course the abbreviation for agriculture). This industry represents those who are involved in farming enterprise in the Midwest States of Iowa, Michigan, Illinois and Minnesota. My anticipation of a warm inspirational evening was quickly doused by a couple of somber-looking gentlemen. The convention badges pinned to their dark lapels identified them as the men for whom I was looking. They greeted me with restrained enthusiasm. These men were losing their farms. Their businesses were going bankrupt. Terrible pressures were being placed on their marriages and families."

This was the story that formed the setting for the rise of Motivational and Inspirational hermeneutics. It was a real problem that faced real people on the threshold of total annihilation. The

man who stood at the very point of dealing with this challenge shown above was Dr. Robert H. Schuller, at that time the Pastor of Crystal Cathedral in the United States of America. The real challenge that faced him in the circumstance was to take up the Bible and look through it for a word to reignite the shattered lives of these men at the peak of a disaster-ridden economic depression, in such a manner that could at least draw out the lingering innate potentials in them, to enable them survive the threatening storm.

Hermeneutics is not static. It is a progressive, living expedition that endeavours to adapt itself in new circumstances, in the ongoing search for meaning in the overall journey of life. Hermeneutics must therefore lend itself, creatively and ingeniously to new situations and circumstances in the ongoing quest to provide meaning to life's intricate perplexities. The Bible, as shown above, has been adapted to the process of mental and emotional incarceration and colonialism. It can also be adapted to the process of awakening dormant innate potentials in the inside of human persons, until such potentials, having been woken up, are assiduously unleashed at the challenging situation, and tangible positive results are yielded.

Motivational and inspirational hermeneutics thus became that perspective of the search for meanings of Biblical texts that seeks to apply the biblical text as quickening tonic to awaken latent strengths in the inside of the human person, for the purpose of effectively dealing with a challenging situation. As Robert Schuller

himself put it, “When you have exhausted all possibilities, remember this; you haven’t”. Dr. Schuller’s book, “Tough Times Never Last But Tough People Do” became a classical epitomization of the tenets of Motivational and Inspirational hermeneutics.

Robert Schuller’s contemporary in the Motivational and Inspirational hermeneutics is Dr. Norman Vincent Pearle, the author of the classical best seller, “The Power of Positive Thinking”. Pearle’s under-guarding philosophy, which also became the title of one of his best-selling books is, “You can, if you think you can”. His favourite Scripture, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13) speaks volumes of the positive confession that turns innate discouragement into budding strength.

6. AFRICAN INCULTURATION HERMENEUTICS

Strangely, and highly worthy of note, Afro-centric hermeneutics has prospered exceedingly in the last couple of decades. Afro-centric hermeneutics has progressed from the point of primitive textual colonialism to a neo-romantic posture in which the African can identify in the Biblical text, no longer a motif of racial colonialism but one of consanguinity, universal affinity, and mutual integration. This progress, it must be admitted, has been largely the product of the years of process hermeneutics and theologies. For instance, it was a great eye-opener that the proponents of liberation theology could discover for themselves that the Biblical text presents Yahweh as identifying with the cause of the oppressed, and indeed takes sides with the oppressed against

their oppressors. A vital technical tool of liberation theology, the Old Testament Book of Exodus, presents the vivid picture of Yahweh, taking up the cause of the oppressed against the oppressors, till all the oppressors became drowned, through Yahweh's drastic intervention, in the Red Sea, while the oppressed were mysteriously delivered. Similarly, modern Afro-centric hermeneutics has completely obliterated the impressions of racial colonial hermeneutics, and is willing to explore the universal humanity posture of the text; *ouk eni Ioudaios oude Ellen en Christo Ieso* (Neither Jew nor Greek in Christ Jesus; Gal.3:28). This implies a total abdication of the traces of racial discrimination, in favour of united universal humanity. Modern Afro-centric hermeneutics can presently identify a common provision in the biblical text, in spite, anyway, of the present socio-economic inequalities in the world. It is to this situation that modern African theologians are addressing their minds with a view to detangling the African mind from the orthodox mental inclinations that hold the people down perpetually in socio-economic bondage, in favour of more pragmatic mental orientations that would enable the African people to take their destinies in their own hands and liberate themselves from the circumstantially induced socio-economic slavery that pervades the African environment presently. It is to these issues of interface hermeneutics for socio-economic liberation that we turn our attention in the next and concluding chapter of this book. But for the purposes of an introduction, it needs to be stated that basically, the purpose of hermeneutics is essentially to generate such

perspectives of textual interpretation that create in a people an appropriate mental orientation necessary for dismantling the internal dissuasions and mobilizing the vast innate human resources for socio-economic growth of the human society. Today, as we anticipate the conclusion of the first quarter of the 21st Century, hermeneutics should now go beyond the traditional primitive concerns of whether God is White or Black, male or female, Jew or Greek, and address itself much more to those mental frameworks necessary for confronting the real human developmental challenges of poverty, under-development, disease and dwindling life expectancy, and how these developmental challenges can be dealt with as mankind progresses into the second quarter of the 21st Century. Modern hermeneutics, it must be advocated, has now to have contemporary, pragmatic creative value.

CHAPTER SIX

INTERFACE HERMENEUTICS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: THE AFRO-CENTRIC PARADIGM

For clarity purposes, interface hermeneutics takes the context of the hermeneutical model beyond the socio-cultural. Whilst not ignoring the social and cultural tensions altogether, it engages an interface context which is rather more holistic in outlook. As has been hinted, the sole objective of hermeneutics is to create, by textual elucidation, a mental framework which interfaces with the basic challenges of society, and fully mobilizes the intra-psychic resources against such challenges. Whereas the hermeneutics of the previous ages have lent themselves only to mere academic elucidation, the process theology hermeneutics has shown us that hermeneutics can be directed to addressing socio-cultural contexts, that is, doing hermeneutics from the basic standpoint of socio-cultural inequalities, these inequalities being the making of human frailties. In interface hermeneutics, the inequalities are rather played down on as though they don't matter anymore, so that the anti-human tensions generated by them, which break down human society along the lines of such tensions, instead of mobilizing whole human resources for the resolution of the challenges, can be avoided. Thus, while the socio-cultural hermeneutical contexts place human beings at the receiving end of the vituperations, interface hermeneutics sees the human family as unbroken and undivided, for the purpose of mobilizing the whole human family

towards the resolution of the human challenges. We can now take a look at some biblical texts randomly chosen, for the purpose of applying the interface hermeneutical models of interpretation, in the Afro-centric socio-economic development paradigm.

We start with 2 Kings 4:1-7

Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying; Thy servant my husband is dead; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. And Elisha said unto her, what shall I do for thee? Tell me, what has thou in thy house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he said; Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her; There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said; Go sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

To begin with hermeneutics that is not targeted at changing the mental orientation of a people for creatively addressing and

redressing their fundamental challenges, is useless. Twenty-First Century hermeneutics must interface the critical developmental challenges of the human society with a view to creating a healthier happier human society.

To begin with, the problem presented here is one of poverty. A certain widow cried to a religious leader (hermeneutical agent); her husband died a debtor, and two of her sons were the collateral security for the debts, and the creditor had come for her sons. The widow in this context, in our Afro-centric paradigm model, is Africa, a continent endowed with resources, yet basking in poverty, as a result of inability to apply the right systems and methods for deriving the necessary financial benefits from the natural resources. Low per capita income, low standard of living, high rate of inflation, low level of amenities, unavailability of electric power supply for production purposes, lack of access roads for evacuating agricultural produce from the hinterland, huge post-harvest losses as a result of lack of processing and preservation facilities, ineffective educational system for tackling developmental challenges, these are the bane of African development. The fact of low level of industrialization coupled with high debt burden imply that these crises will persist for a long time to come. It must be admitted candidly that, unlike the traditional notion in the typical quasi-religious setting, poverty pertains more to unjust social structures rather than mysterious spiritual omens, and unless it is tackled from that perspective, it will never be resolved.

Debt Burden: This widow's husband had died, and she had inadvertently inherited the debt, more so, when her two living sons were the collateral security for the debts, and the creditors had come for them. Africa's debt burden in the first quarter of the 21st Century is reaching an alarming state, estimated in hundreds of billions of dollars. It has been reported in the dailies that the Chinese government has taken over the major international airport in Uganda because of that nation's inability to repay the huge debts owed to China. In Nigeria, as at the beginning of 2022, the debt burden of the country stands at 32.7 trillion naira, about 17 billion US dollars. In the 2021 Nigerian National Budget, about 80 percent of the budget was devoted to debt servicing, and the same applies to the 2022 budget. The creditors are really coming for the throats of the poor masses of Africans as a result of years of poor management of the resources of the African nations.

Your Servant Feared the Lord: (Empty Religious Propensities).

The double crises of the African situation is the extreme religious propensities which do not translate to genuine morality, on one hand, and the ethical orientation that does not promote genuine honest socio-economic growth and wealth creation. The only industry in Africa is religion. In fact, it is only on matters of religion that Africans are willing to stick out their necks and fight till the last drop of the blood. African leaders critically exploit their nations and cart away huge volumes of wealth of their nations to Europe and America. The same criminal leaders walk freely on the streets without fear of molestation. No one would attack them. The

religious orientation of Africans teaches them that only God can judge the ungodly. For that reason, criminal leaders stark away the huge wealth of the nations in foreign countries, and no one cares. But ironically, whisper a little uncomplimentary remark about a religious figure long dead and gone, and Africans will not be content to let God fight for himself. They march out in the streets and burn down houses and kill and main fellow human beings on the other side of the religious divide. For goodness sake, those who committed heavier atrocities against generations yet unborn are walking about freely on the streets, and only a little uncomplimentary remark about a man cooling off in the grave long ago is causing such national upheaval. Who bewitched us in Africa?

The Widow Appealed to the Religious Leader (An Appeal unto a Hermeneutical Perspective)

The appeal here stands at the very critical point of interface hermeneutics. It is like asking; “What hermeneutical perspective shall be most appropriate for dealing with Africa’s poverty and high debt burden which is crippling the continent, with a threat of perpetual slavery staring everyone in the face? Afro-centric hermeneutics must now be deliberately and consciously engaged in this search for the hermeneutical models that fundamentally address the real-life developmental challenges of Africa, with a view to redressing them and creating a better, healthier African society. It will be an act of critical foolhardiness if African exegetes preoccupy themselves with the same Euro-centric colonial

hermeneutical orientations which have left Africans full of education, including religious education, without any moral disposition to the liberation of Africa from the shackles of denigration, underdevelopment and socio-economic lethargy.

What hermeneutical model, sir, would you recommend for freeing us, widow and sons, (in this case, Africa and unborn generations) from the shackles of underdevelopment, poverty, and huge debt burden? That is the interface hermeneutical implication of the widow's appeal to the religious leader (in this case, the Prophet Elisha).

What Do You Have?

The Prophet (hermeneutical agent) started with a question equally cardinal in this interface hermeneutical context; What do you have? What does Africa have to the bargain? What are Africans placing on the bargain table in its bid to secure its liberty from the shackles of denigration and bondage? "What do you have?"

"Your servant has but a little oil".

Africa is the homestead of industrial raw materials and production inputs. As a result of the trade imbalance, a crisis which Walter Rodney has already sufficiently explained in his book; *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the Europeans have carted away large volumes of Africa's industrial raw materials, which are in fact processed and re-exported to African nations. Till today, sixty one years after Nigeria's so-called Independence, Nigeria still exports

crude oil to some African and first world countries where they are refined and imported into the country as premium motor spirits and other products. Every two or three months, Nigerian government is discussing what percentage of petroleum subsidy it could remove, and what quantity it can retain. Cartels of fraudulent businessmen are capitalizing on the shady deals to defraud the country of billions of naira every month. That is the crisis the nation finds itself in.

Now the prophet, the hermeneutical agent, in this story proposes a model of mass production of the oil for commercial purposes.

Borrow Empty Vessels, Not a Few.

This is the point where orthodox hermeneutics misses it and misleads the people. People lock themselves in the house and expect oil to grow. Yet, Israelites who gave that Biblical text to us do not revel in such mental stupor. Israelites, in line with the hermeneutical model propounded by that hermeneutical agent, engage in industrial mass production of consumer items for commercial purposes. Orthodox hermeneutics teaches people to jettison their mental resources, and lock up themselves in a room, expecting a pot of oil to grow into pots of oil. Far from it! The hermeneutical model proposed here, in the context of the Afro-centric interface paradigm for socio-economic development, is the use of machines for the mass production of consumer items for commercial purposes. The point about borrowing empty vessels refers, in the hermeneutical context, to mass production of

packages for the packaging of the mass produced consumer products.

Go and Sell the Oil (Exporter of Finished Products)

The point is further confirmed in the fact that the Prophet, (hermeneutical agent) said: Go and sell the oil. The point here is that Africa would not be in the predicament it is in today, if she was a marketer of finished products. The major problem with Africa is that she is a marketer of industrial raw materials and production inputs. Now, because Africa has no industries, she does not consume the raw materials. If the first world countries which have the industries do not buy those raw materials, they will be wasted because Africa does not have the industries that can process the raw materials to consumer items. This is the major reason for the trade imbalance between Africa and the European and Asian trade partners. The reference to borrowing of empty vessels, going into the room and “processing” of the oil into the many empty vessels signifies, in the peculiar Afro-centric context of interface hermeneutics, the manufacturing process for which technology provides both the intuitive knowledge and, as a consequence, the machines. The bane of African underdevelopment, it has been acknowledged, is the low level of technological growth and industrialization. Africa’s production processes operate at manual levels, which lack the potentials for mass production. What the prophet therefore prescribes, speaking contextually, is a mass production from the raw material base, which technological

development alone can achieve, and which is, in itself, the only solution to poverty and high national debt burden. And the prophet, in this sense a hermeneutical agent, orders the widow (depicting Africa in a state of poverty and high debt burden); “Go and sell the oil, pay your debts, and you and your children (depicting future generations of Africans), live on the rest (implying a new system of economic growth and material prosperity).

A Response to Orthodox Miraculous Orientation

Without doubt, interface hermeneutics does not really completely vitiate or altogether abdicate the tenets of orthodoxy, nor does it deride its hermeneutical models and conclusions. Interface hermeneutics, which brings context peculiarity to the forefront, instead acknowledges the gains of orthodoxy, but posits that meanings should be further sought within the larger frame of what is presently available, insisting that the limitations of orthodox hermeneutics are in historical and circumstantial, rather than discretionary.

Orthodox orientation to textual issues that border on the miraculous and the mysterious are no doubt, to a large extent responsible for the abysmal levels of underdevelopment in Africa. Osundare (2022) lamented over this matter, thus:

We lost the 20th Century to ignorance and allied disabilities, and we are about three short years to the end of the first quarter of the 21st. Shall we end this century too, still striving

heroically to trace ancient cattle grazing routes across impossible distances, still feeling so smug, so secure behind our shield of ignorance and medieval darkness? Shall we continue to beg God to build our country for us, while we the people lie chloroformed by excessive supplication and mindless expectation of illusional miracles? Miracles do not build bridges or erect skyscrapers; miracles will not build and secure our national power grid and rescue us from incapacitating outages that have turned Nigeria into a land of interminable darkness. Miracles do not build oil refineries and keep them in regular unfailing repair. Miracles will not construct the network of roads and rails and air routes Nigeria so sorely needs to become a mobile, enterprising, and infrastructurally connected country with wheels on the path to modernity and progress. Miracles will not accomplish the fundamental equitable restructuring that is needed to correct Nigeria's presently fated "federalism".

Osundare's pain is shared profoundly by African elites, the pains that, alas, the religious class has deluded the people into a state of mental incapacitation and stupor. What a tragedy!

The problem here is purely, wholly and entirely a hermeneutical, an interpretative problem. Hermeneutics, orthodox hermeneutics, is wholly accountable for the perspective of thought which keeps people enslaved in their state of mental delusion, while looking up to heaven for manna. Is God altogether obverse to

raining down manna from heaven to hungry humanity? Certainly not! After all, he sends rain upon the earth at its season. And science has not been able to create rain outside of its season; except that science has devised alternative sources of water, with reservoirs and storage tanks and pumps that can ensure availability and distribution of water all the year round. Is this not a part of divine miracle? Is the scientific discovery of alternative sources of water and means of reticulation not a part of the grand programme of divine miracles? Orthodox hermeneutics is too constrained to appreciate this. Interface hermeneutics broadens its scope to appreciate this.

Orthodox hermeneutics is responsible for the feeling among African elites that religion has deluded the people into a state of mental stupor. You want to build a house in your village, you declare a ninety-day fast for the land to appear from the blues; then twenty-one days dry fast for the money to be provided for the project. And the cycles of these unrealized expectations keep the people perpetually enslaved in their state of penury. No wonder, Africans, in spite of living in the most under-developed part of the world, are the most religious: using religious sentiments to nurse into unwholesome perpetuity their innate state of mental indolence and psychosomatic stupor.

Our text under consideration actually contains in it a pragmatic response to the orthodox hermeneutical notion of miracles. First, notice that the widow (depicting the poor, hungry,

deprived and burdened) had gone to the Prophet (the Pastor and agent of hermeneutical transformation), expecting a miracle. But she did not get the conventional miracle of the prophet detaining her for ninety-day dry fast. Instead, the prophet quickly turns her back to herself. “What can I do for you? What do you have?” This is called introspection – looking inwards. The miracle you are running around for can be found. But where? Inwards! What do you have? Orthodox hermeneutics presents the miracle seekers as completely helpless, relying on the grace of the miracle worker for the slightest favour. But that is not the position here. “What can I do for you? What do you have?” The miracle begins and ends with you.

The first miracle that Africa needs is the miracle of introspection, looking inwards. Years of Euro-centric colonialism, including Euro-centric colonial hermeneutics, has reduced the African to a mentality of total and absolute dependence on European values. When we thought that colonialism had ended, it was in fact only taking a new form. It was continuing in the exacerbated foreign taste of Africans. Nothing of Africa is good for the African; only that which is foreign. In the post-colonial era, Africa depended almost entirely on imported materials for her survival. From the health sector to the educational, the military, transportation, you name it, Africa is littered with foreign goods. As Africans consume these foreign goods, they invest heavily in the growth of the industries and economies of Europe and America.

“What can I do for you? What do you have?” The first miracle of the deliverance of Africa is at the point of introspection. Until Africans develop an appetite for home-grown values, it will remain enslaved to foreign values, and to that extent, continue to grow in debt burden, while her economy and capacity to defray the external debts will continue to dwindle.

The critical point of deviation between orthodox hermeneutics and the interface model being proposed here is at the point of interpretation of the nature of engagement between the divine and the human in the miracle process. When the prophet turned the widow back to herself, she was required to go into her room and close the door behind her and then begin to empty her little jar of oil into empty vessels. Orthodox hermeneutics posits that she prayed to the God of miracles who came down and multiplied the oil. That is wonderful. Interface hermeneutics, whilst not vitiating or deriding the conclusions of orthodoxy, concentrates on this point of engagement and interaction, to make way for the emergence of ingenuity, mental resources, scientific interventions that can in turn lead to a process of mass production of the available original raw material. God is also the author of scientific and technological ingenuity. This is not any less so, even if the ingenuity is turned into destructive end; after all, man has always been at liberty to deploy divine ingenuity to productive or destructive ends. What this means is that even the scientific process of invitro-fertilization for a woman having difficulties of conception, is part of the divine scheme of miracles, contrary, as it were, to the narrow constraints

of orthodoxy. Therefore, while orthodox hermeneutics may keep scores of women in several weeks of dry fasting for miraculous conception, the interface perspective, while not deriding other perspectives of miracles, considers scientific aids to conception as part of the workings of divine miracles.

Similarly, rather than engage in 21 days dry fast for miraculous fund for erecting a structure, or, in fact, complementary to the dry fast, the man may employ God-given initiative and creative faculties to produce goods and services which are exchanged for wealth, through divinely provided opportunities. Such wealth is still, in fact, a vital component of the working of divine miracles. In fact, in the Afro-centric interface hermeneutical models, miracles are re-defined with the vital components of human and divine contributions in place, for, as the text even clearly presents it; “It is God who is at work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Let us for purposes of comparison look at a second passage, employing the tenets of interface hermeneutics in the Afro-centric context.

Joshua Chapter Seven

The story here is rather long. It was the event that took place while the Israelites, under the leadership of Joshua, had just arrived from Egypt into the land of Canaan which God had promised to give them. They had started series of wars with the nations resident in

the region and God had promised to grant them victory in all the wars. Anyway, it at a primitive time in human history, before the delineation of national boundaries and recognition of the sovereignty of nations by global umbrella organizations. Nations of the world prospered by invading other nations and slaughtering the people and taking away their possessions by force. The God of righteousness could not have endorsed such barbarism, neither does he endorse it even now.

Anyway, suddenly, a small nation called Ai defeated Israel, contrary to expectation, and against divine prediction. Joshua the leader of the Israelites was troubled, and he tarried before the presence of the Lord all day, until the Lord revealed to him why they suffered such humiliating defeat; “There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee oh Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you” (Joshua 7:13b). Thereupon, the Lord made Joshua marshal out all the Israelite families for a lot to be conducted, to discover the family of, and eventually the man who had committed the act of theft (theft of a property of the inhabitants of the region, against divine command). It turned out to be Achan, of the son of Carmi, son of Zabab of the family of the Zarhites. The man Achan was stoned to death and burnt with fire, and a great heap of stones was raised over him, perhaps, for a memorial.

Examining this passage in an Afro-centric interface hermeneutical sense, a number of issues stand out here, and these can be considered a little more closely:

1. **Theft Precipitating National Calamity**

The story tells of an act of theft committed by an Israelite, and the result of it was a national calamity in the sense that the nation, Israel, was humiliatingly defeated in war by a much smaller nation called Ai. Theft and fraud, otherwise called corruption, are the bane of African underdevelopment. In the 1990's, it was estimated that a whopping sum of over one hundred and fifty billion US dollars has been stolen by African leaders and stashed away in foreign banks in Europe. Many of those leaders have now died and because of the coded records of those accounts, they cannot be accessed by anybody. Up till the year 2021, Nigerian government is still negotiating for, and receiving the repatriation of funds illegally deposited in foreign bank accounts by a former military Head of State. In 2015, shortly after ascending office as Nigerian Head of State, President Muhammadu Buhari started investigating the military activities of the previous regime of President Goodluck Jonathan, and discovered that a whopping sum of 2.1 billion US dollars had been approved for purchase of arms, in the critical days of terrorist activities ravaging the Northern parts of the country. It was shocking that rather than have the money deployed for the purpose for which it was approved, the investigation revealed that the money was shared between government office holders and

political party members. And yet everyone was wondering why the insurgents were proving insurmountable, when in fact, funds provided for strengthening the military against the insurgents were being diverted.

Theft of public fund is indeed the real bane of African underdevelopment, and unless there is a change of spirit in this regard, African will never make any headway.

2. Concerted Action to Identify the Culprits

The second issue evident in that text was the fact that although the Israelites were engaged in war at the time, everything had to be suspended until the culprit of the act of theft had been fished out. That is exactly how Africa has to treat theft and misappropriation of public fund, if it is ever going to make any progress at all. In this regard, there is a fundamental difference between Africa and the developed nations of the world. The developed nations of the world have institutions which are far stronger than the individuals, no matter how strong and powerfully connected the individuals could be. A case in point was the 2020 Presidential election in America. The sitting President, Donald Trump, was not at peace with the outcome of the election, and tried by all means to use his position as sitting President to overturn it. The Americans cooperated with him, but only within the ambits of the law. His subordinates and retinue of aides took orders from him, provided that in doing so, they did not contravene the existing laws of the nation. All the legitimate avenues of verifying the election results were put in place,

and nothing beyond that. That is the power of strong institutions. In Africa unfortunately, there are weak institutions and strong persons. Individual persons who commit crimes against the State use their positions and high-level connections to beat the system, and walk away unscathed. This is in the main reason why Africa is the way it is. There are many people who hold public offices, who should in fact be serving prison sentences. But they walk about freely because they can beat the weak institutions. As long as this situation remains, Africa will never make any headway at all.

3. Drastic Punishment

Achan's theft brought national calamity to Israel, but he did not live to do it again, nor did anyone gather from that an impetus to commit crime. The attraction to crime in Africa is mainly by the fact that criminals acquire wealth that places them above the system. Why would someone not want to commit crime when, evidently, all those who committed crime in the past are walking about freely, and are being celebrated on account of their ill-gotten wealth? In the case of Israel, as shown in the text, and as we see in developed societies, those who commit crime do not escape the strong arm of the law. In developed societies, wealthy business owners are jailed for tax evasion, and it becomes engraved in the hearts of all that no one is above the law.

African pre-Christian societies were run on the basis of devotion to deities that guarded the morality of the land. The deities had such overwhelming influence that they did not have to depend on the

manipulatable testimonies of human beings. They just acted, and even people who committed crimes in utmost secrecy were fished out and punished. This kept the people in fear. It was this fear that maintained the moral framework of African societies in the period prior to the immigrant religions (Christianity and Islam).

Today, that traditional moral framework has been dismantled, without a matching system being put in place. That is exactly why African morality is deteriorating. People commit all kinds of blood rituals to acquire money, and having gotten the money, they elevate themselves above the institutions and can then commit more crime without anyone daring to call them to question. In a society where criminals cannot be punished, greater impetus is given for more people to engage in criminal activities.

The third illustration is to be taken from 2 Kings 6 and 7.

Thus:

Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and he took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel saying; Beware that thou pass not such a place for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of: and saved himself there, not once nor twice. (6:8-10).

And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Syria gathered all his hosts and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was great famine in Samaria: and behold, they besieged it until an ass's head sold for four score pieces of silver, and a fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him saying; Help, my lord, O king... And the king said to her, What aileth thee? And she answered, this woman said unto me; Give thy son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow... And it came to pass when the king heard the words of the woman that he rent his clothes... Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day. (6:24-31).

Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. ... And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate; and they said one to another; Why sit we here until we die?... And they rose up in the twilight to go unto the camp of the Syrians, and when they were come to the uttermost parts of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there; for the Lord had made the hosts of the Syrians to hear a noise of Chariots and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host ... (7:1-6).

We can now look at the issues a little closely.

1. **Political Relevance of a Religious Personality**

Our main concern in discussing these hermeneutical models is to show that in actuality, the biblical text speaks directly to our peculiar socio-economic and political situation in Africa. As it affects the text under consideration, the bane of religious operation in Africa is the gulf between the political class and the religious. The only meeting point of the political class and the religious class in Africa is the point at which the religious leaders go cap in hands after the politicians who have looted the nation's economy. The politicians are invited to special religious worships and programmes, and given all the prominence and honour as a way of providing the avenue for the religious leaders to get their own share of the fraudulent loot of the politicians. That done, the religious leaders now sacrifice their role and position as the conscience of the society, and take sides with the oppressors of the masses and agents of impoverishment, denigration, and societal dehumanization. Little wonder religion has completely lost its cutting edge as instrument of societal transformation. African people now know whom their real enemies are. When African people count their oppressors and exploiters, they include the religious institutions in the number. A society in which the religious leaders receive gratification from the fraudulent political class and showers praises on the evil agents of dehumanization, such a society is permanently doomed. The religions which provide such callous platforms for fraudulent politicians and leaders to receive accolades

and praises are thoroughly evil and inimical to the collective aspirations of the people, and even more inimical to the purpose of God in setting up the religious institutions for ethical transformation of the society.

In our text under consideration, the religious personality is not aloof from the process of governance. He is, in fact, directly involved. He employs his devices of spiritual discernment, insight, foresight, to get directly involved in the ordering of the society to which he belongs, knowing that if any evil befalls the nation, he would not be spared the destructive ordeals.

Notice also that the religious personality had attained such envious height, a height of personal integrity and character flawlessness, that the leader of the country deferred to him, and not the other way round. In Africa, religious leaders go to lick the boots of the political leaders, throwing decency and morality to the dogs. In our text, the religious leader is exalted by integrity and character, above the ominous charade of the political leaders, such that when the religious leader speaks, the political leaders have no option than to tremble. Great lesson! The bane of religion in Africa is that the religious leaders have subordinated their positions to the fraudulent political class, the callous exploiters of the society. African religious leaders are even not sensitive to the fact that they have lost the people's confidence. They are deceived by the fact that the people have not yet given up their age-long tradition of attending religious activities as part of a cherished social responsibility. Some day, the

masses of Africa will take up arms against their exploiters. And sadly, the religious leaders will not be spared the impact of the long accumulated venoms of the people.

Talking about discernment, orthodox hermeneutics restricts revelation to the direct divine summoning for giving a specific message. By so doing, orthodox hermeneutics restricts revelation to the highly religious or spiritual. Yet, in diverse parts of the Bible, such divine revelations were given to the irreligious and unspiritual. For instance, it was Nebuchadnezzar who received the vision about seven years of prosperity in Egypt, to be followed by seven years of chronic scarcity of food all over the world. And by divine inspiration, Joseph, the Hebrew interpreted the vision and was mandated to preside over the pragmatic programme for response to the revelation.

The point anyway, is that in Hebrew cosmology, there is a fluid connection between revelation (the propensity of the spirit) and perception (the effective operation of the active, working mind). Again, in this wise, orthodox hermeneutics has altogether obscured the enormous resources of the human mind in favour of that which is exclusively of the spirit. The Bible says concerning the human Jesus:

And the child grew, and waxed strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40). And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:52).

Both texts identify four components of domains or dimensions of human development, namely, the physical, the mental, the social, and the spiritual. Orthodox hermeneutics has tended to show that the only way a person can be directed by God is through the working of the Spirit. That is why religion, particularly in Africa, has been often accused of inflicting upon the people an affliction of mental delusion and operational stupor. Once people acquire, or get involved in a religion, their behavior turns bizarre; their relationship turns queer. African elites tear themselves and each other in pieces over such mundane issues as whether prayers should be made through Jesus or through Mary. Meanwhile the elite professional class in other climes are making space aircrafts and exploring life in other planets. Africans are tearing each other in pieces as a result of religious primitiveness. If we who belong to the elite religious class do not succeed in redirecting the minds of our African people towards finding solutions to the critical challenges that threaten our ultimate survival as a race, what have we really achieved, and of what creative value is all our study and education?

In our text under consideration, the religious personality is, by perspicacity and discernment, deeply involved in the challenges facing the society, and providing an informed guidance that helps to save the society from utter annihilation. This is a great challenge to the religious elites of our age.

2. **The Political Siege and the Economic Down-turn**

The text under consideration goes ahead to show that Benhadad, the Syrian king, mounted a siege over Samaria until the level of inflation in the country became utterly unbearable. Again, this situation speaks to the African situation. Rodney (1972) has already shown in some detail how Europe, through the instruments of colonialism, and beyond that, the devices of neo-colonial manipulation, has not only massively exploited Africa, but also set the premise for the perpetual impoverishment, exploitation and underdevelopment of Africa. That in itself amounts to a siege. Also, Siollun (2021) has shown in gory details how Britain sowed the seed of perennial ethno-centric conflicts in Nigeria, while harvesting of the conflicts. In other words, while Nigerians are busy slaughtering each other over useless issues of religious leanings, avenues are provided through such evils, for the economic prosperity of Britain and other European nations. That in itself is a siege. The civil war that was fought in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970 cost the Federal Government of Nigeria a whopping sum of eight hundred and forty million British pounds. All of that money went mainly to Britain, and some to Russia and other nations of Europe that participated.

The siege against Africa is far from lifted. As a result of the collective facets and factors of underdevelopment, Africa has become a dumping ground for foreign goods and service. Occasionally, African nations have engaged Europeans for the setting up of mega technological projects in Africa, and all that one

finds as evidence of such huge investment is a collection of abandoned, fraudulently acquired equipment. Who would ever believe that the Ajaokuta Steel Plant in Nigeria which has gulped up well over five billion Us dollars would still be in such a state where there is little or nothing to show for it?

Africa is a nation under siege. While Africans are slaughtering themselves over useless issues of whether Jesus or Mohammed is the authentic prophet, or whether prayers in the church should be made through Jesus or Mary, Europeans are siphoning the wealth in Africa, and African leaders are collaborating with callous foreign agents of impoverishment to gobble up the future of our nations. In Nigeria, the foreign debt as at the end of 2021 is now about thirty-three trillion naira. In the 2021 national budget in Nigeria, about eighty percent of the budget was devoted to debt servicing. This means that only twenty percent of the budget was actually to be spent on the capital and recurrent expenditures in the country. This situation is also retained in the 2022 budget. It is estimated that by 2023, Nigeria's external debts would have reached fifty trillion naira, as the National Assembly is fast approving more foreign loans for the country. And yet, rather than come together and sink their differences, and strategize about how to save the nation from imminent collapse, religious leaders are busy injecting in their followers divisive venoms that will get them at each other's throats, while the exploiters are busy exploiting, with hardly any one raising eyebrows at their callous exploitive activities.

3. **The Barbaric Option**

The text under consideration also mentions the typical African barbaric option to surviving difficult times. Two women had done a deal to take turns to eat their children. They had already eaten one of the women's children before the pact broke down, and the offended party brought the report to the king.

Although African elites are quick to point out the crimes committed against the African society by the European imperialists, yet, however, they lose sight of the painstaking risks taken by the Europeans to sanitize the African environment; to deliver the Africans from themselves. Historical records, corroborated by African authors, attest to the existence in Africa of barbarian communities that regularly descend upon other communities, plundering them, and in most cases, eating the meat of the slain. African communities are still not any less barbaric even today. In times of economic adversity, Africans reinvigorate their old nature, descend upon one another and slaughter, maim and destroy. Actually, in many African countries, especially Nigeria, the slaughter of human beings for money rituals is on the increase. Kidnap is on the rise, and once people are kidnapped, if the ransom is not paid urgently, they end up on the money ritualist's slaps, where they are dismembered and parts of them used for money rituals. It is needless being deceived by the profuse religious tendencies of Africans. Barbarism is enormously on the rise. Many of those who have prospered by blood money rituals dominate the

religious gatherings, receive all kinds of accolades and investitures on religious platforms where they part with some of their bloody loot to the “prosperity” of the religious leaders. Admittedly, in the traditional African societies, prior to the era of the immigrant religions, human beings were offered, alive or slain, to the deities, for the prosecution of certain functions in the society, and often for the coronation and burial of kings. Those acts were done to empower the shrines of native doctors, and presumably for the ultimate good of the human society, such as in the case of communal wars or control of strange omens. There was, at that time, no indication that individuals slaughtered fellow human beings for rituals for personal prosperity. Today, young men in their late teens and early twenties slaughter fellow human beings, including close relations, for the purpose of money rituals.

Why is it that the religion we practice in Africa does not have an ethical, moral face? The reason is not far-fetched. The river has been polluted from the very source. The larger proportion of the religious practitioners in Africa are fraudulent-minded people who have discovered that the simplest way to conceal crimes is to give them a religious covering. Because of mental declivity and rational primitiveness, Africans are very sentimental about issues of religion, so anything that receives a religious coloration, no matter how criminal it is, receives approval. Robbery, battery (during deliverance), even rape, becomes sanctified if it is done on religious platform. It is only in Africa that two equally hungry, marginalized, exploited, deprived, depraved people, victims of the same group of

vampire leaders, are deceived into a silly argument about the authenticity of religious doctrines, and they suddenly forget that they have one common enemy, their exploiter, and suddenly, they take up arms against each other, while their exploiters, who in fact are not as much worried the doctrine in question, are having a field day. The task before African elite hermeneutics is to take the texts to the very critical points of African underdevelopment, and apply the texts, hermeneutically, unto the development strategies that will deliver, at least, the future generations of Africans from the mental quagmires of the present and the past generations.

4. **The Prophetic Turn-around**

The critical high-point of this narrative is the prophetic turn-around. The prophet eventually made a declaration: “Tomorrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria” (2 Kings 7:1). This is amazing. First of all, notice that towards the end of the previous chapter when the king received the report of the barbaric activity going on in his kingdom, the king took it all out on the prophet. He must have asked himself; “How come we have a prophet of God in this land and we are going through such crisis?” He, in fact, followed up his declaration by sending his aides to go and arrest the prophet Elisha. So it is known everywhere that the prophetic instrument is a blessing to the community. Wherever prophetic devices are engaged with an honest intent, and not with a dubious intent, the community is richly blessed. The king’s

confidence in the power of the prophetic instrument to change the lots of a community from affliction to blessing was not in any doubt. Even today, the destiny of Africa lies in the power of prophetic declaration for a turn-around, provided Africa, both its people and its religious ministers, will repent of their criminal and fraudulent roles, and embrace and God with a sincerity of purpose.

Elisha finally, prompted by the king's declaration of his confidence in his prophetic oracle, was awakened from his ministerial slumber and lethargy. African ministers today must be awakened from ministerial slumber and lethargy, which are as a result of brazen criminality and spiritualized fraud. Unless African ministers, and then all Africans repent of deep-seated criminality and spiritualized fraud, Africa will never make a headway. Every day, Africans, in their exacerbated superfluous religiosity devoid of morality, troop to the religious houses where they receive bouts of prophetic declarations. But unfortunately, these bouts of declarations, wonderful as they are, flow from filthy, corrupted, callous lips; the same lips that have "prophesied" the electoral victory of criminal and fraudulent political aspirants, and poured encomiums on the same vampire leaders that have milked the poor masses to death by their avaricious looting. Prophetic declarations of blessings which flow from filthy, callous and corrupted lips can certainly not be blessings. The filth and callous corruption of the lips from which they flow, radically reverse whatever blessings they may have intended to convey. Africa remains gruesomely imperiled,

as long as its religious class is made up of men of unclean lips dwelling among men of unclean lips.

Notice also something that happened in the next verse of the text;

Then the Lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said; Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said; Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat there of... And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said... (2 Kings 7:2, 17).

Amen. The lord on whose hand the kind leaned... These are the agents of the callous leaders whom the leaders use to perpetrate their callous exploitations. Many of them are even more callous than the leaders they represent. This is because, in addition to their over-bloated fraudulent salaries, they escalate the callous extortions in order to get their own avaricious portions. They are agents of the denigration and impoverishment and they profit heavily from the economic declivity in the country. For this reason, they will question, and radically oppose every step towards economic emancipation. They are the wicked servants of the callous leaders, and are the ones who service the evil system. You think they do not know the right things to do? Haven't you noticed that when the relation of a highly connected person is kidnapped, all of a sudden, the police will become very efficient and deliver instant

result? So, it is not that they do not know what to do. It is that the people they take orders from are accredited agents of the evil system from which many are profiting. You will be surprised that robbery, fraud, banditry, kidnap, terrorism, etc. are escalating in Africa in spite of all the claimed efforts of the agencies of government, because the so called leaders and commanders of the combat forces are part of an evil system from which many are profiting. And who are you to attempt to halt an evil system that is making many people wealthy and prosperous? Of course, they will interrogate any effort to halt the evil trend. "Will this thing be?" But thank God for the prophetic reply; "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat thereof". Amen. All the callous agents of the vampire leaders of Africa who, by their roles are aiding and abetting the evil systems because they profit from them; they shall see the evil system collapse; they shall see the true prosperity of Africa; but they shall not eat of it; Amen. All the agents of the corrupt systems of African nations who do not mind totally annihilating the entire nations; they shall see the return of the economic glory of these African nations; but they will be trodden under foot by the revolting masses of these African nations, as these masses march to their glorious liberty and economic prosperity. Amen. These great words of the prophet are about to come to pass in Africa. The text indeed speaks eloquently to the African situation. The downtrodden masses of Africa are rising and in a glorious march to their liberty and prosperity will tread down their callous exploiters under their feet. Amen.

5. **The Activated Step of Faith**

One thing which a prophetic declaration does is to activate a step in the direction of the prophetic declaration. The words spoken by the Prophet Elisha activated in the four leprous men at the gate a nudge for an action, a faith action, a step of faith. The logic of the leprous men in line with their intended action is indeed stimulating.

Why sit we here until we die?

Literally, paraphrasing their logic; An action, a faith step is indispensable. But in which direction? Simple logic makes every step a deadly option, even as remaining here is a deadly option. We stay here; we die. We move into the city; we die of hunger. The two are certainties. We move into the camp of the Syrians. There, death is a possibility, though not a certainty, as in the two other options. The logic is great. Who told us that faith obscures logic? Orthodox hermeneutics presents faith as the eradication of logic. The text in question disapproves of this. Even faith has a logical basis.

The leprous men opted to take a step of faith. This point is vital. Divine operation is impossible without human contribution, human action; human step of faith. This is the point at which African religious orientation has translated to a mental delusion. You want promotion, elevation, open doors, breakthroughs, you declare twenty-one days dry fast at the end of which you do nothing and a miracle happens. That is why, in Africa, millions of people hang around places of worship believing that to be the only way to

receive a breakthrough. In contrast, the nations that have far less robust, far less pronounced religious orientation are the ones which have very high GDP (Gross Domestic Product – a measure of national productivity); high foreign reserves, low level of debt, high per capita income, and high quality of life. Orthodox hermeneutical presentation of miracles has left human contribution completely out of it. This is the error that has left Africans deluded in their religious profession.

The four leprous men took a step. Though unsure what to expect and what was going to happen, but they took a step all the same. But it was at that point that God provided the miracle; “For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us”.

So, it was when the leprous men took a step of their own that the Lord made available his divine help. The lesson of this is that God cannot (or at least does not) work until we humans work. How then can the scores of miracle chasing Africans be delivered from the mental delusion of sleeping in the place of worship for weeks of dry fasting in expectation of God’s miracle. The text here is very instructive. God will not work for us until we rise up and work, do our own bit. It is in the context of doing our own bit that God works. Africans who are waiting for God to build our collapsing

nations are waiting in vain. Africans who are waiting for God to change their leaders are basking in empty euphoria. Africans who are waiting for God to deliver them from economic collapse are waiting in vain. It is when Africans rise up and disgrace evil leaders out of office by turning out in mass at the electoral polls to vote them out, not by holding twenty-one nights of vigil. It is when Africans rise up and demand account from fraudulent leaders, and ensure that corrupt leaders are brought to book according to the law. It is when Africans embrace the tenets of morality and honesty and ensure that only men and women of virtue are entrusted with the destinies of the people. It is only then that the God of the dry fastings and night vigils will appear and deliver Africa from the shackles of denigration, impoverishment, economic stagnation, servitude and perpetual bondage. That is exactly what that text is saying, hermeneutically applied to the African context.

Let me conclude this section by taking one text from the New Testament; John 9:1-7; from verse 6;

When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay; and said unto him; Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

I shall discuss this passage alongside another, an Old Testament passage; 2 Kings 2:19-22.

And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters and cast the salt in there and said; “Thus saith the Lord: I have healed these waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land: so the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.

In this concluding segment, I turn attention to the use of materials in doing miracles, especially healing miracles. For the avoidance of doubt, interface hermeneutics does not deny the mysterious element in miracles, as naturalist (or liberal) hermeneutics does. Naturalist or liberal hermeneutics posits that what is presented in the Bible as miracles are nothing but mystified natural occurrences. Rudolf Bultmann, New Testament redactionist theologian is one of the greatest proponents of this position. Bultmann has done an extensive work to achieve what he calls the “demythologization” of the New Testament miracle stories, by which he hoped to take away the mystery elements in the miracle narratives and present them as over-bloated natural occurrences. Bultmann would take the expression, “Give place; for the maid is not dead but sleepeth” (Matt. 9:24), as literally an indication of Jesus’ insight by which he could differentiate a dead person from one in a state of comma. Gunther Bornkamm, Bultmann’s disciple,

has further advanced the tenets of naturalist hermeneutics, in the New Testament.

Interface hermeneutics is not naturalist hermeneutics, in the sense that while naturalist hermeneutics completely denies the mysterious elements in the text, in favour of the natural, interface hermeneutics, in its broad concern for varying contexts, accommodates the naturalist and the mysterious elements in the Biblical text.

In this segment, we are concerned with the place of materials of nature in the performance of miracles. In the New Testament text, Jesus met a blind man, and was going to do a healing miracle on him. He spat on the ground, and using the soil and the spittle, he moulded clay. Then he rubbed the clay on the eyes of the blind man and asked him to go and wash, not with tap or rain water, or well or borehole water, or in any river or stream, but in the Pool of Siloam. The specific combination of these naturally occurring materials could be quite instructive for the context of our discussion. Similarly, the Prophet Elisha received a complaint about the state of the land, and was going to carry out a curative ministrations. He asked for a new cruse, then some salt, which he used, along with a prophetic declaration, to achieve the curative ministrations.

When the Christian missionaries came to Africa, they met a vast array of curative practitioners. For purposes of differentiation, we can classify these practitioners into three categories, namely:

1. **Diviners:** These were people who inquired into the mysteries behind unpleasant occurrences in order to discover what needed to be done to bring healing and deliverance.
2. **Curators (Herbalists):** These were people who had extraordinary insight into the use of roots and herbs for the purpose of healing all kinds of ailments. They also had apprentices who gradually “learnt” the art and practiced it, as their mentors grew old and passed away.
3. **Wizards:** These were people knowledgeable in all kinds of destructive spiritual devices, and could be consulted to raise spiritual afflictions against fellow human beings.

When the Christian missionaries came, they branded all of these practitioners as fetish, satanic, idolatrous and evil, and wrote them all off as ungodly. For these Christian missionaries, whatever is not orthodox medical procedure is evil and satanic. It is in fact this type of position that should be rightly described as colonial hermeneutics or hermeneutical colonialism. What then has happened to the deep insight into the vast collection of roots and herbs that God has given to Africans for nutritional and curative purposes? Ironically, these Euro-Christian missionaries have hidden from the Africans the fact that even orthodox pharmaceutical formulations are made up of extracts from roots and herbs occurring in Europe. So, consuming processed roots and herbs is godly, but consuming the same roots and herbs in their

natural form in Africa is satanic and idolatrous. Nothing can be more discriminatory and colonialistic.

So, when African theologians talk about decolonization hermeneutics, they should begin from this fundamental attitude of use of natural materials in Africa, in such a manner as to create the needed mental shift. Thankfully, in Africa, traditional medical practitioners did not allow themselves to be cowed in. They have instead taken their practice one step forward, also employing the tenets of scientific insight to process and preserve their roots and herbs. It is well known today that there are some health challenges in Africa for which orthodox medicine does not have an answer. Besides, in many areas of medical practice, the orthodox exists side by side with the traditional. For instance, the traditional orthopaedic management exists side by side with the orthodox, and in some cases, the traditional (bone setting) homes have proved more effective than the orthodox.

In China, as in India, both of them Asian countries that had suffered the same European imperialism as did African countries, orthodox medical practice exists side by side with the traditional, and both are recognized under the law. Thankfully also, in Nigeria, for instance, the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has started to test the traditional pharmaceutical formulations, and to grant official approval for their use in the country. In 2020, at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, an African country, Madagascar, was the first

country in the world to claim to have produced a cure to the Covid-19 disease. The formulation was made from local roots and herbs. The World Health Organization indicated interest to subject the formulation to analysis before granting official approval for its usage, but unfortunately, never got around to publishing its findings until European nations have come up with their own drugs and vaccines for Covid-19. This clearly smacks of colonial or imperial denigration.

In conclusion, Jesus clearly could have done the stated miracle without any naturally occurring material, but in this instance, he chose to use a naturally occurring material for the miracle on the blind man. African trado-medical practitioners are not committing any act of ungodliness by exploring the use of naturally occurring roots and herbs for curative purposes. In fact, more research should be conducted into the curative functions of the vast occurring roots and herbs in Africa, before the few stigmatized people who have exclusive insight into their functions pass away without any replacement in the on-going “Christianization” of the African environment which stigmatizes the use of naturally occurring roots and herbs for curative purposes.

EPILOGUE

Hermeneutics is a living, discipline which responds to the changing dynamics of human life. As the complexities and perplexities of life escalate, so does the search for new meanings and the expansion of models for textual interpretation. One of the major achievements of hermeneutics in our age is the removal of technical fixation which orthodoxy had compelled on the hermeneutical process. Social context hermeneutics which made a drastic incursion into the discipline in the late 20th Century has opened up large vistas of adaptation of hermeneutics to the social challenges of the human society. Social context hermeneutics has taught us that hermeneutics ought not be performed in a vacuum but must be creatively adapted to confront the threats and errors of the human society. The enormous gains of social context theologies, products of social context hermeneutics, bring to reverberating heights the fact that the whole essence of learning is to elevate the human conditions. In the years ahead, the discipline of hermeneutics will obviously progress in such dimensions and directions that will completely rid it of empty doctrinal and dogmatic fixative frivolities, and channel all of its strengths and resources to dismantling the social maladies and structural inequities that perennially marginalize and demobilize the human race, in favour of more progressive and liberating perspective, for, the ultimate end of all learning is the upliftment and elevation of the human society.

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