

**SOME POPULAR AFRICAN APPROACHES TO
THE BIBLE AND THEIR IMPACT ON
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN LIFE AND
THEOLOGY**

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Abstract

The Bible is a popular book in the African context and most readers understand it literally. The contents appeal to most African readers because they recount issues of traditional life that are still common to many African societies. Sometimes the readers forget that the cultural contexts of the biblical stories and accounts are different and ancient. So there is always the danger of misreading and misapplying the text. This essay examines some of the popular readings of the sacred text and the type of influence they have on the religious life and theological thinking of most people in contemporary Africa. The aim is to inspire a more critical and more holistic reading of the Bible so as to benefit more fully from its immense riches. The essay follows both descriptive and analytical approaches in the exposition. Being a thematic study, the emphasis will not be limited to particular areas of the Bible but to every aspect of the Biblical text that is considered relevant to the discussion.

Key words: Bible, biblical criticism, fundamentalism, interpretation, life, popular reading, theology.

Introduction

This essay addresses an issue that is at the very heart of the growth of Christianity in contemporary Africa, which is the reading and application of the Bible. Many African readers feel so at home with the biblical stories and accounts, particularly the accounts in the Old Testament, that one sometimes tends to imagine that the stories are about the African society. The picture is almost the same anywhere one turns in Africa, especially the areas that have received the Christian faith. Nigeria presents a very significant scenario. The Old Testament personal names and place names have been so appropriated by many African Christians that one would even think that they are the very people of Israel. All these have to do with the way the Bible is read by ordinary people in the African society. One can say, the Bible, and indeed the word of God, is truly alive and active in Africa. It is, in fact, a very fascinating experience doing a research on the mode of reading and interpreting the Bible among ordinary Africans. To borrow the words of Musa Dube, it is like a "long walk in a hall of mirrors".¹ According to Dube, reading the biblical text with ordinary readers in the South African rural context is an experience in self-discovery: "As a black Motswana African woman, I am indeed privileged to be admitted in this hall of magnificent mirrors; I have, nevertheless, struggled to see my image. Its mirrors occasionally give me a piece of what should be my face, and it is usually something undesirable."² The point is that the ordinary readings or popular readings of the Bible reveal

¹ Gerald West and Musa W. Dube, "An Introduction: How We Have Come to 'Read With'," *Semeia* 73 (1996) 10.

² West and Dube, "An Introduction," 10.

the way Africans think and live.

Popular readings of the Bible in Africa are mostly uncritical and fundamentalist in nature. This means that the texts are taken literally as historical data. As a matter of fact, biblical literalism or fundamentalism can be looked at from different dimensions, and sometimes it is very difficult to arrive at a general definition.³ There are different forms of fundamentalism, the most prominent, however, being religious fundamentalism. Different religions have their fundamentalist approaches. For instance, one talks of Jewish fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism. In the present essay, biblical fundamentalism is understood as the literal approach to biblical texts which often expresses itself in opposition to critical reading of the texts.

The fundamentalist approach takes seriously the biblical storyline as a historical chronology and factual presentation of events. The creation accounts in Genesis are understood as accurate representation of the actual origin of the universe. The Adam and Eve story is given historical identity. The same literalism is given to the reading of all the other accounts as the story of Noah and the flood, the patriarchal narratives, the story of Joseph, the account of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, the exodus and desert wandering, Israel's tribal system and monarchic accounts, the prophetic accounts, together with all the Gospel accounts, the

³ For some recent studies on biblical fundamentalism, see Ronald D. Witherup, *Biblical Fundamentalism. What Every Catholic Should Know* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001); McDonough Richard, "Religious Fundamentalism: A Conceptual critique." *Religious Studies* 49, no. 4 (2013): 561–79.

chronological account in Acts and the apocalyptic representations in the book of Revelation. In the same vein, the first five books of the Bible are believed to have been written by Moses, just as the Psalms are also literally attributed to David. Fundamentalist readers object to any attempt by scholars to read these texts through the critical lenses of the science of hermeneutics or biblical criticism. It becomes pertinent to examine the way most Africans read the sacred text and how such reading influences the understanding and practice of the faith in the society.

Popular Biblical Readings in the African Context

Christianity in the African context has grown tremendously and the trajectory of the growth in the next few years can already be drawn from what is happening in the present. Part of this growth is the ever growing love for the Bible. However, the mode of reading the biblical text poses a lot of challenges for the maturation and sustainability of the Christian faith in Africa.

Nevertheless, a strong tradition of critical interpretation of the biblical text has long been developing in some quarters in the African continent. One can refer to an in-depth research of Justin Ukpong, in which he identifies two main currents of critical or academic readings of the Bible in Africa.⁴ The first is the Western pattern based mainly on the historical-critical

⁴ Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa. Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (ed. Gerald O. West, Musa Dube; Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001) 11-28.

method together with the later literary approaches, while the second is what he calls the African pattern which stresses the African context. While the Western model focuses on the text and the ancient community that produced the text, the African model focuses mainly on the community that receives the text, that is, the contemporary African community.⁵ This last model is adopted with nuances in many modern African Universities and higher institutions. But this, notwithstanding, the great majority of African reading of the text remains fundamentalist.

Peter Nyende distinguishes three aspects of the popular readings of the Bible in Africa,⁶ and these are identified as follows: 1. figural readings (where elements within the text are seen to represent something else); 2. thematic readings (whereby a theme is chosen from the biblical text and applied to the life of the Christian); 3. plain or literal readings (whereby a text is read literally and directly applied to the actual lives of Christians).⁷ Nyende's threefold division is very useful in explaining the different features of the popular approaches, but the present essay widens the list following a different structuring, with particular focus on the fundamentalist approach to Bible reading. The readings are generally uncritical, as the following examples demonstrate:

Allegorical Readings: There is often the allegorical type of

⁵ Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 11-12. See also Justin Ukpong, "Popular Readings of the Bible in Africa and Implications for Academic Readings," in *The Bible in Africa*, 582- 594.

⁶ Peter Nyende, "Institutional and Popular Interpretations of the Bible in Africa: Towards an Integration," *The Expository Times* 119 (2, 2007) 59-63.

⁷ Nyende, "Institutional and Popular Interpretations," 62-63.

readings or what Nyende calls the "figural readings" or "figuralism". A typical example of this use of texts is an instance he gives of John 2:1-10, the wedding at Cana, which a preacher uses to instruct a couple at a pre-wedding ceremony in a village in central Kenya. The preacher interprets the six stone jars that held the water that became wine as representing the stones that build a home. He names five of these stones as love, patience, forgiveness, dialogue and peace, instructing the couple to use them to build the marital home.⁸ This form of allegorizing resembles the earlier practice of the Alexandrian Christians in Christian antiquity.

One interesting feature of the allegorical approach to Scripture is that it was most popularized on the African soil, that is, in the Egyptian city of Alexandria. Even the Jewish form of exegesis that inspired it also had its origin in Alexandria.⁹ The city of Alexandria played a pivotal role in the crystallization of both the Old Testament thought and the later New Testament theology. One recalls that it was in Alexandria that first translation of the Hebrew Bible was made into Greek. The most significant scholar in this tradition was the Jewish scholar, Philo of Alexandria (30 B.C.- 50 A.D.), who was famous for his adoption of the allegorical approach to the text. Thus the allegorical interpretation ranks as one of the first popular approaches to the Bible in Africa. Three important scholars very much associated with this form of interpretation were Clement of Alexandria, Origen and St. Augustine. Both Clement and Origen interpreted

⁸ Nyende, "Institutional and Popular Interpretations," 62.

⁹ See David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

many Old Testament texts as "types" of Christ, that is, texts allegorically foreshadowing the Christ-event. Clement saw most of the biblical stories and passages as couched in metaphors and mysterious, symbolic language.¹⁰ According to Robert Grant, the interpretation of Scripture by Clement was hardly ever systematic: "He is not attempting to construct a theological system in the light of his interpretation of scripture, but simply to use scripture to illustrate his already formed thought."¹¹ This was the practice of using what is called proof texts. Historically, doctrinal, ethical and spiritual matters have been authenticated with references from the Bible. This approach has diverse dimensions. The most popular has been the practice of looking for biblical texts to prove or justify already formed ideas or propositions. Because the Bible is considered normative, the belief is that whatever it says becomes the final proof. Thus a statement or proposition is made and then one searches for a biblical text to justify it. Whether that text is actually intended for that statement is immaterial. Most of the time, an isolated statement from the Bible is taken and applied to the argument.

Augustine approached the Bible on two methodological levels: the literal or historical and the allegorical or spiritual. While Augustine does not deny the historical sense of the OT he considers as superstitious any understanding of the Bible only on the literal or historical level.¹² In the Medieval Ages, the use of

¹⁰ See Clement of Alexandria, *Str.* 6.124.6; see also Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (London: SCM 21984) 55.

¹¹ Grant with Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 55.

¹² See Henry Chadwick, "Augustine," *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 66-69.

Allegory in the Western Church became systematized as four levels of interpretation of Scripture were developed: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical. Nicolas of Lyra popularized it in the expression: *littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia* - "the literal sense teaches what happened, the allegorical what you are to believe, the moral what to do, anagogy where you are going."¹³ the greatest theologian of the Medieval Ages, Thomas Aquinas, emphasized more the literal or historical sense of scripture but also recognized the value of the allegorical interpretation. The distinctive thing is that he regarded the literal sense as primary. In fact, after Thomas Aquinas, the allegorical method began to lose its prominence in biblical interpretation but the arbitrary use of proof texts did not stop.

Bible Used to Justify Conventional Structures: The Bible is used in diverse spheres to justify certain structures that would have been difficult to justify. It is often used in this manner in the political sphere. Sometimes, politicians appeal to the Bible to win public approval for their ideological positions or policies. The worst of this form of approach to the Bible was its use to justify the apartheid system in South Africa. This racist system was justified especially within the circles of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa where certain sections of the Bible were interpreted in nuanced ways to approve the system. For instance the text of Rom 13:1-7, which admonishes every person to be subject to the ruling authorities as every authority comes from God. The Apartheid government was in the light of this text

¹³ Taken from Louth, "Allegorical Interpretation," 13.

justified as coming from God.¹⁴ Some other texts employed to justify the Apartheid system were Genesis 11; Deut 32:8; Acts 1:8; 17:26; 1Cor 7:17-24, etc. Contemporary wars of attrition and terrorist activities have been justified in some quarters by appeal to some known or remote sections of the Bible. As one author points out,

Historically, the Bible has been used to justify such acts as genocide, slavery, war, crusades, colonialism, economic plunder, and gender oppression. Bible verses were quoted, sermons preached from pulpits, and theses written in theological academic centers to justify barbaric acts that were labeled 'Christian missionary zeal' or 'righteous indignation'. Millions have unjustly died and perished in the name of Jesus and by the hands of those who call themselves his followers.¹⁵

There are many other institutional structures that get sustained by constant appeal to the biblical text. Significantly, both polygamy and monogamy are often justified by appeal to biblical texts. Violent conflicts and wars have been waged on the basis of monotheism, all with reference to relevant or irrelevant sections of the Bible. The onus lies always on the interlocutors to say which text is the relevant one today. The exploitative system of tithe collection in many African churches and sects today is justified by constant appeals to the book of the Prophet Malachi and other texts of the Old Testament. It does not matter whether

¹⁴ On this, see Elelwani B. Farisani, "Interpreting the Bible in the Context of Apartheid and Beyond: An African Perspective," *Studia Historicae Ecclesiasticae*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Pretoria, 2014) 1017-0499.

¹⁵ Miguel A. De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Maryknol, NY: Orbis Books, 2002) 38-39.

the issue being addressed in Malachi and these other texts is relevant to the contemporary context or not.

Bible Used for Divinatory and Magical Purposes: The divinatory and magical use of the Bible is a very ancient practice. It has been a feature of approaches to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures all through the ages.¹⁶ In the African context, divinatory and magical use of the Bible is expressed in diverse forms. It may be difficult to represent all of them, but some instances may suffice:

- i. **Use of Biblical Texts to Sell Drugs:** In some situations, the Bible is used to sell ordinary medicines whether orthodox or traditional medicine. A Kenyan respondent to a question in the course of our research on this theme narrated how a traditional healer used to win many customers by reading a chosen biblical text over a medical concoction before giving it to the customer. In this way it is believed that the healing power gets transmitted through the Bible. This practice is also rife in different ways in Nigeria, an instance being the selling of drugs in commercial vehicles. The sellers often begin with preaching based on a number of biblical texts or themes, in this way giving a biblical background to the potency of their drugs.

¹⁶ See Eric Ziolkowski, *Magical Use of the Bible* (De Gruyter, 2019) in <https://www.degruyter.com>; Frederick Ebot Ashu, *Magical Uses of the Psalms in the Holy Bible: One hundred and fifty Psalms taken from the Holy Bible can make your wishes come true* (London: Blessed Hope Publishing, 2015).

ii. Random Opening of the Biblical Texts: In this approach, the Bible is opened at random and the text that comes to view is taken as the text the Holy Spirit has directed the reader to read. Many Bible study groups adopt this approach to the text. It belongs to what is conventionally regarded as bibliomancy.

iii. Significant Texts Opened to Ward off Evil: This involves the opening of some texts beside a sick person or one in dire need, the understanding being that the text possesses power to ward off enemy forces. One of such texts is Isa 54:17: "No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, says the Lord."

iv. Magical Recitation of Texts and Psalms: A related practice to the magical use of biblical words is the recitation of the psalms and significant texts to ward off evil or to solve immediate needs. Certain psalms are popularly considered very powerful for the resolution of significant existential problems. While this practice is not necessarily bad in itself one also finds that it is often abused. Such practices are rife in other cultures.¹⁷

v. Hypnotic Manipulation of Biblical Words and Expressions: A very common practice among many preachers today is the repetition of sentences, phrases, common expressions

¹⁷ Instances abound in Greco-Roman cultures. See J. G. Gager (ed), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Revised Edition 1999); C. A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

or simple words lifted from the Bible so many times that the listener or even the speaker gets caught up in a frenzy. A typical example is Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my Shepherd: there is nothing I shall want." The aim, often, is to let the biblical message stick to the mind in a very profound way. Sometimes, a whole crowd gets into ecstasy or gets hypnotized repeating such words. In some situations, the words are believed to possess magical powers capable of influencing the lives of those involved. In such circumstances, the words function as magical incantations just as one finds in certain traditional religious settings. This phenomenon is seen in many forms, and it is rife among many neo-Pentecostal groups.¹⁸

Impact of the Popular Bible Readings on African Christianity

It is a proven fact that the quality of the Christian life in any age or context depends to a large extent on the level of the knowledge of the Scriptures. The renewal of the Christian community is most effective through the proper ministration of the word of God. The words of St. Jerome, in a commentary on Isaiah, ring familiar here: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" ("Ignoratio enim Scripturarum, ignoratio Christi est").¹⁹ The Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, puts it aptly, "And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and

¹⁸ See Stephen Gyesaw, *Slain in the Spirit: The Socio-Psychological Manipulation of Christians by Charlatan Prophets* (2023) in <https://www.modernghana.com>.

¹⁹ *Ex Prólogo commentariorum sancti Hierónymi presbyteri in Isaíam prophetam* (Nn. 1. 2: CCL 73, 1-3).

vigor, and the children of the Church as the strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life."²⁰ The Church in Africa is well-known for its vibrancy, thanks to the enthusiastic reading and reception of the word of God. But one must also point out that the faith still remains very shallow on many fronts.

Most of the time, the external manifestations of the faith are not commensurate with the practical results. This means that the faith is not properly internalized. One of the reasons is that the popular readings of the Bible are by and large shallow and too simplistic. The consequence is that Christian life remains superficial and largely sentimental. There is much attachment to the external rituals, rules and other physical aspects of the religion. Because the word of God is often not properly interpreted, the spirituality of the listeners and worshippers lacks depth. This explains the violence that erupts among Christians at the slightest provocation. The issues can be articulated from a number of related perspectives.

3.1 Pragmatic Approach to the Faith: In most places in Africa, the Bible is usually read to solve ordinary life problems. All the different approaches are diverse ways of seeking solutions to the challenges of life. Underlying this attitude is the belief that the Bible possesses extraordinary power to solve such problems. This belief in the power of the biblical text is so entrenched that people frown at any attempt to subject the text to a critical analysis or to challenge the assumptions of the text.

²⁰ *Dei Verbum*, 21.

3.2 Literal Understanding of Biblical Truth: The fundamentalist approach regards every aspect of the biblical text as literally true and chronologically valid, and consequently the contents are interpreted without much critical scrutiny. The biblical stories and laws are understood literally. For instance, many understand Paul's injunction on women covering their heads in worship as still applicable to African women. It is taken so literally in most African contexts that women are not allowed to come to Church or religious gatherings without a head-tie. The biblical accounts of the prominence of supernatural or preternatural forces and demons are often interpreted literally. All these are ploughed back into the African society such that ordinary psychic or para-psychological phenomena are misinterpreted as demonic attacks. In this way, the reading of the Bible achieves the negative effect of frustrating proper enlightenment and development.

3.3 Syncretism in Belief and Worship: The uncritical reading of the ancient biblical text brings about much syncretistic tendencies in the practice of the faith. The fact is that the apparent resemblance of the African traditional worldview to the ancient biblical worldview inclines African Christianity to remain largely very conservative and traditionalist. This makes it difficult to do a critical reading of the texts in the African context. Many ordinary readers in Africa see the critical reading of the text as an adulteration of the supposedly unchanging word of God.

3.4 Insufficient Interest in Training of Biblical Experts: The presumption that the biblical text is very simple to understand inclines many Catholic Dioceses in Africa to pay little attention

to the training of experts in the biblical field. This is exemplified by the number of people sent from the dioceses and religious communities to study the sacred text. Some seminaries in Nigeria today, training future priests in theology, lack enough resident lecturers in biblical theology. Although the problem is being tackled in some of the seminaries, some others do not seem to recognize the anomaly. It reveals that the study of the Bible is not really considered very central to the mission of the Church in this part of the world, despite all the loud proclamations about it. To think of it, this is happening in a period when many lay people in the Continent have developed such a great interest in the reading of the sacred text and many Protestant and Pentecostal Churches are littering the religious space with nuanced and often misleading interpretations of the biblical text.

3.5 Doctrinal Conservatism and Improper Application of Bible Texts: The fundamentalist readings positively show that people take the Bible seriously as a holy book and as a book very relevant to daily living. Because of this many take the Bible as normative for life. This in itself is very commendable. The real challenge is to bridge the gap between the biblical worldview and the contemporary worldview and to determine the proper ways the Bible can be normative to life in the contemporary setting. Because most of the popular approaches to the Bible do not use the Bible critically the consequence is a literal imposition of the biblical world on the contemporary society and a shallow understanding and practice of the Christian faith. The consequences can be seen on three levels: an imperfect understanding of the biblical message; a conservative and unbalanced practice of the faith; an improper living of the African

Christian identity. The search for the relevance of the biblical text to the contemporary life is quite a laudable venture, but sometimes this search is exaggerated. This trend is gradually diminishing the attention to serious issues of the biblical text among many African students of the Bible and ordinary readers alike. Raymond Brown and Sandra Schneiders make this important exhortation on the issue of relevance of scripture: "We must be careful that the quest for instant relevance does not canonize our biases which we cannot recognize. To pass on to the next generation only what we find relevant in Scripture may be to censor Scripture, for precisely what we do not find relevant to our times may be God's principal word to another generation."²¹

3.6 Antipathy towards the African Culture and Modern Development: As a matter of fact, popular readings are influenced by the protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, and thus the tendency is to see the Bible as normative for all forms of religious and social life. According to this mentality, any form of life that is not supported by the Bible does not merit much attention. In line with this approach, some scholars of the Bible have tried to slant the biblical interpretation in such a way that it must address the contemporary life in all its ramifications and in every particular context. Thus, the Bible is used for social and political struggles and campaigns. Popular readings of the Bible often presuppose that the Bible reports events and words that can apply to every context and age directly without critical interpretation. The overall consequence is the growing antipathy in many circles towards anything that is modern or scientific

²¹ Raymond E. Brown - Sandra M. Schneiders, "Hermeneutics," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R. E. Brown et al.; London 1989) 1151.

together with a disparagement of genuine local cultural beliefs and practices. The assumption is that the Bible is the only credible guide to life in all its ramifications. This assumption is based on an insufficient grasp of the real nature of the biblical text. The Church, herself, which properly owns the Bible as we have it today, acknowledges many human errors in it and insists on a critical reading of the text.

Some Challenges of Popular Bible Readings to African Theology

Theology in the African context is faced with concrete challenges of making the Christian faith relevant to African people. This has led to the development of nuanced ways of reading the biblical text. One notes that critical study of the Bible is relatively very recent in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is due to the fact that the Christian religion is relatively very young in this part of the world. Only in very few places in Sub-Saharan Africa can one speak of upwards of a hundred and fifty years of Christian religious presence. Before the 1970s, one could point only at few names of Africans with postgraduate degrees in biblical studies, and almost all these were obtained from institutions outside black Africa. The situation has, however, changed dramatically since the 1970s. Today, Africa has a myriad of highly trained and professional biblical scholars, and many tertiary institutions in Africa have been offering postgraduate degrees in different areas of biblical studies.²²

²² Knut Holter, "The Institutional Context of Old Testament Scholarship in Africa," *Old Testament Essays* 11/3 (1988) 452-461.

All these notwithstanding, it is also a fact that the critical scholarship of the Bible in Africa, though increasingly formidable, is still on the minority level. While the Bible has remained very popular in the African society, it is read uncritically majority of the time and applied literally to social and religious life. This state of affairs imposes a great burden on biblical scholars to assist the people in a genuine approach to the text while taking into consideration the religious, ethical and social appeal of the biblical text among Africans. The task has been to seriously examine how a genuine critical reading of the Bible can become an authentically African reading.

Another challenge that biblical fundamentalism poses to the development of genuine African theology is the menace of what may be regarded as aggressive Pentecostalism. The fastest growing movement in the African Christian context today is the phenomenon of Pentecostalism. It comes with many forms and it fascinates both the old and the young. Many Catholics are turning to Pentecostal churches because they prefer the warmth of their boisterous assemblies to the solemn Catholic religious worship. At the center of the Pentecostal religious worship is the special place accorded the Scriptures. There is no doubt that the Pentecostals read the Bible more than traditional Catholics. This imposes a great responsibility on the agents of evangelization in the Catholic Church.

Another area of the Pentecostal challenge is the multiplication of tertiary institutions with Pentecostal affiliation. In Nigeria, majority of the ever increasing private Universities belongs to Pentecostal churches. In these institutions, people are trained also

in the reading of the Bible. The worrisome aspect of it is that the reading is usually fundamentalist and this truncated understanding of the Bible influences attitudes and ideas in all other areas of life.

Synopsis

The uncritical reading of the biblical text is often sustained with the argument that the Bible is a faithful and direct representation of God's word and should be accepted literally with faith. Critical scholars are often accused of confusing the people rather than leading them to appreciate the already given and, presumably, clear message. This accusation, which emanates from a fundamentalist approach to the text, makes no distinction between the biblical chronology and the historical chronology, that is, it presumes that the biblical text is a historical document and reports events the way they actually happened. It makes no sense to some when they hear the "jargon" that some biblical text gives a religiously true message but historically and scientifically unreliable information. Biblical theologians who expound such critical views of the biblical material are often branded as non-believers or incurable skeptics. Some are even convinced that the prevailing critical study of the Bible is of no use to Africans. This mentality has promoted the continued fundamentalist reading of the text in Africa, with its dire consequences for the deepening of the evangelical work in the African context.

Conclusion

This study has exposed the diverse facets of the popular readings of the biblical text in the African context. The African society is filled with myriads of Bible preachers and self-styled evangelists many of whom dish out shallow ideas and half-baked theologies and spiritualities that have continued to determine the religious and moral lives of many Africans. Critical exegesis has become so unpopular that even some trained Catholic exegetes are fast joining the ranks of fundamentalist preachers and interpreters. The consequence is that fundamentalism is seriously defining the contemporary African Christianity, and this includes almost all the denominations. The burden is thus on biblical theologians to address these challenges and guide the people on the part of correct reading of the texts.