

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Dissertation Title: The Impact of Colonization, the Problem of Evil, and the African Traditional
Religion Worldview on Biblical Hermeneutics in West Africa

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy – Bible Exposition

by
Christopher Blay

Lynchburg, Virginia

July 10, 2024

Abstract

This research paper delves into the complex relationship between colonization, African Traditional Religion (ATR), the problem of evil, and their impact on interpreting biblical texts in West Africa. The study explores how historical colonization, cultural beliefs rooted in ATR, and the existential question of evil have shaped the lens through which Millennials and Gen Z in West Africa engage with Christianity.

Through an analysis of historical sources, scholarly works, and academic articles, this paper highlights how these factors have contributed to a decline in interest in Christianity among the youth in the region. The paper also emphasizes the importance of understanding this complex interplay to promote effective cross-cultural communication of the gospel of Christ.

Keywords: Christianity, West Africa, colonization, problem of evil, African Traditional Religion (ATR), biblical hermeneutics, Millennials, Gen Z

Contents

Figures.....	vi
PART 1 - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
<i>Thesis Statement.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Background of West Africa</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>West Africa in Biblical Context.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Christianity in West Africa.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Statement of Problem and Purpose of this Research.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Significance of this Research.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Research Methodology.....</i>	<i>22</i>
Chapter 2 – Background - Africa and Christianity	30
<i>Africa in Biblical History.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Africa in the Early Church.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Hermeneutical Challenges in Africa.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Understanding the Decline of Interest in Christianity.....</i>	<i>47</i>
PART 2 – HERMENEUTICAL INFLUENCES IN WEST AFRICAN	51
Chapter 3 – The Hermeneutical Implication in Biblical Interpretation	51
<i>Overview</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Methodology – Working Backwards.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Merit and Purpose</i>	<i>57</i>
Chapter 4 - The Case for Local African Gods	61

<i>West Africa Traditional Worldview</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Comparing West African Traditional Religion (WATR) and Christianity.....</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Shortfalls of the West African Traditional Religion (WATR)</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>The Perceived Potency of African Gods</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Hermeneutical Influence (Interview Data)</i>	<i>80</i>
Chapter 5 - The History of Colonization and Oppression	85
<i>Colonial Missionaries</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Exploitation and Slavery.....</i>	<i>89</i>
<i>White Man’s Religion Tag</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Distinguishing Missionaries in Colonial West Africa</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>Hermeneutical Influence (Interview Data)</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>Observation, The Local Gods are to Be Blamed?</i>	<i>98</i>
Chapter 6 - The Problem of Evil “Why Suffering?”.....	100
<i>Social Injustices</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>Tough Economic Climate and A Sense of Hopelessness</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>Hermeneutical Influence (Interview Data)</i>	<i>106</i>
PART 3 – THE DEFENSE, AND THE CONCLUSION	113
Chapter 7 - The Biblical Defense.....	113
<i>Guiding Principles</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>The Bible is God’s Word.....</i>	<i>115</i>
Chapter 8: Biblical View on West African Tradition Religion (WATR).....	123
<i>Origin and Purpose.....</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>Introduction to The Divine Council</i>	<i>133</i>

<i>Divine Council Rebellion</i>	137
<i>Nations under the “Sons of God”</i>	139
<i>Mediation and Divination</i>	143
<i>Jesus is the Only Way</i>	149
Chapter 9: Biblical View on Colonization and Slavery	154
<i>Creation, Dominion, Dependency</i>	154
<i>Sin and Its Consequences</i>	156
<i>Colonization and Slavery Exist due to the Fallen Human Race</i>	160
<i>The Kingdom of God</i>	180
Chapter 10: Biblical View on the Problem of Evil	185
<i>The Nature of Evil in the Bible</i>	185
<i>Divine Sovereignty and the Problem of Evil</i>	192
<i>Biblical Models for Addressing the Problem of Evil</i>	195
Chapter 11: In Defense of the Bible	200
<i>The Bible is not a Tool for Exploitation</i>	200
<i>Christianity is not a “White Man’s Religion.”</i>	203
<i>The Case for Proper Hermeneutics in West Africa</i>	205
Chapter 12 – Final Arguments	207
<i>Recapping of Key Data Points:</i>	207
<i>Implications of the Finding and Response</i>	209
<i>Conclusions</i>	210
BIBLIOGRAPHY	212

Figures

Figure I - Methodology Flywheel	56
---------------------------------------	----

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The African continent is an array of diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, each contributing to its rich and complex history. Ghana has over 80 languages and over 100 different ethnic groups. Notwithstanding the complexities, Africa is often portrayed as a fertile ground for Christianity, with a significant portion of its population identifying as Christian. The widespread belief in Christianity across the continent seemingly paints a picture of a seamless embrace of the faith. Yet, this narrative is rapidly evolving. In the current landscape, particularly among the younger generations of Millennials and Gen Z, there exists a growing skepticism and disengagement with Christianity in Africa. This skepticism is rooted in a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and theological factors.

The prevailing sentiment among the younger generations in Africa today is one of disillusionment with Christianity. This cynicism is rooted in a confluence of factors, including the perception of Christianity as a "White Man's Religion," historical scars from colonization and oppression, the enduring problem of evil, and a renewed attraction to local traditional worldviews. These sentiments, though diverse in nature, converge to form a formidable force that threatens to derail interest in Christianity among African youth. Central to the disengagement is the belief among those departing from the faith that the Bible itself has been weaponized and exploited by oppressors.

Various forces, including the arrival of colonial masters, have shaped the history of Africa, leaving an indelible mark on the continent's sociocultural fabric. West Africa, in particular, has a history that intertwines the bequests of colonization, the dynamics of traditional

belief systems, and the influence of other religions like Christianity and Islam.¹ From the 15th to the 20th century, colonization in Africa had profound consequences on the continent's people, economies, and cultures. The colonial masters exploited Africa's resources, leading to the establishment of colonial rule that disrupted existing social structures and imposed new cultural paradigms. The legacy of colonization includes not only material exploitation but also the imposition of Western values, languages, and religious systems, often leading to tensions between indigenous belief systems and external influences.

Compounding the unnerving history of colonialization in the continent is the problem of evil, a philosophical and theological conundrum that explores the existence of suffering, pain, and injustice in a world supposedly governed by a benevolent and all-powerful deity. This issue has been central to philosophical debates for centuries and takes on unique dimensions when considered within the context of West Africa. The region has and continues to face its share of historical and contemporary challenges, including social injustices, economic disparities, and political turmoil. For example, a violent extremist group called Boko Haram threatens and continues to invade and destroy human lives in Nigeria and other areas across the continent. Granted, these issues of extremism are not only in Africa but a global issue. However, these challenges coupled with hardship have led individuals and communities to question the compatibility of their faith with the harsh realities they experience.

Another critical component on the continent is the movement of African consciousness, a call to return to national gods and follow the African Traditional Religion (hereafter ATR) worldview. ATR is deeply rooted in the continent's history and is characterized by a close

¹ While Islam has different measures to facilitate continuous growth, for example, forcing its members to marriage within religion and raise their children alike, there seem to be a shift among the youth to embrace native religion even among Muslim youth although it is not at the scale observed among Christians.

connection to nature, the veneration of ancestors, and a complex cosmology that shapes moral values and social norms. This worldview, intertwined with daily life, has persisted alongside the introduction of global religions like Christianity. In West Africa, where ATR remains a significant cultural force, tensions can arise (although not common in West Africa) between traditional practices and Christian beliefs, leading to a unique syncretism that can influence how religious texts, like the Bible, are interpreted. It was common for people to observe the traditionalist cut themselves with a knife and the wounds were instantly healed. Such examples are rampant, and they incite the youth against the perceived lack of such showmanship in Christianity.

In Ghana, schools began teaching religion in elementary and the predominant focus was on Christianity, Islam, and the traditional religion. At Debiso² in the Western North of Ghana, most of the people were Christians, however, most Christians recognized the potency of the traditionalist. For example, anytime there is an outbreak of a disease, the chief and his outrage would mostly offer sacrifices to appease the gods. The village had an annual festival where food and sacrifice would be offered to the ancestors and those were both scary and also joyful times. Now looking back, the chief of the town who offered these sacrifices and acted as the voice of the gods was a devoted Catholic who attended mass every morning. To most people then, it was just normal to go to church and also recognize the local gods. One of the common ways the local gods were called upon was during a quest to find an answer. For example, my father had a boarding school and during one term, a lady in the boarding house went missing. The parents of the girl heard about the incident and came to the school with the police to hold my father responsible for the girl in his custody. For over a year, the girl was not found and upon many

² This is a town the researcher grew up in, located closer to the border of Cote D' Voir.

efforts and prayers, my dad resorted to consulting a medium of an idol who told him, the girl was alive and would return, to which after months she was found.

Such attitudes impact how people look at and interpret the Bible. A former president of Ghana, the late Jerry John Rawlings, encouraged the Ghanaian parliament to swear by local gods instead of the Bible since corruption continues to rise due to the fact that the parliamentarians do not revere the Bible and are not afraid of it. The call by the president gained a resounding majority support among the youth, who are suffering due to corrupt leaders. Without a serious consideration of biblical hermeneutics, most people will hold a similar view about the Bible being less feared. In West Africa, Christians least know about the perceived powers of the local gods that are shared through oral traditions or enforced by routine rituals and ceremonies. For example, Amadioha (also known as Kamalu or Ofufe), the god of thunder and lightning, is widely worshiped among the Igbo people in southeastern Nigeria. He is associated with justice and is often invoked to settle disputes and conflicts. People (sometimes Christians) would go to this god to settle disputes and sometimes ask for vengeance, instead of forgiving. One can already see the intricacy and hermeneutical association with such upbringings, history, and conflicting theological views. The result is a complex landscape where the boundaries between tradition and modernity are blurred.

While some argue that Christianity was imposed upon Africa from outside, a closer examination of scripture and historical contexts reveals a more nuanced and intricate relationship. The Christian faith possesses deep, intertwined roots with the African continent, dating back to the very beginnings of the church. The story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:27-40 provides a powerful example of early African involvement in Christianity. This man, encountered by Philip on his journey, readily embraces the faith and seeks baptism, highlighting

the continent's openness to and active participation in the spread of Christianity. Furthermore, the presence of African Jews at the Pentecost experience in Acts 2:1-12 demonstrates the continent's already existing engagement with spiritual and religious ideas. This fact challenges the notion of Christianity as a completely foreign import, acknowledging the complex interplay between existing belief systems and the emerging Christian faith. Notably, even today, certain West African tribes maintain Jewish traditions and ordinances, illustrating the diverse tapestry of religious experiences in the region.³

As one can already observe, dismissing Africa's role in Christianity as passive or solely receptive paints an incomplete picture. Scripture itself reveals the continent's deep and active participation in the unfolding story of faith. For example, Egypt, an African nation, served as a refuge for Jesus. Beyond its geographical location, Egypt in Matthew 2:14-15 transcends a mere backdrop. It becomes a vital refuge for Jesus, the very cornerstone of the Christian faith. God orchestrates events, leading Joseph and Mary to seek refuge in this African land, shielding the infant Messiah from Herod's murderous intent.

Jesus's command in Matthew 28:19-20 resonates with a universality that encompasses all nations, including those on the vast African continent. He instructs his disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations," implying an expectation that the gospel message would reach and transform lives across geographic and cultural boundaries. This inclusivity resonates in the vibrant Christian communities across West Africa, such as those in Ghana. Generations born into these communities, inheriting and practicing their faith, stand as living testaments to the successful fulfillment of Jesus's command. These examples are but glimpses into the vast

³ Meir Jacob Kister, *King David in Jewish Liturgical Tradition* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1979), 124-125.

tapestry of African engagement with Christianity. They showcase the continent's role not simply as a recipient of faith, but as an active participant in its history, interpretation, and propagation. By reframing the narrative, the paper moves beyond simplistic notions of imposition and celebrates the complex, dynamic partnership between Christianity and the African continent.

In conclusion, dismissing Christianity as a solely external imposition upon Africa oversimplifies the reality. Early African inclusion in the church narrative, existing Jewish communities, and the universality of the gospel message all point towards a more complex and interconnected relationship between Christianity and the African continent. The presence of thriving Christian communities across West Africa stands as a living testament to the gospel's successful journey and integration within the continent. While the continent boasts a longstanding Christian presence, a wave of disengagement among Millennials and Gen Z necessitates deeper reflection and understanding. Understanding this disengagement demands going beyond simplistic narratives of imposed religion or mere youthful rebellion. The scars of colonialism, persistent challenges like the problem of evil, and a renewed call to traditional African worldviews paint a nuanced picture of disillusionment. The evolving relationship between Christianity and African youth presents both challenges and opportunities. Acknowledging the complexities, fostering open dialogue, and prioritizing authenticity allows Christians in Africa to navigate this shifting landscape and cultivate a vibrant future for Christianity. This future will be rooted in genuine faith, critical engagement, and meaningful relevance.

Against this backdrop, this thesis aims to untangle the intricate relationship between the history of colonization, the problem of evil, the ATR worldview, and their collective impact on biblical hermeneutics in West Africa. By delving into this multifaceted relationship, the research

seeks to illuminate how these influences contribute to a decline in interest in Christianity among Millennials and Gen Z and to provide a biblical defense to address misconceptions that arise from these challenges. In doing so, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between faith, culture, and history in West Africa, offering insights that are valuable for both academic scholarship and practical approaches to cross-cultural engagement and religious dialogue.

Thesis Statement

The history of colonization, the problem of evil, and the ATR worldview directly shape the lens through which biblical texts are interpreted in West Africa, leading to a decline in interest in Christianity among Millennials and Gen Z.

Background of West Africa

To fully comprehend and respond to this burgeoning phenomenon of disengagement with Christianity in Africa, this research paper focuses on West Africa, a region emblematic of the broader African experience. West Africa is a dynamic and culturally rich region located on the westernmost edge of the African continent. It is known for its diverse landscapes, vibrant cultures, and a history deeply intertwined with trade, empires, and colonialism. It is a vast region that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Sahel region in the east. It encompasses 16 countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Niger, and Ivory Coast. Ghana, one of the countries was the first country in Africa to get independence from colonial rule in 1957.⁴ West Africa has a storied history that dates back thousands of years. It was home to several powerful

⁴ Toyin Falola and Daniel Jean-Jacques, *Africa: An Encyclopedia of Culture and Society*, vol. 3 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 112.

empires, including the Ghana Empire, the Mali Empire (famous for its ruler Mansa Musa), and the Songhai Empire.⁵

West Africa boasts of ancient civilizations that flourished long before the arrival of European colonizers. Among these, the Kingdom of Ghana, not to be confused with the modern nation of Ghana, emerged as one of the first major powers in the region. Situated between the Sahara Desert and the forests of West Africa, the Kingdom of Ghana controlled lucrative trade routes, particularly in gold and salt, which made it a dominant force in the trans-Saharan trade network. Its wealth and influence attracted traders from across the Islamic world, contributing to the region's cultural exchange and economic prosperity.⁶ Following the decline of Ghana, the Mali Empire rose to prominence under the leadership of legendary figures like Sundiata Keita and Mansa Musa. Spanning vast territories encompassing modern-day Mali, Senegal, Gambia, and parts of Guinea, Niger, and Mauritania, Mali became one of the wealthiest and most powerful empires of its time. Renowned for its rich cultural heritage, including the city of Timbuktu, a center of Islamic scholarship and trade, the Mali Empire played a pivotal role in shaping the history of West Africa.⁷ The Songhai Empire succeeded Mali as the dominant power in the region, establishing its capital at Gao and expanding its influence along the Niger River. These kingdoms not only amassed wealth but also fostered the development of art, architecture, and scholarship, laying the foundation for a unique West African civilization.⁸

⁵ J. D. Fage, *A History of West Africa*, 6th ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 75.

⁶ J. F. Hunwick, *West African History for Historians: A Survey from Ancient Times to c. 1800* (Woodbridge: James Currey Publishers, 2003), 15.

⁷ Nehemia Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1973), 34.

⁸ J. H. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sa'di's Tarikh al-Sudan down to 1613 and Other Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 79.

To further understand West Africa is to delve into this intricate mosaic of faith, where ancient traditions intertwine with global religions, creating a unique expression of human connection with the divine. Long before colonial powers arrived, West Africans nurtured a vast array of indigenous belief systems, deeply rooted in the land and intertwined with daily life. From the Dogon of Mali with their elaborate cosmology of celestial beings to the Ashanti of Ghana with their reverence for ancestral spirits, these traditions emphasized communal harmony, respect for nature, and the guidance of divine forces. Ancestral veneration played a central role, with ancestors seen as intermediaries between the living and the spiritual realm, ensuring continuity and providing wisdom for the present. Across West Africa, various ethnic groups practiced their own forms of animistic worship, often centered around the veneration of ancestors, nature spirits, and gods associated with the elements. Rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices were common practices aimed at appeasing these spiritual entities and seeking their favor for protection, fertility, and prosperity.⁹ Examples of indigenous belief systems include the Akan religion of Ghana, the Yoruba religion of Nigeria, and the Vodun practices of Benin.

The 8th century witnessed the arrival of Islam in West Africa, primarily through trade routes that snaked across the Sahara Desert. The faith, with its emphasis on monotheism, social justice, and community, resonated with existing traditions of righteousness and ethical conduct. Kings embraced Islam, leading to the rise of powerful empires like Mali and Songhai, renowned for their centers of learning and pilgrimage. While Islam profoundly transformed political and social structures, it also coexisted with indigenous beliefs, leading to a fascinating syncretism of practices and rituals. Islamic architecture, education, and governance became prominent features

⁹ J. Lorand Matory, "The Trouble with the Word 'Religion': Reflections on Power, Pluralism, and the Study of Africa," *American Anthropologist* 102, no. 2 (2000): 286-305.

of West African society, blending with existing indigenous traditions to create unique cultural syntheses.¹⁰ Today, Islam remains a dominant religion in West Africa, with significant Muslim populations in countries such as Senegal, Nigeria, and Mali.

Today, West Africa presents a kaleidoscope of religious practices. Islam and Christianity hold the majority, but traditional beliefs continue to thrive alongside growing pockets of atheism and agnosticism. The religious landscape of West Africa is far from static. Religious thought and practice continue to evolve, adapting to the realities of globalization, migration, and technological advancements.¹¹ West Africa is also a region of immense resilience and cultural vibrancy. Its music, dance, and literature resonate with the rhythms of daily life, expressing its complex history and celebrating its enduring traditions. From the rich storytelling of the Griots to the breathtaking masks of the Dan, West Africa's artistic expressions offer a glimpse into the soul of the region.

While West Africa has made significant progress in various areas, it faces numerous challenges in the 21st century. These challenges include political instability, corruption, poverty, inadequate healthcare systems, and environmental issues like deforestation and desertification.

West Africa in Biblical Context

Understanding the history of West Africa from a biblical viewpoint involves exploring the region's role in the biblical narrative, as well as the influence of biblical events and figures on West African societies. While the Bible primarily focuses on the Middle East, it indirectly connects with West Africa through several historical and cultural contexts. For example, West

¹⁰ J. S. Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.

¹¹ John D. Y. Peel, "Religious Syncretism: An African Perspective," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 17, no. 3 (1987): 258-281.

Africa was a part of the extensive network of ancient trade routes, commonly known as the trans-Saharan trade routes. These trade routes connected the Mediterranean world, including the Roman Empire, with sub-Saharan Africa.¹² While not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, these trade routes played a pivotal role in connecting various regions and facilitating cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the spread of Christianity in the ancient world and its impact on Africa is noteworthy. As Christianity spread throughout the Mediterranean region, it eventually reached North Africa, including modern-day Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Prominent early Christian theologians, such as Augustine of Hippo (in present-day Algeria), emerged from this region. Although not within the borders of contemporary West Africa, North Africa's Christian legacy had indirect influences on later Christian communities in the region.

There are many religious and cultural interplays between West Africa and Judaism. An example of an indirect connections is the suggestion that the coat of many colors, the special garment that Jacob made for Joseph (see Gen. 37) as a sign of his love had a West African cultural origin.¹³ This story is mostly shared through oral traditions to date. The Kente, a popular cloth in Ghana that worn on special occasions are handwoven with a multicolored stripe of silk and cotton is purported to have influenced Jacob's precious gift. Religious traditions found in Judaism like drink offering, grain offering, animal sacrifices are similar to West African Traditional Religion (hereafter WATR) and such practices are still carried out today.¹⁴ While geographically distant, West Africa and Judaism have intersected in various ways, contributing

¹² Nehemia Levzion, "The Early Development of the Trans-Saharan Gold Trade," *The Journal of African History* 41, no. 2 (2000): 233-257.

¹³ Charlene A. McCutcheon, "African Textiles and the Biblical World," in *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of John H. Walton*, edited by John N. Oswalt (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 179-193.

¹⁴ M. J. Bogle, *Accounting for Kente*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 19-21.

to the rich array of cultural diversity in the region. This analysis explores some of the notable cultural interplays between West Africa and Judaism.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the cultural interplay between West Africa and Judaism lies in the realm of oral traditions and mythologies. Across West African societies, oral traditions have preserved stories and legends that bear striking similarities to certain biblical narratives. For example, there are oral traditions among some West African communities that echo the story of creation, the flood, and the migration of ancestral figures, reminiscent of biblical accounts found in the Book of Genesis.¹⁵ These parallels suggest a shared cultural heritage and possible exchanges of ideas between West African and Jewish communities over time. Another is the symbolism and iconography present in both West African and Jewish traditions. Symbolic motifs such as the tree of life, the serpent, and the lion hold significant religious and cultural meaning in both contexts.¹⁶ Moreover, certain artistic expressions, such as intricate patterns and geometric designs found in West African textiles and pottery, bear resemblance to symbols and motifs found in Jewish religious art and architecture.

Likewise, WATR and Judaism share commonalities in their ritual practices and ceremonies. For instance, both traditions place importance on sacrificial offerings, communal feasting, and rites of passage marking significant life events such as birth, marriage, and death. The practice of circumcision, a central ritual in Judaism, is also observed in various West African cultures as a symbol of initiation and belonging to a particular community. Further, the shared concept of syncretism has fostered even deeper connections. Throughout history, various syncretic religious movements have emerged in West Africa, blending elements of indigenous

¹⁵ Sandra Hamutiyine, "West African Hunter Narratives and the Figure of the Trickster," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 44, no. 4 (December 2014): 437-463.

¹⁶ Jean Laude, *The Arts of the Black World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 36.

spiritual beliefs with external influences, including Judaism. These movements, such as the Beta Israel community in Ethiopia and the Igbo Jews of Nigeria, reflect attempts to reconcile traditional African spirituality with Jewish religious practices and beliefs. By examining these shared practices and movements, one can observe that ancient West African and Jewish cultures have intersected and influenced each other in profound ways.

The colonial period also marked a significant turning point in West Africa's relationship with the Bible, as European powers introduced Christianity to the region through missionary activities and colonial administrations. Beginning with the arrival of Portuguese explorers on the coast of West Africa, Christian missionaries sought to spread the gospel and convert indigenous peoples to Christianity. Early missionaries recognized the importance of bringing the scriptures to local communities in their mother tongues. Missionaries like Samuel Ajayi Crowther spearheaded the translation of the Bible into Yoruba in the 19th century, paving the way for further efforts.¹⁷ Today, over 200 languages in West Africa have at least some portions of the Bible translated, with several complete versions available in major languages like Hausa, Igbo, and Akan. By placing indigenous voices at the heart of Bible translation, West Africa was not just receiving the Bible; it is actively shaping its message and meaning. This collaborative work enriched the spiritual life of generations, not only in West Africa but also for the global Christian community.

Additionally, following colonialism and missionary activities, indigenous Christian movements began to emerge in West Africa, challenging traditional religious practices and beliefs while incorporating elements of Christianity into local cultures. These movements, often

¹⁷ J. D. Adekunle, "The Impact of Bible Translation on the Development of the Yoruba Language," *Journal of African Studies* 39, no. 3 (2012): 391-406.

characterized by syncretism and adaptation, sought to reconcile African spirituality with Christian teachings, creating hybrid forms of worship that reflected the region's diverse cultural heritage. One notable example is the Aladura movement, which emerged in Nigeria in the early 20th century and emphasized prayer, healing, and spiritual deliverance. Founded by leaders such as Joseph Babalola and Moses Orimolade Tunolase, the movement combined Pentecostalism with traditional African religious practices, attracting a large following among West African Christians.¹⁸

In contemporary West Africa, the Bible continues to play a central role in religious life and cultural identity, with millions of Christians across the region turning to its teachings for guidance, inspiration, and solace. The proliferation of churches, Bible study groups, and Christian media outlets underscores the enduring influence of the Bible in West African society. From early encounters with biblical figures to the translation and dissemination of the Bible in indigenous languages, West Africa's relationship with the Bible has evolved over time, leaving a lasting imprint on the region's religious landscape. As West Africa continues to navigate the complexities of modernity and globalization, the Bible remains a source of strength, resilience, and hope for millions of Christians across the region, shaping their faith, identity, and vision for the future.

In summary, while the region's connection to the Bible may not be immediately apparent in its textual narratives, its influence and resonance are evident in the lived experiences, spiritual expressions, and cultural identities of West African peoples.

¹⁸ J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounters: An Anthropology of Dynamics in Yoruba and Black Atlantic Traditions* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). 15-18.

Christianity in West Africa

While Christianity initially flourished in the Middle East, its echoes reached West Africa as early as the 1st century, carried on the winds of trade and cultural exchange. Connections likely occurred through the trans-Saharan trade routes, fostering indirect links between West African societies and early Christian communities in North Africa. Though not explicitly mentioned in scripture, these whispers laid the groundwork for future encounters with the faith. The arrival of European colonial powers in the 15th century marked a turning point. Portuguese explorers, such as Henry the Navigator, played a significant role in early Christianization efforts along the coast of present-day Ghana and Nigeria.¹⁹ However, widespread conversion efforts gained momentum during the colonial period, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁰ West Africa has denominational diversity; however, the Roman Catholic Church maintains the majority presence with a strong following in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Ivory Coast. Besides the Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, etc. are prevalent as well. Beyond the church, Christianity has significantly impacted West African society and culture. Missionary efforts led to the establishment of schools and hospitals that continue to play vital roles in education and healthcare.²¹ In fact, the best schools in West Africa are mostly missionary schools and they are very disciplined. In most missionary schools, students get up every morning at 5:00 AM to bathe and prepare to join all other students to recite the rosary at 6:00 AM. These schools impact their students positively to be good citizens.

¹⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 54.

²⁰ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 79.

²¹ Richard Juang, "The Persistence of Tradition and the Negotiation of Modernity: A Re-examination of Pentecostal Growth in Rural Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 4 (December 2010): 431-457.

Christianity's journey in West Africa was not simply about imposing foreign doctrines. Missionaries faced the challenge of adapting their message to diverse cultures and traditions. This led to the emergence of syncretic forms of Christianity, incorporating elements of ancestral veneration, spirit divination, and traditional music into worship practices. The mid-20th century witnessed the dawn of independence movements across West Africa, leading to the decolonization of the region and the emergence of indigenous Christian movements. Nationalist fervor and calls for self-determination resonated within the Christian community, giving rise to churches that emphasized African autonomy, cultural identity, and social justice. Leaders like Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Nnamdi Azikiwe in Nigeria championed the role of Christianity in the struggle against colonial oppression.²² Theologians like John Mbiti from Kenya and Kwame Gyekye from Ghana challenged Eurocentric interpretations of scripture, offering fresh perspectives informed by African cultural realities.²³ Independent churches thrived, reflecting the desire for self-determination and a place for African voices within the global Christian community.

With all the positives that come with Christianity in West Africa, the challenges continue. With the outburst of one-man churches that are largely unregulated (a term given to churches that are formed by individuals with no affiliation to a denomination or fellowship), false teachers and prophets take advantage of many people. Some of these false purported Christian leaders go for witchcraft and occults and use the Bible as a cover. These churches abuse their members, and no one holds them accountable. For example, Bishop Daniel Obinim, the flamboyant and controversial leader of the International God's Way Church in Ghana, has often graced headlines

²² M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Independence: Nigeria, France and de Gaulle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 62.

²³ Kwame Gyekye, *African Theological Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987). 37.

for his unorthodox sermons and claims of possessing supernatural abilities. One of the most outlandish assertions he has made is the ability to transform into animals, primarily snakes and tigers. This claim has drawn widespread criticism, skepticism, and even legal charges. In a recent interview, the self-acclaimed man of God, who had thousands of members for many years, admitted that all these sayings over the years were lies.²⁴ In Rwanda, East Africa, the president had to step in with regulations to shut down such churches and provide the basic requirements needed to start or operate a church.²⁵ The Rwandan government's move to regulate religious institutions has sparked a heated debate, pitching concerns about government overreach against arguments for fostering stability and preventing abuses.²⁶

The recent BBC Africa Eye investigation into the controversial Nigerian televangelist, TB Joshua, and his Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN) has indeed caused a stir. The investigation uncovered alleged widespread abuse and torture within the church, raising serious concerns about the practices and leadership of the organization.²⁷ The BBC investigation marks a significant turning point in the public perception of TB Joshua and the SCOAN. While the full extent of the alleged abuses remains to be confirmed through investigations, the revelations have already triggered an important conversation about accountability and ethical practices within

²⁴ "Flashback: 'I Lied; I Can't Turn Myself Into Any Animal' – Obinim Backtracks On His Supernatural Powers," *3news.com*, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://3news.com/showbiz/flashback-i-lied-i-cant-turn-myself-into-any-animal-obinim-backtracks-on-his-supernatural-powers/#:~:text=Bishop%20Daniel%20Obinim%2C%20the%20head,hurt%20his%20enemies—were%20false>.

²⁵ Faith-Based Organizations, "Rwanda Governance Board accessed [September 7, 2023], <https://www.rgb.rw/1/civil-society-faith-based-and-political-organisations/faith-based-organisations>.

²⁶ Jean-Pierre Karegeye, "Religious Freedom and the Regulation of Religious Institutions in Rwanda: Navigating a Complex Landscape," *African Journal of Law and Religion* 10, no. 1 (2023): 123-142.

²⁷ BBC News, Africa Eye, "TB Joshua: Megachurch Leader Raped and Tortured Worshippers, BBC Finds." *BBC News*, January 7, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67749215>. Accessed February 28, 2024.

religious institutions. The story continues to unfold, with potential legal actions, internal reforms within the church, and ongoing public scrutiny shaping the future of this once-powerful religious organization. While this paper is not taking sides because there are others who are defending TB Joshua,²⁸ these examples show concerns on abuse and systematic corruption in unregulated churches.

In summary, while its positive impacts on education, healthcare, and social activism are undeniable, contemporary challenges arise from the emergence of unregulated one-man churches with potential for abuse and exploitation. Recent cases like Bishop Obinim in Ghana and TB Joshua in Nigeria highlight the need for critical examination and potential regulations to ensure ethical practices and protect vulnerable individuals within the faith. Despite these issues, the story of Christianity in West Africa remains dynamic and ongoing.

Statement of Problem and Purpose of this Research

The study explores the hermeneutical consequences of popular opinions related to how the Bible is interpreted and applied in contemporary West African settings. The ultimate aim of this research paper is to equip evangelists, apologists, and all followers of Christ with the tools to provide a biblical defense and articulate the reason for their hope in Christ (see 1 Pet. 3:15). Throughout this exploration, the paper maintains a central focus on the profound influences of historical factors, cultural perceptions, and theological inquiries on the interpretation of the Bible in the context of modern West Africa.

²⁸ "BBC Documentary: Despite Shocking Revelations, FFK, Dele Momodu, Others Defend Controversial Preacher T.B. Joshua," *Premium Times Nigeria*, accessed February 28, 2024, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/entertainment/naija-fashion/657273-bbc-documentary-despite-shocking-revelations-ffk-dele-momodu-others-defend-controversial-preacher-t-b-joshua.html>.

This research draws from an array of scholarly resources, both historical and contemporary that share light on the multifaceted dimensions of this complex issue. A few of the sources are: It interacts with authoritative works such as Michael A. Noll's *The History of Christianity in Africa*, which offers insights into the historical presence of Christianity on the continent. Lamin Sanneh's *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* also provides valuable perspectives on the evolving nature of Christianity in global contexts. Finally, Kalu's, *African Christianity: An African Story*, which presents a comprehensive view of African Christianity's unique trajectory.

Furthermore, the paper incorporates journal articles such as Afe Adogame's "Between 'Mission' and 'Pentecost,'" which addresses identity politics and evangelicalism in Africa, and John S. Ukpong's "African Indigenous Churches and the Biblical Hermeneutics," which explores the hermeneutical challenges within African Christianity. These scholarly articles add further depth of understanding to the issues at hand. Also, to comprehend the historical roots of the problem of evil and its impact on African theology, articles such as Nimi Wariboko's "African Traditional Religions and the Problem of Evil" and B. H. Kato's "A Theological Problem in Missions: The God of the African Traditional Believer."

The research also draws from dissertations and online sources including but not limited to Opoku Onyinah's "African Charismatic Theology" and Paul Appiah-Kubi's "African Theology in Transformation," which offer specialized insights into the evolving theological landscape in Africa; Paul N. Mwaura's "Interpreting the Bible in Africa" and Olufemi Akintunde's "African Hermeneutics in the 21st Century," which provide contemporary perspectives on biblical hermeneutics in Africa. The aim of this work is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the

challenges facing Christianity in the region and provide guidance for a biblical response to the current decline in interest.

Significance of this Research

The decline of interest in Christianity among youths in West Africa is a significant issue with far-reaching implications. West Africa, historically known for its rich Christian heritage, is now witnessing a shift in religious affiliations among its younger generations. This shift bears immense importance due to its impact on culture, identity, education, and social cohesion. Earlier parts of this work have already looked at the benefits of Christianity in West Africa so this will highlight different data points to show the importance of this research.

Christianity stands apart from other religions in its foundational belief that Jesus Christ is the exclusive path to salvation. “Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:6-7, NKJV). This fundamental tenet of Christianity emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus as the sole mediator between humanity and God. While other religions may offer various paths to spiritual fulfillment, Christianity asserts that salvation is found exclusively in Jesus Christ. The misconception that Christianity can be interchangeable with agnosticism or other religious beliefs is a significant soteriological concern. Soteriology, the study of salvation, underscores the essential nature of faith in Jesus Christ for redemption. In a world increasingly characterized by pluralism and secularism, the notion that all belief systems lead to the same ultimate truth poses a challenge to the core teachings of Christianity. Part 3 of this paper will delve deeper into the theological implications of Jesus as the exclusive means of salvation. However, it is essential to recognize the urgency of addressing misconceptions and affirming the truth of Christ's

redemptive work. Embracing the message of Jesus and following his commandments offer the surest pathway to salvation and eternal life.

Another notable implication of declining interest in Christianity is the potential shift in cultural and identity dynamics. For centuries, Christianity has been an integral part of West African cultures, influencing art, music, rituals, and traditions. A decrease in Christian adherence may lead to a disconnect between the younger generations and their cultural heritage. For generations, Christian beliefs and practices have permeated the very essence of West African cultures, infusing them with unique rhythms, vibrant art forms, and deeply rooted traditions. However, the dwindling interest in the faith among younger generations threatens to sever this vital connection, potentially leading to a cultural disconnect of staggering proportions. For example, in Nigeria, where Christianity has deeply influenced local cultures, the decline in Christian faith among youths is resulting in a gradual erosion of cultural practices that are intertwined with the Christian faith. (This is further explored in Part 2.) This potential disconnect is not merely a matter of lost traditions; it is a seismic shift in the very bedrock of identity. For many West Africans, Christianity provided a shared moral compass, a unifying element that transcended tribal lines and fostered a sense of belonging. Its decline risks leaving a void, where once stood a shared language of faith, a framework for navigating life's complexities.

Moreover, the consequential ramification of the dwindling adherence to Christianity is the erosion of moral values and the proliferation of social vices within West African societies. Christianity traditionally advocates for virtues such as love, compassion, and community-building, serving as a moral compass for individuals and communities. Without the grounding principles espoused by Christianity, there is a risk of societal fragmentation and a weakening of the bonds that hold communities together. Furthermore, the absence of Christian values may

contribute to a culture of indifference towards ethical conduct and accountability. An alarming example of this trend can be observed in the normalization of adultery within West African societies. In recent discussions with youths from Ghana, it was disheartening to note that fidelity in marriage was largely deemed unimportant by many. This normalization of infidelity underscores the erosion of traditional moral values and raises pertinent questions about the future trajectory of society. Where will this lead to?

As one can see, the decline of interest in Christianity among youths in West Africa is not merely a religious matter; it extends into the realms of culture, education, social cohesion, interfaith relations, and socio-political influence. The examples provided from various West African countries illustrate the multifaceted nature of this issue and its potential consequences. As this trend continues, it is essential to recognize the broader significance of this decline and work towards a nuanced understanding of its implications for the region's cultural and social fabric. Addressing this issue requires thoughtful engagement, and efforts to preserve the positive aspects of West African Christian heritage while respecting individual choices in matters of faith.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively investigate the factors contributing to the decline of Christianity among youths in West Africa. Mixed methods combine data collection and analysis methods to provide a more holistic understanding of the hermeneutical challenges and implications. After establishing the hermeneutical implications from these influences, the study works backwards from these implications to develop biblical exposition that serves as a foundation for a biblical refutation of the syncretistic challenges and the restoration of trust in the Bible.

Data Collection Methods

The researcher conducted the exploration based on both primary and secondary sources. Most of the primary sources included surveys, interviews, and literature reviews and the secondary sources included video interviews conducted, and online sources.

The researcher sent a survey to representatives of 30 youths (ages 21-35) from urban and rural areas across multiple West African countries. The survey consisted of closed-ended questions to gather quantitative data on religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs. The survey also included questions to assess the strength of religious identity and the influence of historical, cultural, and theological factors on religious views. The groups included people who were Christians and very active in ministry, people who had stopped going to church, people who were facing hardship and as a result apprehensive about life, and other people who favored the move from Christianity to ATR.

The researcher conducted in-person interviews with four active pastors in West Africa who were facing a hard time evangelizing to the youth. These semi-structured interviews provided a qualitative perspective on the experiences, perceptions, and narratives of young people regarding their religious beliefs and the factors influencing their adherence to Christianity. The open-ended questions allowed pastors to express their views in their own words.

The researcher also looked at relevant scholarly literature on the topic and the historical data, including colonial-era records, missionary reports, and indigenous religious texts through archival research. The research dived deeper into the historical context and examines the impact of colonization, oppression, and syncretism on religious beliefs in West Africa.

Survey and Interview Questions

Introduction and Background:

1. Can you provide some insights into your personal experiences and observations regarding the decline of interest in Christianity among Millennials and Gen Z in West Africa?

Historical Factors:

2. How do you perceive the influence of colonial history on the way biblical texts are interpreted in West Africa today?
3. Can you share examples or instances where you believe colonial history has left a lasting impact on religious beliefs and interpretations in West Africa?
4. In your opinion, how have historical experiences such as colonization contributed to a decline in interest in Christianity among the younger generations?

The Problem of Evil:

1. From your perspective, how does the problem of evil, particularly in the context of West Africa, influence the interpretation of biblical texts?
2. Can you elaborate on any theological debates or discussions you've encountered related to the problem of evil within Christian communities in West Africa?
3. How do you think the way Christianity addresses the problem of evil resonates with or differs from the traditional African worldview?

ATR Worldview:

1. To what extent do you believe the ATR worldview shapes the lens through which biblical texts are interpreted in West Africa?
2. Can you provide examples of ways in which ATR elements or beliefs are integrated or contrasted with Christian interpretations in West Africa?

3. How does the interaction between ATR and Christianity affect the religious views and practices of Millennials and Gen Z in West Africa?

Hermeneutical Questions:

1. How do you perceive the influence of historical colonization on the way biblical texts are interpreted in West Africa today?
2. In your opinion, how has the historical experience of colonization contributed to the way biblical hermeneutics is approached in West African communities?
3. To what extent do you believe the ATR worldview shapes the lens through which biblical texts are interpreted in West Africa?
4. Can you provide examples of ways in which elements or beliefs from ATR are integrated or contrasted with Christian interpretations in West Africa?

Decline in Interest in Christianity:

1. In your opinion, how does the convergence of historical, theological, and cultural factors influence the declining interest in Christianity among younger generations in West Africa?
2. Are there specific challenges or concerns raised by Millennials and Gen Z regarding Christianity that you've come across, and if so, what are they?
3. How might addressing these concerns stemming from historical, theological, and cultural factors potentially rekindle interest in Christianity among younger generations in West Africa?

Future Outlook:

1. What do you envision as potential solutions or strategies for addressing the decline in interest in Christianity among Millennials and Gen Z in West Africa?

2. How can religious leaders, educators, and communities effectively bridge the gap between historical, cultural, and theological perspectives to engage younger generations with Christianity?

Data Analysis

The data collection process involved gathering information via email correspondence, which was subsequently summarized to yield quantitative findings. Additionally, interview transcripts were meticulously recorded and analyzed to discern recurring themes, patterns, and narratives concerning religious beliefs and their influencing factors. The decline of Christianity and its underlying causes are extensively documented, with comprehensive support provided in the bibliography. This research employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors influencing the decline of Christianity among West African youth.

Themes emerged through an iterative process; wherein representative quotes were strategically employed to elucidate pivotal findings. This research employed a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data to delve deeper into the complex tapestry of religious beliefs and their evolution among West African youth.

1. Quantitative Insights:

- a. Using statistical software, the researcher analyzed the survey responses from 30 diverse participants (ages 21-35) across various West African countries. The closed-ended questions provided valuable data on religious affiliation, practices, and beliefs, offering a broad quantitative overview of the landscape.
- b. Recognizing the limitations of a small sample size, the research triangulated these quantitative findings with existing research on declining Christian

interest in the region. This robust body of academic literature, reflected in the bibliography, lent further weight and context to the quantitative analysis.

2. Qualitative Depths:

- a. To illuminate the lived experiences and narratives influencing faith, the researcher conducted four in-depth interviews with active pastors facing challenges engaging youth in their ministries. These semi-structured interviews provided rich qualitative data in the form of detailed transcripts.
- b. Through an iterative process of thematic coding, the researcher analyzed transcripts, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to religious beliefs and the factors shaping them. This process allowed for a move beyond statistics and a delve into the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants.

3. Bringing it Together

- a. Throughout the paper, the researcher leveraged representative quotes from both surveys and interviews. These firsthand voices not only lend authenticity to the research but also bring the identified themes and narratives to life for the reader.

For a more comprehensive understanding of the data and analysis, readers are encouraged to consult the addendums accompanying this research.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. This research prioritizes ethical integrity and ensures participant well-being by adhering to several key principles:

1. Informed Consent: Prior to participating, the researcher presented every individual with a detailed consent form outlining the research's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any point. This consent form were in clear and understandable format, allowing participants to make informed decisions about their involvement.

2. Voluntary Participation: Participation in the research was entirely voluntary. Individuals were free to decline or withdraw at any stage without facing any pressure or consequences. The researcher emphasized importance of voluntary participation throughout the process.

3. Confidentiality: To maintain participant privacy and ensure anonymity, the researcher removed all personal information from the data collection and analysis process. The researcher used unique identifiers, such as "Participant #1" or "Pastor #1," to protect their identities while allowing for data organization.

4. Data Security: The researcher stored all interview data securely in accordance with relevant data protection regulations and assured participants that their information would be handled with utmost respect and confidentiality.

5. Transparency and Openness: Researchers involved in the project-maintained transparency throughout the study and provided clear information about the research to participants, including its objectives, methodology, and anticipated timeline.

6. Potential Risks and Benefits: The consent form explicitly addressed any potential risks associated with participation, such as the possibility of discomfort or emotional distress while discussing sensitive topics. Additionally, the researcher communicated the potential benefits of

the research, such as contributing to a deeper understanding of the decline in Christian interest among West African youth.

7. Debriefing: After completing the survey or interview, the researcher offered participants the opportunity to ask questions, express any concerns, and receive additional information about the research.

By implementing these ethical considerations, this research fostered trust and respect for the participants while ensuring the validity and integrity of the research findings. This commitment to ethical principles strengthened the research and contributed to a more robust understanding of the complex issues investigated.

Chapter 2 – Background - Africa and Christianity

The analysis has thus far focused heavily on West Africa. However, to understand the hermeneutical challenges and address the external influences shaping how most young people interpret the biblical text, a broader examination of the continent may be beneficial. Africa, the second largest continent, pulsates with the rhythm of ancient mysteries and vibrant modernity. Its landscapes, stretching from the sun-scorched savannahs to the emerald rainforests, whisper tales of a continent that witnessed the dawn of humanity and nurtured the rise of diverse and sophisticated civilizations. While the exact location remains debated, archaeological evidence from across Africa reveals a rich insight of early human settlements. Tools, cave paintings, and fossilized remains paint a picture of societies adapting to diverse environments, shaping and being shaped by the continent's varied biomes.²⁹ From the hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari Desert to the sophisticated fishing communities along the Nile, Africa's early humans laid the foundation for the civilizations that would follow.

Around 3,000 BCE, along the fertile banks of the Nile, the magnificent civilization of Ancient Egypt bloomed. Pyramids pierced the sky, pharaohs ruled with divine authority, and complex hieroglyphs documented the lives of gods and mortals alike. Egypt's architectural marvels, scientific advancements, and intricate belief systems continue to captivate the world with their enduring legacy. Meanwhile, in the Sahel region, the enigmatic Nok culture thrived, leaving behind remarkable terracotta sculptures that hint at a complex social and religious life. Beyond the savannas, along the West African coast, the Kingdom of Kush built trade networks and erected towering pyramids, demonstrating the wealth and sophistication of its civilization.³⁰

²⁹ D. W. Phillipson, *African Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 12-16.

³⁰ C. Berheide and I.L. Fowler, "Metalworking in the Nok Culture: A Review of Current Research," *Journal of African Archaeology* 14, no. 3 (2016): 235-258.

The eastern coast of Africa saw the rise of Aksum, a powerful empire that controlled trade routes linking Africa to the Mediterranean and Indian worlds. With a unique script, its own coinage, and impressive architectural feats like the monolithic obelisks at Axum, Aksum left an indelible mark on the continent's history.³¹

While the legacies of Egypt, Kush, Nok, and Aksum often dominate narratives of ancient Africa, countless other civilizations and cultures flourished across the continent. From the matriarchal societies of West Africa to the powerful warrior kingdoms of southern Africa, each region developed its own unique traditions, artistic expressions, and political structures. The story of Africa's background, origin, and ancient civilizations is not simply a relic of the past. It is a testament to the enduring spirit of a continent that has constantly reinvented itself. The lessons learned from the rise and fall of empires, the adaptation and innovation of ancient societies, and the rich tapestry of diverse cultures remind all that Africa is not a monolith, but a vibrant mosaic of peoples, histories, and achievements.

Africa in Biblical History

Context is important in biblical hermeneutics and Africa forms part of the interpretive context and background of the scriptures. When discussing the Old Testament and its historical context, Africa is often overlooked despite its significant presence and influence on the narratives found within these ancient texts. Africa's role in Old Testament history is a fascinating and multifaceted one, encompassing geographical locations, individuals, and cultural influences that have left an indelible mark on the biblical narrative.

³¹ D. W. Phillipson, *The Rise of Aksum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34.

Ancient Egypt, one of the world's earliest and most powerful civilizations, played a central role in several Old Testament stories. Egypt, also known as Mizraim, is mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament, often in the context of the Israelites. This analysis will explore the various African connections to the formation of the Jewish people.

Abraham finds safety in Africa during a famine. “Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land” (Gen. 12:10, NKJV). According to the Book of Genesis in the Bible, Abraham, a pivotal figure in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, faced a famine in the land of Canaan (modern-day Israel and Palestine) and sought refuge in Egypt, which is located in northeastern Africa.³² Faced with the scarcity of food in Canaan, Abraham decided to go down to Egypt with his wife Sarah. Aware of Sarah's beauty and fearing for his own safety, Abraham asked Sarah to pretend to be his sister rather than his wife, anticipating that the Egyptians might kill him to take her as a wife. As a result, Sarah was taken into Pharaoh's palace, and Abraham was treated well because of her. However, God intervened to protect Sarah and Abraham. Before Pharaoh could take Sarah as his wife, God afflicted him and his household with plagues. Realizing the truth about Sarah's marital status, Pharaoh rebuked Abraham for deceiving him and sent them away, along with their possessions. This narrative not only highlights Abraham's resourcefulness in seeking refuge during times of hardship but also illustrates the interconnectedness of ancient Near Eastern and African societies.

Isaac was warned by God not to go to Egypt (see Gen. 26:1-2). During a period of famine in the land of Canaan, Isaac, like his father Abraham before him, faces the challenge of scarce

³² David Noel Freedman, *The Nine Commandments and Why They Matter: An Archaeological and Historical Approach* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 64.

resources. His initial instinct might have been to seek refuge in Egypt, as his father had done previously. However, God appears to Isaac and specifically instructs him not to go to Egypt but to remain in the land where He would lead him. This divine warning serves several purposes. Firstly, it emphasizes God's sovereignty and provision, assuring Isaac that He will take care of him even in times of hardship. Secondly, it underscores the importance of obedience to God's commands. Despite the allure of Egypt as a land of plenty, Isaac is called to trust in God's guidance and stay where He directs him. While God prevents Isaac from going to Egypt, the insight relevant for this paper is the perception that Egypt had the answers to famine but God asked Isaac to trust him.³³ This insight shows a consistent image of an economically strong[er] Egypt during that time.

Jacob and Joseph go to Egypt. One of the most well-known stories involving Egypt is the account of Joseph, the son of Jacob. Joseph, who is favored by his father and receives a special coat of many colors. This favoritism incites jealousy and resentment among Joseph's brothers, who plot to get rid of him. They seize Joseph and sell him as a slave to a passing caravan, who then take him to Egypt. In Egypt, Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph, leading to his imprisonment. However, his ability to interpret dreams catches the attention of Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. Impressed by Joseph's wisdom, Pharaoh appoints him as the second-in-command over all of Egypt, granting him authority to oversee the storage and distribution of food during the famine. Joseph's foresight and leadership ultimately save Egypt and the surrounding nations from starvation. Meanwhile, back in Canaan, Jacob and his other sons suffer from the famine and are compelled to travel to Egypt to buy grain. Unbeknownst to them, Joseph, who they had

³³ D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Interpreter: Essays on the Interpretation of Old Testament Texts* (T&T Clark, 2000), chap. 10: "Abraham's Deception and the Birth of Israel."

presumed dead, is now the powerful governor of Egypt.³⁴ When Joseph reveals his identity to his astonished brothers, they fear retribution for their past actions. However, Joseph forgives them, recognizing that their actions were part of God's greater plan. Joseph then invites his father Jacob and the rest of their family to settle in Egypt, where they are given land in the region of Goshen.

The phrase "Out of Egypt I called my son" is a significant biblical passage found in the Old Testament book of Hosea 11:1. While it may seem straightforward at first glance, this verse carries profound theological and historical implications, especially concerning the formation of Israel in Egypt and God's preservation of a people under His covenant. The imagery of God calling His "son" out of Egypt is a reference to the Exodus, the pivotal event in Israelite history when God delivered His people from slavery and led them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses.³⁵ This event marked the birth of the nation of Israel as a distinct people, chosen by God to be His treasured possession and to fulfill His purposes in the world. This dramatic event, recounted in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, centers on the Israelites' liberation from slavery and their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Egypt's role as the oppressor in this narrative underscores the significance of this African civilization in Old Testament history. Moses, the widely accepted author of the Torah had his education in Egypt and the audience of the Torah lived in Egypt for 400 years prior to their migration. Therefore, Egyptian motif and context are key, the researcher suggests, to fully understand the biblical text and it serves as a key ANE reference.

In addition to its role in Israelite history, in the New Testament, Egypt is primarily associated with the early life of Jesus and His family. Fleeing from King Herod's persecution,

³⁴ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 72.

³⁵ J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 112.

Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus find refuge in Egypt until it is safe to return to Israel (Matt. 2:13-15). This event fulfills the prophecy, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1), highlighting Jesus's connection to the history of Israel and His role as the fulfillment of God's promises.³⁶ Therefore, Egypt's presence in the Bible is far from incidental. It serves as a crucial plot device, a potent symbol, and a source of theological and cultural richness. Understanding its multifaceted role offers a deeper appreciation for the biblical narrative and its enduring influence on human history and belief.

Another prominent African representation in the Bible is Cush. Cush, a land mentioned numerous times throughout the Hebrew Bible, has captivated scholars for centuries.³⁷ Scholarly consensus places Cush south of Egypt, encompassing parts of modern-day Sudan and South Sudan. However, the exact boundaries and extent of Cush remain debated, with some arguing for a broader territory encompassing parts of Ethiopia. This complexity necessitates a nuanced approach, acknowledging the fluidity of ancient geographical designations.³⁸ This research accepts the broader territory view of Cush with Ethiopia as part. Here are some notable references.

The Queen of Sheba visits Solomon. According to the account in 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12, the Queen of Sheba, believed by some to be from the region of modern-day Ethiopia, visited King Solomon in Jerusalem. The story begins with the Queen of Sheba hearing about Solomon's wisdom and wealth, prompting her to undertake a long and arduous journey to

³⁶ R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 152-155.

³⁷ Thomas Adamo, *I Saw the Holy City: The Book of Zephaniah and Modern Ethiopia* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009), 24.

³⁸ D. Tandy, *Bantu Migrations: Language, History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 34-40. [This source provides a broad overview of the Cush region and its interactions with other cultures.].

visit him. Upon her arrival in Jerusalem, the queen is awestruck by the grandeur of Solomon's court and the wisdom with which he governs his kingdom. She tests Solomon with difficult questions, seeking to ascertain the extent of his wisdom, and is amazed by his insightful answers. Impressed by Solomon's wisdom and the magnificence of his kingdom, the Queen of Sheba offers him lavish gifts, including gold, spices, and precious stones.³⁹ In return, Solomon reciprocates by generously bestowing upon her all that her heart desires and granting her requests. This interaction highlights the far-reaching influence of the biblical world, with Africa serving as a point of connection.

Cush forms an alliance with Judah. The Assyrian king, Sennacherib, had launched a military campaign against various nations in the region, seeking to expand his empire and exert dominance over the Near East. As part of this campaign, Sennacherib's forces besieged and captured numerous cities in Judah, threatening the kingdom's existence. Faced with this imminent threat, King Hezekiah of Judah took diplomatic measures to secure assistance and support from neighboring nations. One of these alliances mentioned in 2 Kings 19:9 is with Ethiopia, also referred to as Cush in some translations of the Bible.⁴⁰ The biblical account of the alliance between Judah and Ethiopia serves as a reminder of the importance of diplomacy and alliances in ancient geopolitics. It highlights the strategic calculations made by rulers like King Hezekiah to navigate the complexities of international relations and safeguard their kingdoms in times of crisis.

³⁹ J. Gerrard, *A Woman of Legend: The Ethiopian Queen Sheba* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1996), 43.

⁴⁰ L. I. Levine, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures from the Collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 145.

Cush is praised for its riches. In Job 28:19, Cush is indeed praised for its riches, highlighting the wealth and prosperity associated with this ancient region. In this passage, the author uses imagery to describe the unparalleled value of wisdom, suggesting that even the finest treasures, such as the topaz from Cush, cannot rival its worth. The mention of Cush here indicates that it was known for its abundance of precious resources, including gemstones like topaz. Throughout the Bible, Cush is depicted as a land of great wealth and influence. In addition to its mineral resources, Cush was also known for its agricultural productivity and strategic location along trade routes, which contributed to its prosperity.

Cush is mentioned alongside Egypt as a recipient of God's judgement. In Amos 9:7, Cush is indeed mentioned alongside Egypt in the context of God's judgment. The verse is part of a prophecy delivered by the prophet Amos, addressing various nations and peoples in the ancient Near East. The specific reasons for God's judgment on Cush, as mentioned in Amos 9:7, are not provided in this verse alone. However, throughout the book of Amos, the prophet denounces various nations for their sins and injustices, including oppression, idolatry, and social inequality. This verse challenges the Israelites' sense of exceptionalism and reminds them that God's covenant and judgement extend beyond their particular nation.⁴¹ It emphasizes the universality of God's law and the potential consequences of disobedience for all peoples.

Lastly, the narrative of Moses marrying a Cushite provides an interesting outlook. The marriage of Moses to a Cushite woman is mentioned in the biblical book of Numbers 12:1. The identity of Moses' Cushite wife is a subject of speculation. Some scholars suggest that she was an ethnic Cushite from the region of Cush, which corresponds roughly to modern-day Sudan. Others propose that "Cushite" could also denote a woman of darker complexion or a foreigner,

⁴¹ J. L. McKenzie, *Amos: A Commentary* (Westar Institute for Ancient Biblical Studies, 2000), 264-265.

without necessarily indicating her specific ethnic origin.⁴² The marriage of Moses to a Cushite woman carries theological implications within the biblical narrative. It reflects themes of interracial marriage, cultural diversity, and inclusivity within the Israelite community. Some scholars interpret this episode as a demonstration of God's acceptance of individuals from different backgrounds and the breaking down of ethnic barriers.⁴³

As one can observe by now, Africa's presence in Old Testament biblical history is both significant and complex. It encompasses the prominence of ancient Egypt in various stories, the enigmatic Queen of Sheba, and the geographical connections that tie the biblical narratives to African landscapes. Overall, Africa's impact on biblical history highlights the interconnectedness of ancient civilizations and the diverse peoples and cultures that shaped the biblical narrative. From Egypt to Cush and beyond, Africa's influence is woven into the fabric of the Old Testament, provides enriching understanding of biblical history and the world in which these events unfolded. Recognizing Africa's role in Old Testament history is vital in understanding the biblical world and underscores the interconnectedness of cultures and civilizations across continents in ancient times.

Africa in the Early Church

The early church in Africa was a vibrant and diverse community that made significant contributions to the development of Christianity. Africa's participation in the early Church stands as a remarkable chapter in Christian history, characterized by both profound contributions and significant challenges. From its early encounters with Christianity in biblical times to its

⁴² J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 232.

⁴³ D. M. Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 71-72.

flourishing communities in the first few centuries AD, Africa played a pivotal role in shaping the development and spread of the Christian faith.

Africans were present at Pentecost. The presence of Africans at Pentecost, as recorded in the book of Acts in the New Testament, underscores the universality of the Christian message and the inclusive nature of the early Church. Pentecost, which marks the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus, is a foundational event in Christian history, often regarded as the birth of the Church.⁴⁴ The account in Acts 2:1-13 mentions the diverse crowd gathered in Jerusalem from various regions, including Africa. Among the regions mentioned, "Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene" specifically highlight the presence of Africans at Pentecost. Cyrene, located in present-day Libya, was a prominent city in antiquity with a sizable Jewish population, and it played a significant role in early Christian history.⁴⁵ The participation of Africans at Pentecost also highlights the early Church's commitment to welcoming people from diverse backgrounds into the Christian community. As the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem to regions like Africa, the presence of African believers at Pentecost foreshadowed the growth of Christianity on the African continent.

In Acts 8:26-40, one reads the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, a high-ranking official in the Ethiopian government who was converted to Christianity by Philip the Evangelist. This story is significant because it shows that Christianity was spreading to Africa as early as the 1st

⁴⁴ Andreas J. Kostenberger, *Acts*, Baker Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 120-122.

⁴⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, vol. 10, *Baker Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 78-79.

century AD.⁴⁶ The researcher also finds the story quite remarkable hermeneutically speaking, because the Spirit of God instructed Philip to explain the text to the eunuch. “Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’ So, Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘how can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him” (Acts 8:29-31, NKJV). The eunuch’s response and attitude are notable; it shows he was ready and teachable.

The first few centuries AD witnessed the establishment and growth of Christian communities across Africa, particularly in North Africa and the Nile Valley. Alexandria, Egypt, emerged as a prominent center of Christian scholarship and theological debate, producing influential theologians like Origen and Athanasius. The city's renowned catechetical school played a vital role in training Christian leaders and intellectuals. In North Africa, cities like Carthage became hubs of Christian activity, with Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine of Hippo among the prominent theologians who shaped Christian thought and practice.⁴⁷ The spread of Christianity was facilitated by urbanization, trade networks, and the presence of a diverse population receptive to new religious ideas.

African theologians made significant contributions to early Christian theology and doctrine. Augustine of Hippo, in particular, left an indelible mark on Christian thought with his writings on topics such as original sin, grace, and the nature of God. His works, including

⁴⁶ Christine Isenberg, "From Roman North Africa to Christian Nubia: The Evidence of Archaeology," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity in Africa*, ed. John Iliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82-113.

⁴⁷ D. Edwards, *Christianity in the Roman World: A Survey from the Origins to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116.

Confessions and *City of God*, continue to be influential in Christian theology.⁴⁸ Additionally, African Christians played a crucial role in theological controversies and debates that shaped the early Church. Figures like Tertullian and Cyprian engaged in theological disputes, such as the Donatist and Novatianist controversies, which tested the unity and orthodoxy of the Church. Tertullian was considered one of the most important figures in the early church, and he is known for his writings on Christian theology and apologetics.⁴⁹ Origen was another important African figure in the early church. He was a theologian, philosopher, and exegete who lived in the 3rd century AD. Cyprian was a bishop of Carthage who lived in the 3rd century AD. He was a key figure in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Africa's participation in the Early Church was not without challenges. Christians in Africa faced persecution from Roman authorities, as well as opposition from traditional religious institutions. The Roman persecutions, particularly under emperors like Decius and Diocletian, targeted Christian communities throughout the Roman Empire, including those in Africa. Moreover, theological controversies and divisions within the Church posed challenges to African Christians.

African theologians continue to shape theological dialogues to date. For example, African bishops released a joint statement to take a stance against the Pope's stance on same sex marriage blessing. "We, the African bishops, do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual unions or same-sex couples because, in our context, this would cause confusion and

⁴⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. John E. Rotelle (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 34.

⁴⁹ James R. Alexander, *Early Christian Thought* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 56.

would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities.”⁵⁰ This example is important to observe how African culture helps enforce a biblical conservative view.

These are just a few examples of the many African Christians who played a significant role in the early church. African Christians helped to spread the gospel, shape the Christian faith, and defended the church against its enemies. In conclusion, Africa's participation in the early church is a testament to its vibrant spiritual heritage, intellectual prowess, and unwavering faith. As the continent continues to engage with Christianity in the 21st century, its unique voice and diverse perspectives remain vital to the ongoing dialogue within the global Christian community.

Hermeneutical Challenges in Africa

The task of interpreting the Bible in Africa is fraught with a varied cultural, linguistic, and contextual complexities. Biblical hermeneutics, the art and science of interpreting the biblical texts, faces distinctive challenges in the African context. These challenges stem from Africa's incredible diversity of languages, cultures, religious traditions, and historical experiences. This inquiry explores the unique challenges encountered by biblical scholars, theologians, and the faithful in Africa as they seek to understand and apply the scriptures. The research draws upon a range of sources, both academic and theological, to illuminate the multifaceted nature of biblical hermeneutics in Africa.

First, the central challenge in African biblical hermeneutics is the continent's profound cultural diversity. Africa is home to over 2,000 languages and an even greater number of distinct cultures. Each of these cultures brings its own set of values, traditions, and worldviews to the

⁵⁰ "African Bishops, with Pope Francis' Agreement, Declare 'No Blessing for Homosexual Couples,'" *America Magazine*, January 11, 2024, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/256517/african-bishops-no-blessing-for-homosexual-couples-in-the-african-churches>.

reading of the Bible. In *Reading Other-wise*, Gerald O. West and his contributors emphasize the importance of socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities.⁵¹ They assert that understanding the Bible necessitates interpreting it through the lens of the cultural milieu of the readers, acknowledging that interpretations can diverge based on cultural perspectives. Moreover, they highlight the considerable challenge posed by linguistic diversity in Africa. While the Bible is frequently translated into the languages spoken by different African communities, these translations may not fully capture the nuanced meanings and subtleties inherent in the original texts. Thus, a more comprehensive approach to biblical interpretation is needed, one that takes into account both the cultural context and the intricacies of language, ensuring that the richness of the scriptures is fully appreciated and understood within diverse African communities.

Additionally, Justin S. Ukpog, in his work "African Christian Presence," highlights the importance of adequate biblical translation to convey the depth of biblical concepts accurately.⁵² Language, a crucial carrier of culture, shapes how Africans perceive and interpret biblical narratives. Ukpog's insights shed light on the intricate interplay between language, culture, and biblical interpretation in the African context. He argues that the richness of biblical truths can only be fully conveyed when translated into languages that resonate with African cultural nuances and worldview. Language serves as more than just a means of communication; it embodies the collective wisdom, traditions, and values of a people, shaping their perception of reality and spiritual understanding. Moreover, Ukpog highlights the importance of culturally

⁵¹ Gerald O. West, ed., *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with Their Local Communities* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004). 131-150.

⁵² Justin S. Ukpog, "African Christian Presence," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to African Christianity*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley Blackwell Publishing, 2019), 1-17.

sensitive translation methods that capture the essence and depth of biblical concepts without compromising their integrity. This entails not only linguistic accuracy but also a deep appreciation for the cultural context of the interpreters. By employing indigenous languages and idiomatic expressions, biblical translators can bridge the gap between the ancient biblical world and contemporary African realities, making the message of the gospel accessible and relevant to African audiences.

Secondly, African societies are marked by a rich diversity of religious traditions, including indigenous belief systems and syncretic faiths that blend elements of Christianity, Islam, and traditional practices. Syncretism, the blending of religious beliefs and practices, is prevalent in many parts of Africa where traditional African religions coexist with Christianity, Islam, and other faiths. This syncretic environment can influence how individuals interpret religious texts, leading to a fusion of Christian, Islamic, and indigenous beliefs. Hermeneutics in Africa must address syncretism by promoting a clear understanding of the distinctiveness of each religious tradition while fostering dialogue and mutual respect among adherents. This syncretic approach to spirituality can present hermeneutical challenges.

In his thought-provoking article titled "The African Hermeneutical Quest," Dapo Babalola delves into the intricate task of harmonizing traditional African practices with biblical teachings.⁵³ This challenge is especially pronounced when it comes to issues like ancestor veneration, which holds deep cultural significance but may conflict with orthodox Christian interpretations. Babalola's exploration shows the complexities faced by African communities striving to reconcile their cultural heritage with the tenets of Christianity. Ancestor veneration, rooted in reverence for departed relatives and the belief in their continued spiritual presence,

⁵³ Dapo Babalola, "The African Hermeneutical Quest: Reading the Bible in the African Context," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 2010. 138, 38-54.

occupies a central place in many African societies. However, this practice encounters theological tensions within the framework of Christianity, where the worship of God alone is emphasized, and prayers to deceased ancestors may be perceived as idolatrous or contrary to biblical teachings. In essence, Babalola's article serves as a compelling invitation to embark on a deeper exploration of the African hermeneutical quest. By addressing the complexities of reconciling cultural traditions with biblical teachings, it invites readers to engage in a nuanced dialogue that honors both the diversity of African cultures and the transformative power of the Christian gospel.

Thirdly, contextualization is a key concern in African biblical hermeneutics. African theologians strive to interpret the Bible in ways that address the specific socio-economic, political, and cultural issues facing African communities. The challenge lies in finding a balance between preserving the core biblical message and adapting it to the contemporary African context. Moreover, political and social issues intersect with biblical interpretations in Africa. In some cases, the Bible has been invoked to legitimize political actions or to support certain social norms. This raises the question of how biblical texts should be applied to issues like poverty, corruption, and conflicts. African theologians, like Wilson Mutebi Kyomya, who explored "The Challenge of African Biblical Hermeneutics" in Uganda, grapple with these questions.⁵⁴

Central to Kyomya's analysis is the recognition of the diverse cultural landscape of Africa and the necessity of developing a hermeneutical framework that takes into account the unique perspectives and experiences of African people. Drawing on his expertise as a scholar and theologian, Kyomya addresses the challenges faced by African biblical interpreters, particularly

⁵⁴ J. S. Ukpong, "New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 2 (2004): 26–46.

in navigating the tensions between traditional African worldviews and Western theological paradigms.⁵⁵ One of the key themes Kyomya explores is the concept of contextualization, or the process of interpreting biblical texts within the specific cultural and social realities of African communities. He examines how African biblical hermeneutics enrich understanding of scripture by incorporating indigenous languages, symbols, and oral traditions into the interpretive process.

Furthermore, Kyomya addresses the legacy of colonialism and its impact on African biblical interpretation. He acknowledges the influence of Western missionaries and theologians in shaping the theological landscape of Africa but also emphasizes the importance of reclaiming indigenous African perspectives and voices in biblical scholarship. Through a critical analysis of colonial-era attitudes towards African culture and religion, Kyomya calls for a decolonization of African biblical hermeneutics and a renewed commitment to African agency in interpreting the scriptures.⁵⁶

Granted, the list above is not conclusive and there are many other factors, but the paper will underscore the leading hermeneutical influences. Addressing these hermeneutical challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that incorporates contextual scholarship, cultural sensitivity, and theological reflection. African theologians and scholars play a crucial role in developing indigenous hermeneutical methods that empower African Christians to interpret scripture in ways that are relevant, transformative, and faithful to their diverse cultural contexts.

⁵⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity in Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 3-8.

⁵⁶ J. Kyomya, *Reading the Bible in Africa: Postcolonial Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 101.

Understanding the Decline of Interest in Christianity

While Part 2 dives deep into the specific hermeneutical influences shaping West African Christianity, this section examines broader observations beyond the paper's demographic focus, contributing to the decline in Christian interest. This trend poses significant questions about the future of Christianity in the region and its impact on West African societies.⁵⁷ Understanding the factors contributing to this decline requires a nuanced examination of social, cultural, and theological dynamics. This decrease coincides with the rise of Pentecostalism⁵⁸ and the growing Muslim population. In another survey, Ghana, once known as the "Gold Coast" for its fervent Christian missionary activity, is also experiencing a shift. A 2019 survey by the University of Ghana found that only 48% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 considered themselves "very religious."⁵⁹ The following are compelling observations that contributes to this issue.

Theological Diversification: The landscape of Christianity in West Africa is no longer monolithic. The continent has witnessed a proliferation of independent churches and Pentecostal movements, often emphasizing prosperity gospel teachings and charismatic leadership. While these groups attract many seeking spiritual fulfillment and material prosperity, their unorthodox doctrines and sometimes exploitative practices can alienate others, particularly those with a more conservative theological upbringing.

⁵⁷ "The Demise Of Christianity In West Africa Will Begin In Ghana," *Modern Ghana*, accessed March 18, 2024, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/880467/the-state-of-christianity-in-africaghana-today.html>.

⁵⁸ Pentecostalism in the context of Africa include the masses of "one-man churches" which are unregulated and at times abusive and not theologically sound. Therefore, the term attracts a lot of negativity than positive.

⁵⁹ Daniel Gyamera, "The Rise of Pentecostalism and Its Impact on Social Change in Ghana: A Critical Analysis," *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 23, no. 1 (February 2022): 32-58.

Socioeconomic Challenges: The rapid social and economic transformations sweeping West Africa present both opportunities and challenges for organized religion. Urbanization, increased access to education, and exposure to alternative ideologies all contribute to a questioning of traditional beliefs and practices. Moreover, the failure of some Christian institutions to address issues of poverty, inequality, and corruption has led to disillusionment among certain segments of the population.

Generational Disconnect: immersed in the digital deluge of diverse perspectives and alternative belief systems, these youth find traditional, top-down approaches to religious instruction ill-suited to their yearning for open dialogue and critical inquiry. Uchenna Akuchawu, in her study of Nigerian youth, highlights a deep desire for theological engagement beyond rote memorization and pronouncements, seeking instead personal relevance and contextualized interpretations of biblical teachings.⁶⁰ Akuchawu highlights the desire among Nigerian youth for a more relevant and contextualized interpretation of Christianity, one that addresses contemporary issues and resonates with their lived experiences. This aligns with Olufemi Taiwo's research, which underscores the growing preference for hermeneutics that resonate with contemporary realities, rather than dogmatic pronouncements from an unyielding pulpit.⁶¹ Taiwo discusses the challenges and opportunities presented by the contextualization of theology in Africa, emphasizing the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge and cultural practices into Christian discourse.

⁶⁰ Uchenna Akuchawu, "Nigerian Youth and the Reinterpretation of Christianity in the 21st Century," *Journal of Black Theology* 35, no. 2 (2023): 123-135.

⁶¹ Olufemi Taiwo, "Christianity and the Challenge of Contextual Theology in Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 28.4 (2022): 345-358

Deception and Abuse: The proliferation of one-man churches, which are often unregulated and lack accountability structures, has led to instances of abuse and manipulation. Leaders of these churches may exploit their followers for financial gain or engage in unethical practices under the guise of religion. These church leaders accuse individuals, often vulnerable members of society, of witchcraft or demonic possession. These accusations can lead to stigmatization, ostracization, and even physical harm against the accused. Some pressure their members to donate money or assets, often under the promise of divine blessings or miracles while the leaders live opulent lifestyles at the expense of their congregants, exploiting their faith for personal gain. Zaccheus examines the impact of the prosperity gospel on youth disillusionment in West Africa.⁶² Zaccheus argues that the prevalence of the prosperity gospel, emphasizing material wealth and success as markers of divine favor, alienates youth struggling with economic hardship. This creates disillusionment and disconnects faith from their daily realities.

Skepticism of western culture: the decline in Christianity in West Africa can indeed be attributed, in part, to skepticism towards westernized church culture and the perceived imposition of anti-biblical laws. Many people in West Africa view the adoption of Christianity and western cultural norms as intertwined, leading to suspicion and resistance. One aspect of this skepticism arises from concerns about cultural imperialism, where the influence of Western countries, including their religious and legal frameworks, is perceived as a form of exploitation. Westernized church culture, often seen as synonymous with certain denominations or missionary efforts, is sometimes viewed with skepticism or distrust. This skepticism can stem from a sense

⁶² David Zaccheus, "The Prosperity Gospel and the Disillusionment of Youth in West African Christianity," *African Journal of Theology* 56.3 (2022): 211-225.

of cultural pride and a desire to preserve indigenous traditions and values. Additionally, the acceptance of anti-biblical laws, such as those related to LGBT rights, creates tension within Christian communities in West Africa. Many Africans adhere to conservative interpretations of scripture that oppose homosexuality, viewing it as incompatible with their culture. When Western countries advocate for or enforce laws that contradict these beliefs, it leads to a sense of alienation or betrayal among African Christians.

In conclusion, the decline in Christian interest among West African youth presents a complex and multifaceted challenge, with the mixture of theological, socioeconomic, and cultural threads. While the future of Christianity in the region remains uncertain, understanding the factors driving this trend is crucial for fostering a vibrant and relevant faith that resonates with the next generation. From navigating the complexities of theological diversification to addressing concerns about socioeconomic inequalities and cultural imperialism, the path forward demands a nuanced approach that embraces dialogue, critical inquiry, and a commitment to social justice. Only through such a lens can Christianity hope to reclaim its place as a significant force in the lives of West African youth and contribute meaningfully to the region's future.

Having laid the groundwork for understanding the decline of religious interest among younger generations in West Africa through Part 1's exploration of research context and methodology, this section now delves into the core of the investigation: the specific hermeneutical influences shaping Christianity in the region. Titled "Hermeneutical Influences in West Africa," Part 2 examines these complex factors in greater detail. However, before tackling the first challenge, the text introduces the hermeneutical process itself, providing essential context for the subsequent analysis.

PART 2 – HERMENEUTICAL INFLUENCES IN WEST AFRICAN

Chapter 3 – The Hermeneutical Implication in Biblical Interpretation

This chapter looks at the implications of hermeneutics, alongside the traditional processes of observation, interpretation, and application. The objective is to argue that by also strongly considering hermeneutical implication, it provides a foundation for challenging the use of ATR, colonization, and the problem of evil as the primary lenses for interpreting the Bible in West Africa and ultimately underscores its significance in reevaluating prevailing interpretive paradigms in West African Christianity.

Overview

The art of biblical interpretation, also known as hermeneutics, has traditionally been understood as a three-fold process consisting of observation, interpretation, and application. This well-established framework has guided scholars and theologians in their endeavors to understand and apply the biblical text. Observation involves a careful examination of the biblical text, including its historical, cultural, and literary context. Interpretation seeks to uncover the meaning of the text, considering its original intent and message. Application involves applying the text's teachings to contemporary life. Building upon this foundation, this chapter proposes incorporating a fourth, complementary step: hermeneutical implication. "The interpreter's task is not simply to understand the meaning of the text in its original context, but also to discern its implications for the present-day context."⁶³ Osborne does not explicitly differentiate between "application" and "implications." However, he suggests that the interpreter's task is not only to

⁶³ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 24.

understand the meaning of the text in its original context but also to discern its implications for the present-day context. This paper defines implications as the logical consequences that follow from an interpretation of a biblical text. Hermeneutical implication does not necessarily focus on how the text applies today, rather, the effects of contemporary application. This additional layer is crucial as it can significantly impact the understanding and relevance of the biblical text.

The implication of biblical interpretation is particularly helpful in the context of ATR, colonization, and the problem of evil. By bearing in mind the interpretative implications of these issues, one will better understand the challenges that Christians in West Africa face and develop more effective responses. For instance, interpreting the Bible through the lens of West Africa's colonial history necessitates considering the impact on understanding God's sovereignty and justice. Likewise, interpreting the Bible through the problem of evil demands considering the implications for understanding God's love and goodness.⁶⁴ By considering the implications, one can be better equipped to interpret the Bible in a way that is both faithful to the text and relevant to the challenges that Christians face in West Africa.

Hermeneutical implication also makes interpreters responsible and accountable for the consequences of their teachings. The implications of interpretations can significantly affect individuals, communities, and society. This raises important questions about the interpreter's responsibility and accountability. In some religious communities, trust in leaders is high, and questioning authority can be viewed as sinful, making members, especially vulnerable individuals, susceptible to manipulation and abuse by unlearned or unscrupulous individuals

⁶⁴ Stephen T. Davis, *God and the Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2001; Reprinted 2011), 1-10.

claiming religious authority.⁶⁵ This makes members, especially vulnerable individuals, susceptible to manipulation and abuse by unlearned or unscrupulous individuals claiming religious authority. The phrase "Touch not the Lord's anointed" (Ps. 105:15) is sometimes misinterpreted and misapplied to shield leaders from accountability. While this verse emphasizes God's protection over his chosen ones, it does not exempt leaders from scrutiny or consequences for their actions, especially if they are harming others. Addressing the issue of abusive interpretation and manipulation of scripture requires a multifaceted approach involving education, accountability, support for victims, and a commitment to upholding ethical standards within religious communities.

In West Africa in particular, holding teachers of the Bible accountable for misinterpretation in West Africa can play a significant role in stopping systematic abuse in unregulated churches. A culture of accountability can lead to a more nuanced and informed understanding of scripture. By engaging in open dialogue and challenging harmful interpretations, communities can develop a healthier and more just theological framework. In the early church, teachers were held accountable and were sometimes profiled as false due to the teachings.

The threat of hermeneutical implication can be a powerful antidote to the dangers of uneducated preaching in West Africa. Knowing one will be held accountable for misinterpretations incentivizes pastors to truly prepare, challenging the ingrained "called, not educated" attitude. Many pastors in this context adhere to the belief that a divine calling supersedes the need for educational preparation, often citing examples like Peter, the uneducated

⁶⁵ Kenneth Feldman, "The Hermeneutics of Responsibility: Trust and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40, no. 1 (2012)

fisherman turned disciple. However, such thinking overlooks the rigorous three-year training period the disciples underwent under Jesus Christ's guidance. "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16, NKJV). This verse serves as a crucial reminder for West African pastors who rely on the "called, not educated" justification for neglecting formal theological preparation. Embracing hermeneutical implication is not about requiring worldly degrees, but about recognizing the responsibility that comes with shaping spiritual understanding. It is a call for dedication to learning, reflection, and a nuanced approach to scripture, ultimately protecting congregations from harmful misinterpretations and fostering a more responsible, educated pastorate.⁶⁶

In conclusion, incorporating hermeneutical implication into the interpretive process is not merely an academic exercise; it is a tool for promoting deeper understanding, fostering dialogue, and encouraging responsible application of biblical teachings in our lives and communities. It also emphasizes accountability for the outcomes of teachings, particularly relevant in contexts like West Africa, where unregulated churches may be vulnerable to misinterpretation and abuse. Considering the implications of interpretation better equips individuals to address complex issues such as colonization and the problem of evil. This approach ensures faithfulness to scripture while remaining relevant to contemporary challenges. Holding teachers of the Bible accountable for misinterpretation can serve as a powerful incentive for proper preparation and education, challenging harmful attitudes that prioritize divine calling over formal training. Ultimately, embracing hermeneutical implication fosters a more

⁶⁶ Paulo M. Fabiano, *Theological Education and Leadership in Africa* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), 12-15.

responsible, informed, and ethical approach to biblical interpretation, safeguarding congregations from harm and promoting a deeper understanding of scripture.

Methodology – Working Backwards

Rather than moving linearly from observation to application in the traditional approach, this methodology demonstrates how to incorporate hermeneutical implications as an additional complementary step. This approach enables interpreters to identify the potential implications and values present in the scripture while engaging in a holistic interpretation. By considering the logical consequences of one's interpretation, it sets the stage for a more informed and nuanced understanding of the text. This approach has precedence in the scriptures. For example, the Jews got angry at Jesus due to what his words implied. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one. Again, his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, many good works I have shown you from my Father. For which of those works do you stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, for a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God" (John 10:30-33, NKJV). In the interactions above, the Jews' actions were influenced by the implication drawn from the statement of Jesus and hence, they were ready to hold Jesus accountable for what they considered to be blaspheming.⁶⁷

Stepping back from the traditional interpretation process and employing the "working backward" methodology can be a powerful tool for West African preachers to combat unconscious biases and self-serving motivations. This approach, often used in product development, involves envisioning the desired outcome (in this case, a clear and accurate

⁶⁷ David P. Daniels, "The Johannine Jesus and Judaism," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Second Temple Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 182-200.

interpretation of scripture) and then working backwards to identify the necessary steps. By starting with the goal of an objective understanding, preachers can challenge their own predispositions and preconceived notions about the text. This is particularly relevant in West Africa, where many preachers approach scripture with the intention of either defending or attacking specific viewpoints. Such motivations, rooted in personal agendas rather than a genuine pursuit of truth, often lead to skewed and inaccurate interpretations.

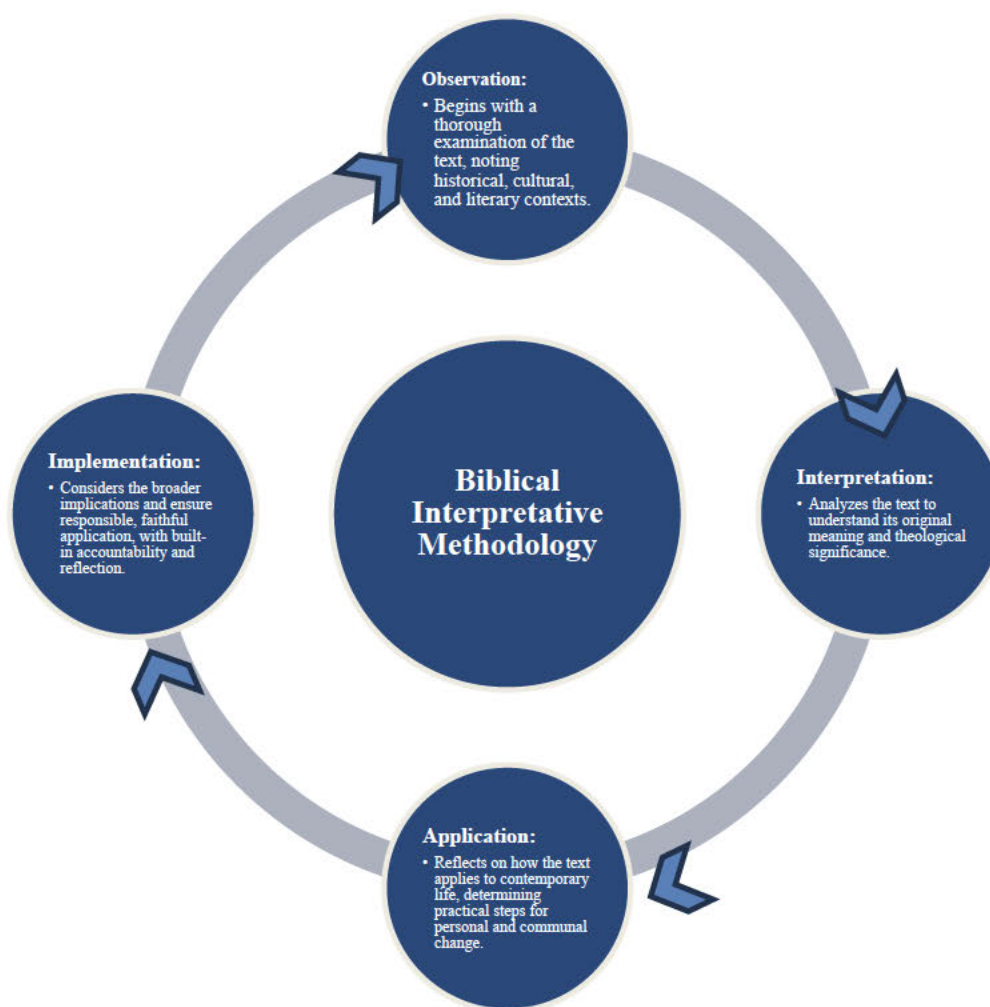


Figure i - Methodology Flywheel⁶⁸

⁶⁸ This flowchart illustrates a cyclical process where hermeneutical implication is integrated into the traditional biblical interpretation framework. It demonstrates how considering the potential implications of an interpretation can inform and refine the earlier stages of observation and interpretation, ensuring a deeper and more

The working backward method encourages critical self-reflection, prompting preachers to ask themselves: "What biases might one be bringing to this text? How can one ensure that their interpretation is not simply reinforcing their beliefs?" By consciously examining their motivations and assumptions, preachers can create a more neutral space for engaging with scripture, paving the way for a more faithful and nuanced understanding.⁶⁹ In essence, the working backward approach encourages West African preachers to shift their focus from "winning" theological arguments or proving their points to humbly seeking the true meaning of the text. This not only promotes intellectual honesty and theological integrity but also fosters a more open and inclusive religious environment where diverse perspectives can be heard and respected.

Merit and Purpose

At its core, hermeneutical implication introduces a dimension of critical thinking and depth to the interpretation of scripture. It prompts readers to move beyond the surface and explore the logical consequences of one's interpretations. By embracing hermeneutical implication, fostering educational environments, and promoting ethical interpretations, both interpreters and religious communities can work towards protecting vulnerable individuals, combatting harmful manipulation, and ultimately fulfilling their responsibility to interpret and apply the Bible with integrity and relevance. In this pursuit, one uncovers several compelling advantages that elevate the quality and depth of one's engagement with the Bible. Here are a few benefits to adding implications as part of the hermeneutical process.

nuanced understanding of the text. This continuous feedback loop allows for a dynamic and enriching engagement with scripture.

⁶⁹ John Dewey, *How We Think* (New York: D.C. Heath & Co., 1910), 168-172.

Identification of Interpretation: One of the key benefits of considering implication in biblical interpretation is its ability to identify potential problems with interpretations. Interpreters often focus on the immediate meaning of the text. However, by introducing the concept of implication, the analysis goes beyond the surface level and delves into the logical consequences of an interpretation. This process can act as a safeguard against flawed interpretations. When an interpretation leads to logical contradictions or absurdities within the text, or conflicts with established biblical principles, it serves as a warning sign. This critical self-assessment ensures that the interpreter's understanding aligns with the intended message of the text, ultimately enhancing the accuracy of biblical interpretations.

Understanding of the Big Picture: The second benefit of incorporating implication into hermeneutics is its ability to facilitate a broader understanding of the text. Interpreters often focus on individual verses or passages in isolation, leading to a fragmented comprehension of the Bible. Hermeneutical implication encourages consideration of the logical consequences of an interpretation within the larger biblical narrative. It prompts pondering how an interpretation contributes to the overall message. By examining how an understanding fits into the grander theological and narrative framework of the scriptures, a more comprehensive and holistic comprehension of the text's significance and relevance is achieved.

Practical Application: Lastly, the hermeneutical process of implication fosters the effective application of biblical teachings to daily life. By understanding the implications of their interpretations, readers can bridge the gap between the ancient biblical contexts and their contemporary personal and social situations. Discerning how interpretations connect to real-life scenarios and issues allows readers to extract practical insights and guidance from the text. This application-oriented approach empowers individuals to utilize biblical teachings in everyday life,

addressing personal challenges, ethical dilemmas, and societal concerns.⁷⁰ In essence, implication equips readers with the tools necessary to make the biblical message actionable and relevant within a modern context.

In summary, incorporating implication into the hermeneutical process leads to a more informed, nuanced, and faithful interpretation of the Bible. This approach helps identify potential issues with interpretations, understand the text's broader context, and apply its message more effectively. It is particularly valuable when considering African Traditional Religions (ATR), colonization, and the problem of evil. By initially considering the implications of interpretations on these issues, one gains a better understanding of the challenges faced by West African Christians and can develop more effective responses. This method fosters deeper understanding, enhances relevance, encourages critical thinking and dialogue, and promotes responsible interpretation. This comprehensive approach enriches engagement with any text, especially religious scriptures, where the stakes of interpretation are often high. By embracing the exploration of implications, readers can approach texts with greater discernment, responsibility, and a richer appreciation for their enduring significance.

Now, to evaluate the efficacy of this methodology within the context of hermeneutical influences in West Africa, it is essential to delve into pertinent issues, starting with the emergent call among the youth to reembrace the worship of African local gods. This trend reflects a significant shift in cultural and religious attitudes, challenging established norms and beliefs.⁷¹ This phenomenon can be analyzed through the lens of the working backward methodology. This

⁷⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 23-27.

⁷¹ Philip M. Peek, "Hermeneutics and the Re-Emergence of African Traditional Religions: A Critical Analysis," *Journal of Africana Religions* 8, no. 2 (2023): 123-148.

approach allows for the exploration of the underlying motivations driving the resurgence, the implications on traditional interpretations of scripture, and how prevailing hermeneutical approaches may hinder or facilitate a nuanced understanding of these changing dynamics. By employing this method, the interplay between cultural, religious, and interpretive factors shaping contemporary discourse in West Africa can be revealed, offering valuable insights.

Chapter 4 - The Case for Local African Gods

The plea to return to local African gods is a testament to the enduring power of tradition and the complexity of faith in West Africa. It challenges the dominance of Christianity, not merely as a religious alternative but as a profound reconnection with ancestral roots and a perceived source of spiritual potency. In a rapidly changing world, where globalization and modernity intersect with deep-seated cultural and spiritual beliefs, this movement represents a pivotal chapter in the ongoing narrative of faith and identity in West Africa.

For centuries, West Africa has been a predominantly Christian continent. However, in recent years, there has been a growing movement to return to traditional African religions, such as ancestral worship. The desire to reconnect with African culture and heritage, a belief that African gods are more potent than the God of the Bible, and a dissatisfaction with the Christian church are the driving force behind such movements. The appeal to return to ancestral worship is particularly strong among young people. For example, the majority of this sentiment is carried through a social media campaign under the name, Common Sense Family, which was originally started in Ghana with the goal of enlightening the youth to boycott Christianity. Many young West Africans feel that Christianity has been imposed on them by Western colonialists and that it is not a true reflection of African culture and values. They are also drawn to the power and vibrancy of African gods.

West Africa Traditional Worldview

The West African traditional worldview is a rich and complex system of beliefs and values that has a profound impact on the lives of many people in West Africa. It is a worldview that is deeply rooted in the natural world and the spiritual realms, and it emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things. The origin of the African traditional worldview is deeply rooted

in the diverse cultures and belief systems of the African continent, dating back thousands of years. It is a product of the collective experiences, rituals, customs, and spiritual practices of numerous ethnic groups and societies across Africa. The worldview belief systems encompassing animism, ancestor veneration, spirit worship, and divinatory practices. They vary greatly across different regions and ethnicities but share core themes of respect for nature, reverence for ancestors, and a sense of interconnectedness between the physical and spiritual realms. However, it is important to note that African traditional worldview is not static but has evolved over time through cultural exchange, adaptation, and syncretism with other belief systems, including Christianity and Islam. Understanding this worldview requires an exploration of its crucial elements:

God and Gods: One of the core features of the West African traditional worldview is the belief in a supreme being. This being is often referred to as Nyame (Asante - Ghana), Olodumare (Yoruba - Nigeria), or Chukwu (Igbo - Nigeria).⁷² However, the supreme being is not typically seen as directly involved in the world of humans. Instead, it is believed that the supreme being has created a hierarchy of lesser gods and spirits who are responsible for mediating between the divine and the human worlds. The Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin have a complex pantheon of gods known as the Orisha.⁷³ These gods govern various aspects of life, and their worship involves complicated rituals, dance, and music. God is also seen as transcendent, existing beyond the physical realm, this God is also often understood as immanent, actively influencing and interacting with the world through various intermediaries. These intermediaries can include

⁷² J. A. A. Ayode, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 1983), 15.

⁷³ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969), 20.

ancestral spirits, natural forces, and even certain animals or objects. African traditional religions often emphasize concepts of cosmic order, balance, and justice. While the high god may not directly intervene in human affairs, they are believed to uphold these principles, and humans have a responsibility to maintain them through righteous actions and adherence to traditional customs.

The Supernatural Worldview: In African traditional worldviews, the spiritual nature of the world is deeply ingrained and permeates every aspect of existence. Unlike some Western perspectives that may separate the physical and spiritual realms, African traditional beliefs emphasize the interconnectedness and interdependence of the material and spiritual dimensions of reality. It pulsates with a vibrant spiritual dimension, an unseen world intertwined with the visible one, forming a tapestry of interconnectedness and meaning. The belief that all things, from rocks and trees to animals and ancestors, possess a spirit animates this worldview. These spirits act as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual, influencing the course of events and shaping human experiences. This manifests in the veneration of various natural elements, ancestral rituals, and belief in spirit possession. The spiritual nature of the world in African traditional worldviews is characterized by a deep reverence for the interconnectedness of all life forms, the recognition of spiritual forces at work in the natural world, and the importance of maintaining harmony and balance in both the material and spiritual realms. These beliefs shape the daily lives, rituals, and ethical values of individuals and communities across the African continent, fostering a profound sense of connection to the divine and to one another.

Ancestral Worship: Another key item of the West African traditional worldview is the belief in the power of ancestors. Ancestors are believed to play an important role in the lives of their living descendants, and they are often invoked for guidance and protection. Ancestors are

also believed to be able to intercede on behalf of their living descendants with the gods and spirits. Ancestors are not merely deceased relatives; they are believed to occupy an intermediate realm, existing alongside the living, but with knowledge and power beyond the physical world. They watch over their descendants, offering guidance, protection, and even intervention when necessary. Ancestors embody the accumulated wisdom and values of the past. They uphold traditions, enforce social norms, and remind living generations of their responsibilities towards family and community. Disrespecting ancestors can invite misfortune, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a strong connection through rituals and offerings. In many West African cultures, including the Akan people of Ghana and the Yoruba people of Nigeria, the pouring of libations is a common form of ancestral worship.⁷⁴ During ceremonies, rituals, or family gatherings, a designated individual pours a liquid (typically water, alcohol, or palm wine) onto the ground while reciting prayers and invocations to honor ancestors. This act is believed to establish a connection between the living and the spirits of the deceased, seeking their guidance and blessings.

Spirituality of Nature: In the African traditional worldview, nature is not just a backdrop for human life; it is a vibrant, pulsating entity interwoven with the spiritual realm. Every mountain whisper ancestral wisdom, every river carries unseen forces, and every rustling leaf speaks of interconnectedness. Trees, rivers, mountains, and animals are believed to be house spirits or gods, and their protection is vital for community well-being. For instance, Oshun is revered as the goddess of rivers and love in Yoruba cosmology,⁷⁵ while Mami Wata is a widely venerated water spirit across the region. These gods serve as intermediaries between humans and

⁷⁴ Jacob K. Olupona, *African Traditional Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 120-121.

⁷⁵ Molefi Kete Asante, *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1987), 65-66.

the spiritual realm, and elaborate rituals are performed to honor and seek their favor. A universal life force, often called "*mana*," permeates the entire universe, flowing through living and non-living things, connecting all in a web of existence. Rituals and offerings aim to tap into this mana, ensuring harmony within the spiritual dimension, which in turn affects the well-being of the physical world. Many West African communities maintain sacred forests that are considered highly spiritual and off-limits to most human activities. These groves are dedicated to specific gods or spirits and serve as places of worship and communion with the natural world. For instance, the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove in Nigeria is dedicated to the Yoruba goddess Osun and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.⁷⁶

Rituals and Ceremonies: Rituals, ceremonies, and festivals are integral to the traditional worldview. West African traditional practices encompass countless rituals, ceremonies, and festivals that mark significant life events, agricultural cycles, and spiritual milestones. These are not mere spectacles or social gatherings; they are conduits, bridges between the physical and spiritual realms, connecting individuals, communities, and ancestors in a dynamic dance of life, death, and renewal. An illustrative example is the Durbar festival celebrated by the Hausa people, featuring vibrant displays of horsemanship, music, and dance. Initiation rites, such as the Dipo ceremony among the Krobo people in Ghana, represent another integral aspect of these practices, signifying the transition from adolescence to adulthood.⁷⁷ The specific forms and meanings of rituals and ceremonies vary greatly across the vast spectrum of African traditional religions. However, one unifying thread remains: the deep connection with the spiritual realm, the celebration of life's cycles, and the reinforcement of community bonds. These are not relics

⁷⁶ Jacob K. Olupona, *African Traditional Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 122-123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

of the past, but living practices that continue to shape the cultural expression and spiritual landscape of countless communities across Africa.

Birth, Purpose and Death: In the African traditional worldview, birth, purpose, and death are not merely biological events, each stage holds profound meaning, connecting individuals to ancestors, the divine, and the wider community. Birth is viewed as a sacred and transformative event in African traditional cultures, marking the entry of a new life into the world and the continuation of ancestral lineage. It is often accompanied by rituals, ceremonies, and communal celebrations that honor the newborn and welcome them into the community. Babies are seen as gifts from the divine and are believed to bring blessings, joy, and hope for the future. It is believed that each individual is believed to have a unique purpose or destiny bestowed upon them by the divine or ancestral spirits.⁷⁸ This purpose is often intertwined with one's familial lineage, community roles, and spiritual calling. Individuals are encouraged to discover and fulfill their purpose through self-reflection, spiritual guidance, and communal support. Death is also not viewed as an absolute ending, but a transition to another realm of existence. The deceased join the ancestors, becoming guardians and intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds.

In certain regions of the West African traditional worldview, it is believed that every birth carries a predetermined purpose. However, if an individual fails to fulfill their intended purpose in life, it is believed that they may be reincarnated to complete it in subsequent lifetimes. In more extreme cases, individuals who deviate significantly from their intended path and commit egregious sins may face consequences such as illness or deformity.⁷⁹ In some beliefs,

⁷⁸ Louise Meintjes, "Birthing Life and Lineage: Ancestral Continuity and the Sacred in Southern African Birth Rituals," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 43, no. 4 (2013): 473-500.

⁷⁹ Isoke Amad Diallo, "The Will of the Ancestors and the Choices We Make: Reincarnation and Moral Responsibility in Yoruba Thought," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 48, no. 1 (2020): 122-147.

they may even be reincarnated as plants or animals. It is important to note that these beliefs are not universal across West Africa. Different cultures and ethnicities within the region hold diverse perspectives on destiny, reincarnation, and the consequences of straying from one's purpose. However, this particular understanding offers a fascinating glimpse into the intricate relationship between purpose, morality, and the cycle of life and death in certain West African traditions.

Cosmology and Celestial Bodies: The belief systems often connect celestial bodies like the sun, moon, and stars to spiritual significance. The movements of these celestial bodies are interpreted as messages or signs from the spirit world. Many cultures employ divination practices that utilize celestial bodies to gain insights into the future, diagnose illnesses, or make important decisions. These practices might involve reading star patterns, interpreting the movements of planets, or casting oracles that tie fate to celestial cycles. For instance, the Dogon people of Mali have a cosmology involvedly linked to celestial bodies, particularly the star Sirius.⁸⁰ Their knowledge of astronomy and cosmology has fascinated scholars for its complexity and accuracy. The Sigi festival is a vital event that marks the culmination of a sixty-year cycle and includes masked performances, dance, and rituals.⁸¹ Exploring the cosmology and celestial bodies in African traditional worldviews reveals a profound connection between humanity and the cosmos. It is a worldview where the sky is not just a distant expanse, but a vibrant canvas pulsating with meaning, guidance, and stories that continue to guide and inspire countless communities across Africa. The heavens are often populated by a pantheon of sky gods, spirits, and mythical creatures. These entities might control weather, influence destinies, or act as intermediaries between the material and spiritual realms. Understanding these entities and their roles is crucial

⁸⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 80-81.

⁸¹ Walter van Beek, *Dogon: Secret Art of Mali* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 12-13.

for navigating the complexities of the cosmos and seeking their favor. For example, the Yoruba of Nigeria believe in the Orisha, divine gods associated with natural forces and phenomena, including the sun (Orunmila) and the moon (Yemoja).

Communalism: The worldview also places a strong emphasis on community and social harmony. Individuals are seen as part of a larger whole, and their actions are believed to have an impact on the entire community. As a result, there is a strong emphasis on cooperation and mutual respect. Communities collectively make decisions, and individuals maintain deep connections to them. This sense of community also gives the people identity and belonging. The sense of community is a powerful force that helps people to cope with adversity and to build strong and supportive relationships. This worldview emphasizes the deep interconnectedness of all beings. It posits a shared responsibility for mutual help and support.⁸² Ancestors are also believed to play an active role in the lives of the living, watching over and guiding them. Their wisdom and experiences become part of the communal memory, shaping traditions, values, and ethical frameworks that bind generations together. Maintaining social harmony is paramount in communal societies.⁸³ Elders, councils, and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms work to address conflicts and restore balance within the community. This emphasis on collective well-being encourages compromise, forgiveness, and peaceful coexistence.

Healing Practices: Traditional healers, known as herbalists or diviners, play a crucial role in diagnosing and treating physical and spiritual ailments. The worldview sees most sickness as a result of spiritual consequences. Traditional healers often work with spirits or ancestors to diagnose and treat illnesses. Rituals, prayers, and offerings are made to appease or seek guidance

⁸² Jacob K. Olupona, *African Traditional Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 126-127.

⁸³ John Mukum Mbaku "Community and Identity in Africa." *African Studies Review* 43, no. 2 (2000): 1-23

from the spiritual realm. These practices are especially common in societies that believe illness is caused by spiritual disturbances. Methods such as throwing cowrie shells, reading patterns in natural elements like water or fire, or consulting oracle systems are used to gain insight into the causes of illness. Once the cause is determined, appropriate remedies or rituals are prescribed.⁸⁴ While some of these practices may appear unconventional from a Western medical perspective, they play a significant role in the health and well-being of many communities in the region. It is important to note that traditional healing practices vary widely among different ethnic groups in West Africa, and the specific methods and beliefs can differ significantly from one community to another.

In summary, the WATR is a source of strength and resilience for many people in West Africa. It provides a framework for understanding the world, and it offers guidance on how to live a good and meaningful life. It is also a source of community and belonging, and it helps people to cope with adversity and to build strong and supportive relationships. While the West African traditional worldview has been challenged by the forces of globalization and modernization, it remains a powerful and vibrant force in the lives of many people in West Africa. It is a worldview that is deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of the region, and it continues to play an important role in shaping the values and beliefs of its people.

Comparing West African Traditional Religion (WATR) and Christianity

Comparing the WATR and Christianity reveals fascinating points of both convergence and divergence. It is important to remember that ATR is not a monolithic entity, encompassing diverse traditions across the continent. However, some general comparisons can be drawn:

⁸⁴ Paul Stoller, *Healing Performances: The Anthropology of Indigenous Medicine in Amazonia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23-24.

Concept of Deity: The concept of deity is a fundamental aspect shared between African Traditional Religions (ATR) and Christianity, both acknowledging the existence of a supreme being or beings responsible for the creation and governance of the universe. Despite variations in the nature and characteristics attributed to this divine entity, the fundamental notion of a higher power remains central to both belief systems.⁸⁵

In African traditional religions, particularly within the context of West Africa, there exists a belief in a pantheon of gods or spirits.⁸⁶ These entities are often associated with natural phenomena, ancestral spirits, or specific facets of human life. Revered as potent forces with authority over various aspects of existence, these gods play significant roles in the spiritual and practical lives of adherents. They are regarded as intermediaries between the earthly realm and the spiritual realm, capable of influencing events and bestowing blessings or curses.

Contrastingly, Christianity stands as a monotheistic faith, firmly professing belief in one singular, supreme God. This God is perceived as transcendent, omnipotent, and omnipresent, existing beyond the confines of time and space. Within Christian theology, this divine entity is understood as the creator of the universe and all life within it. Furthermore, Christianity espouses the Trinity, affirming the existence of one God in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. This triune nature of God reflects a complex understanding of divinity within the Christian tradition, emphasizing the interconnectedness and unity of the Godhead.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 12-14.

⁸⁶ Philip M. Peek, "Divination and the Construction of Personhood among the Bambara of Mali," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42, no. 4 (December 2012): 483-510.

⁸⁷ David Mantle, "The Trinity and Social Relations: Rethinking Relational Models of God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24, no. 1 (January 2022): 98-119.

Salvation and Redemption: WATR often emphasize concepts of balance, harmony, and spiritual well-being within the community. Salvation is often sought through rituals and ceremonies aimed at restoring equilibrium, addressing spiritual imbalances, and seeking divine intervention in times of need. Redemption is seen as a process of reconciliation with the ancestors, the spirits, and the cosmic forces that govern existence. Through offerings, prayers, and communal gatherings, individuals seek to align themselves with the spiritual forces that sustain life and ensure their place within the cosmic order.⁸⁸ In Christianity, salvation and redemption are primarily understood in terms of individual faith in Jesus Christ. According to Christian doctrine, Jesus Christ is believed to be the Son of God who came to earth, lived a sinless life, and died on the cross for the redemption of humanity's sins. Through his sacrificial death and resurrection, believers are offered the gift of salvation and eternal life. Redemption in Christianity is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ as the savior and acceptance of his atoning sacrifice. This personal relationship with Christ is central to the Christian understanding of salvation, as believers are called to repentance, faith, and obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ.⁸⁹

Mediation and Intermediaries: While both ATR and Christianity acknowledge the need for mediation, they diverge in their conceptualizations and practices. In ATR, mediation encompasses a multifaceted approach involving ancestral spirits, diviners, and ritual specialists. Ancestors serve as mediators between the living and the divine realm, facilitating communication, protection, and guidance for their descendants. Diviners, through oracles and spiritual consultations, act as intermediaries who interpret the will of the spirits and provide

⁸⁸ Isaac Omo Opadele, "The Centrality of Asa: Reconceptualizing Harmony, Social Order, and Moral Personhood in Yoruba Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 1 (2014): 127-150.

⁸⁹ N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 123-127.

insights into resolving existential dilemmas or communal conflicts. Ritual specialists conduct ceremonies and sacrifices to appease gods, fostering harmony between humans and the spiritual world.⁹⁰ Christianity, with its monotheistic doctrine, presents Jesus Christ as the ultimate mediator between humanity and God. Central to Christian theology is the belief that Jesus, through his sacrificial death and resurrection, reconciled humanity with the divine, bridging the gap caused by sin. In some Christian tradition, mediation involves prayer, sacraments, and the intercession of saints, wherein believers seek divine favor, forgiveness, and guidance through Christ and the communion of saints.

Afterlife Beliefs: A key characteristic of ATRs is the emphasis on ancestor veneration. Deceased ancestors are believed to reside in a spirit world, maintaining an active connection with the living. Their blessings and interventions are sought through rituals and offerings, ensuring community well-being and continuity.⁹¹ In contrast, Christianity generally sees death as a definitive transition, though commemoration of the deceased exists. While some Christian denominations view saints as intercessors, the emphasis lies on individual salvation through faith in God, rather than a direct ancestral link. Both ATRs and Christianity acknowledge a form of judgement after death. In ATRs, the nature of this judgement is often tied to one's adherence to moral principles and societal obligations during life. The rewards or punishments may manifest in the spirit world or influence future reincarnations. In Christianity, judgement usually involves a divine entity (God or Jesus) and leads to either eternal reward in heaven or punishment in hell. The basis for judgement often centers on faith and adherence to religious teachings.

⁹⁰ Jacob K. Olupona, "Concepts of the Divine in African Traditional Religions," *The Routledge Handbook of African Religions* (London: Routledge, 2017), 12-13.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of African Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42-45.

ATRs commonly embrace the concept of reincarnation, where the spirit of the deceased is reborn into another life, carrying lessons learned from previous lives. This cyclical view emphasizes continuous learning and development across lifetimes.⁹² Christianity, on the other hand, emphasizes the resurrection of the body, with believers receiving eternal life in a transformed physical form. This linear perspective focuses on a singular earthly life followed by a permanent afterlife state.

Morality and Ethics: Morality and ethics constitute fundamental aspects of human behavior, shaping individual conduct and societal norms across diverse cultural and religious landscapes. Moral principles in ATR are often transmitted through oral traditions, rituals, and communal practices, emphasizing virtues such as hospitality, reciprocity, and respect for elders and ancestors. Ethics in ATR are intrinsically tied to maintaining harmonious relationships within the community and with the natural world, guided by concepts like ubuntu (human interconnectedness) and the belief in the moral agency of spirits and ancestors.⁹³ Christianity, on the other hand, offers a distinct moral framework grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ and biblical scripture. Central to Christian ethics is the concept of love, encapsulated in the Golden Rule to "love your neighbor as yourself." Christian morality is delineated through the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, emphasizing virtues such as honesty, forgiveness, and selflessness. The Christian ethical perspective is guided by the belief in the inherent dignity of every individual as a creation of God and the imperative to strive for moral perfection modeled after Jesus Christ.

⁹² Philip M. H. Peek, "The Dark Side of the Ancestors: The Moral Discourse of Witchcraft in West Central Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 48, no. 4 (December 2018): 475-503.

⁹³ Musa Dube, "Normativity and the Ancestral Moral Order in African Traditional Religions," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 47, no. 1 (2019): 132-154.

While both ATR and Christianity espouse moral values and ethical principles, they manifest in distinct ways reflective of their respective cultural contexts and theological foundations. ATR emphasizes communal solidarity and the interconnectedness of humanity with the spiritual realm, fostering a collective responsibility for the well-being of the community and the environment.⁹⁴ In contrast, Christianity places a strong emphasis on individual moral accountability before God, with salvation contingent upon personal faith and adherence to divine commandments.

Syncretism and Cultural Adaptation: In some regions of West Africa, there has been a historical blending or syncretism between traditional African religions and Christianity, resulting in hybrid belief systems that incorporate elements of both traditions. This syncretism may manifest in the adoption of Christian rituals, symbols, or prayers alongside indigenous practices. African Traditional Religion, with its diverse pantheon of gods and rich oral traditions, readily incorporates elements from different cultures and belief systems. Syncretism in ATR often involves the assimilation of new gods, rituals, and beliefs into existing practices, fostering a dynamic and adaptive religious landscape. For example, the Yoruba religion in Nigeria has seamlessly integrated elements of Catholicism, resulting in practices such as veneration of saints alongside traditional gods like Ogun and Oshun.⁹⁵ Similarly, Christianity, as a global faith, has undergone extensive syncretism as it spread to diverse cultural contexts. In regions such as Latin America and Africa, Christian missionaries often incorporated indigenous beliefs and practices into their evangelization efforts, resulting in hybrid forms of worship and belief. For example,

⁹⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, second edition (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2009), 74.

⁹⁵ Ishau Lawal, *Yoruba Religion in the Diaspora: Continuity and Transformation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 12-14.

the veneration of Catholic saints in Latin America parallels pre-Christian practices of ancestor reverence, demonstrating a blending of religious traditions.⁹⁶

In summary, while both systems exhibit points of convergence, such as the acknowledgment of a supreme deity and the importance of moral principles, they also diverge significantly in their conceptualizations of mediation, afterlife beliefs, and ethical frameworks.

Shortfalls of the West African Traditional Religion (WATR)

The West African traditional worldview, steeped in rich cosmological narratives, vibrant rituals, and profound reverence for ancestors, has long guided generations through life's sophisticated paths. However, despite its resilience and significance in shaping the cultural identity of West African societies, this worldview faces numerous challenges in the modern era.

Gender Inequality and Harmful Practices: Despite its ancient heritage, ATR still exhibits tendencies that infringe upon women's rights. Practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) persist in some communities, despite recognition as harmful and inhumane. These rituals, rooted in traditional beliefs, subject women and girls to physical and psychological trauma, undermining their health and well-being.⁹⁷ This harmful practice, unfortunately present in some ATR communities, raises serious concerns about women's bodily autonomy and health. While traditionally viewed as a rite of passage or cultural preservation, it demonstrably violates human rights. Efforts within ATR communities, often led by women themselves, are working to educate, advocate, and ultimately eradicate FGM.

⁹⁶ Holger Gooren, "Christianization and Indigeneity in the Americas: Negotiating Religious Pluralities," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 54, no. 03 (August 2022): 523-544.

⁹⁷ Rosalind Shaw, "Female Genital Mutilation in Africa: Debating Culture and Rights," *African Studies Review* 63, no. 3 (December 2020): 127-149.

Influence of Local Gods and Priesthood: Shrines dedicated to local gods and their priests are often situated in remote and impoverished areas, where they wield significant influence over the lives of the local populace. These gods are believed to dictate life decisions, including marriage, livelihoods, and community affairs. Individuals may be prohibited from marrying or pursuing certain occupations due to perceived obligations to these gods, further perpetuating socio-economic marginalization and dependency. The practice of individuals marrying gods exists in some communities, often involving restrictions on social interaction.⁹⁸ However, judging this tradition solely through a Western lens can be misleading. Understanding the cultural context and the agency of individuals involved is crucial.

Abuse of Spiritual Power and Fearmongering: Some practitioners of ATR exploit the belief in spiritual forces to manipulate and control others, leading to instances of injustice and fear within communities. Corrupt priests may use curses and rituals to harm or intimidate individuals, perpetuating a climate of fear and mistrust. This abuse of spiritual power undermines the principles of justice and equality within traditional religious systems, eroding community cohesion and trust. The concept of curses and vengeful gods can undoubtedly instill fear and be misused for manipulation.⁹⁹ However, it is important to recognize that ATR emphasizes ethical conduct and consequences for wrongdoing, aiming to maintain social order and harmony.

Lack of Medical Expertise in Herbalism: While herbalists play a crucial role in traditional healing practices, their lack of medical expertise and standardized dosages can lead to unintended consequences and medical complications. In some cases, herbal remedies prescribed

⁹⁸ Bruce Brubaker. "African Religious Economics and the Moral Order of the Marketplace." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 4 (2011): 643-665.

⁹⁹ Igor Saveliev, "African Traditional Religions and Social Justice in a Globalized World," *Religion, State, and Society* 12, no. 1 (2023): 121-140

by practitioners may exacerbate health conditions or interact negatively with modern medical treatments.¹⁰⁰ Traditional medicine knowledge is valuable, but the lack of standardized dosages and potential for misuse of herbs by some practitioners raise concerns. Efforts to document traditional knowledge, integrate it with modern medical practices, and ensure responsible training of herbalists are crucial. This highlights the need for greater collaboration between traditional healers and modern healthcare professionals to ensure the safety and efficacy of alternative healing modalities.

Limitations on Social Mobility: In certain traditional societies, families may be designated as servants to the king, imposing restrictions and limitations on their members' potential and opportunities. For example, individuals from such families may be expected to serve the royal household for generations, with their lives revolving around the needs and whims of the monarchy. This social stratification perpetuates inequalities and denies individuals the freedom to pursue their own aspirations and interests.¹⁰¹ While slavery has been officially abolished, its historical impact and associated practices may linger in certain areas, affecting social mobility and perpetuating inequalities. Addressing these issues requires acknowledging the past and working towards restorative justice within ATR communities.

The Perceived Potency of African Gods

The sentiment that local gods in West Africa are more potent or immediate in their influence compared to the God of the Bible is a complex and multifaceted belief that reflects the

¹⁰⁰ Felicia Eberechukwu, and Ikpo, S. O. Moses, "Knowledge and Practice of Traditional Healers in the Management of Non-Communicable Diseases in Enugu State, Southeast Nigeria: A Public Health Concern," *Nigerian Journal of Pharmaceutical Research and Development* (NJPRD) 14, no. 1 (2023): 22-31.

¹⁰¹ Maryinez Lucas, "The Persistence of Hereditary Service in Contemporary Benin," *Africa* 83, no. 4 (2013): 521-543.

syncretic nature of spirituality in the region. This sentiment is often rooted in the deeply ingrained cultural and historical context of West African societies, where traditional religious beliefs coexist with, and sometimes overlap with, imported religious systems like Christianity and Islam. For years, the fabric of livelihood was oriented around the activities and actions of these local gods. Local gods, also known as gods, spirits, or divinities, are seen as powerful beings with influence over specific aspects of human existence, such as fertility, agriculture, weather, and ancestral protection.¹⁰² These gods are the agents of the supreme God to mediate and interact with humanity in the WATR view.

On the one hand, West Africans have a long tradition of worshiping local gods. They see these gods as more personal, accessible than the God of the Bible, and more responsive to the specific needs of the community.¹⁰³ For example, the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin have a complex pantheon of gods known as the Orisha. These gods govern various aspects of life, and their worship involves complicated rituals, dance, and music. Many Yoruba people believe that the Orisha are more powerful than the God of the Bible and that they can provide them with the things they need in life, such as wealth, health, and happiness.¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, Christianity is also a major religion in West Africa. Millions of West Africans identify as Christians, and they believe in the one true God of the Bible. Christians believe that the God of the Bible is the creator of the universe and that he is all-powerful and all-knowing. They also believe that the God of the Bible loves them and that he has a plan for their

¹⁰² M. Mbillah, "Understanding the Divinity of Ala in Igbo Traditional Religion," *Studia Africana: Rivista di Studi Africani* 33, no. 2 (December 2021): 171-189.

¹⁰³ Isoke Oyewole, "Gendered Work and the Supernatural in Yoruba Religion," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 4 (2010): 432

¹⁰⁴ Jacob K. Olupona, *African Traditional Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 122-123.

lives.¹⁰⁵ Some Christians in West Africa believe that the local gods are not real and that they are simply idols or false gods. They believe that the only true God is the God of the Bible. However, most Christians in West Africa believe that the local gods are real and that they are simply different manifestations of the one true God. They believe that the local gods can be intercessors on behalf of humans with the God of the Bible.¹⁰⁶

Ultimately, the sentiment that local gods in West Africa are more potent than the God of the Bible is a matter of personal belief. Some people believe that the local gods are more powerful, while others believe that the God of the Bible is more powerful.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the sentiment is backed by observable data. There are various examples of people who are placed under a curse and such people get sick, die, or go crazy. Many West Africans believe in the power of juju, which involves the use of charms, amulets, or talismans to harness supernatural forces. These objects are often used for protection, healing, or to harm enemies. Curses may be placed on these items, and they are believed to bring harm to those who cross the person who possesses the juju.¹⁰⁸ The main challenge is, where do these gods get their power from? The recent movement of African consciousness argues that these gods are part of the council of the supreme God, and they are given to the nations to serve them. Therefore, returning to these gods is in accordance with the creator's intent.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Adam Droogers, "Theological Innovation in African Christianity: Pentecostalism as a Case Study," *International Journal of Pentecostal Charismatic Theology* 23, no. 2 (June 2022): 192-210.

¹⁰⁶ Olufemi Taiwo, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15-16.

¹⁰⁷ Isoke Oyinola Akande, "African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and the Negotiation of Religious Authority in Yorubaland, Nigeria," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 48, no. 4 (December 2018): 473-498.

¹⁰⁸ Isaac A. Okeowo, "African Traditional Religion and Public Health in Nigeria: A Missiological Exploration" (PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2018), 124-127.

¹⁰⁹ S. O. Ilesanmi, "The Yoruba Concept of the Supreme Deity," *Religion* 16.2 (1986): 143-164.

Undoubtedly, this appeal to return to ancestral worship is a significant development in West Africa, but not a new one. It reflects the growing desire among Africans to assert their cultural identity and to free themselves from the legacy of Western colonialism. The movement is also a challenge to Christianity, which has been the dominant religion in West Africa for centuries. It is important to note that the return to ancestral worship is not a monolithic movement. There is a wide range of beliefs and practices within African traditional religions. Some people may choose to return to ancestral worship in a syncretic way, blending traditional beliefs and practices with Christianity.

Hermeneutical Influence (Interview Data)

The perceived power of local gods has a significant influence on how the Bible is interpreted in West Africa. For many Christians in the region, the Bible is not seen as a standalone text, but rather as part of a larger corpus of religious knowledge that includes traditional beliefs and practices.¹¹⁰ This means that when Christians in West Africa interpret the Bible, they often do so through the lens of their traditional worldview.

One way in which the perceived power of local gods influences the interpretation of the Bible is in the understanding of the nature of God. In many traditional West African religions, they do not see the divine as a single, transcendent being, but rather as a multiplicity of spiritual forces that inhabit the world around us. These forces can be both benevolent and malevolent, and they are often associated with specific natural phenomena or places.¹¹¹ This understanding of the

¹¹⁰ Isolde Hammond, *The Spirited Gospel: Pentecostalism and Possession in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 34-35.

¹¹¹ Birgit Meyer, "The Bible and African Traditional Religions: A Study of Reciprocal Influences," *The Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 3 (2002): 321-346.

divine is reflected in some West African interpretations of the Bible. For example, some Christians in the region believe that the God of the Bible is not the only God, but rather one among many gods and spirits. Others believe that the God of the Bible is the supreme being, but that he/she is coexistent with a host of lesser gods.¹¹²

Another way in which the perceived power of local gods influences the interpretation of the Bible is in the understanding of the relationship between humans and the divine. In many traditional West African religions, humans are seen as in a constant state of negotiation with the spirit world. This negotiation process often involves making sacrifices and offerings to the gods in order to seek their favor and avoid their wrath.¹¹³ This understanding of the relationship between humans and the divine is also reflected in some West African interpretations of the Bible. For example, some Christians in the region believe that they need to make sacrifices and offerings to God in order to receive his/her blessings.¹¹⁴ Others believe that they need to appease God in order to avoid his/her punishment.¹¹⁵ The perceived power of local gods also influences the interpretation of specific passages in the Bible. For example, some Christians in West Africa interpret the story of the serpent in the Garden of Eden as a cautionary tale about the dangers of disobeying the gods.¹¹⁶ Others interpret the story of Noah's Ark as evidence of God's power to destroy the world and start over.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Jacob K. Olupona, *African Traditional Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 123-124.

¹¹³ Ibid., 124-125.

¹¹⁴ Felicia E. Paracka, "The Bible and Daily Life in Contemporary Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 48, no. 4 (December 2018): 486-512.

¹¹⁵ Bernard Mbillah, *African Theology in Dialogue* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 98-102.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Allo Isichei, "The Sacred Realm: Religion as a Category of Experience in Igbo Culture," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 3 (November 2003): 340-368.

¹¹⁷ Philip M. H. Peek, "Proverbs, Chiefs, and Morality in African Religion," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 48, no. 1 (March 2020): 123-148.

Furthermore, the lack of concrete historical records or written texts detailing the origins of local gods in ATR contributes to a significant knowledge gap and complicates the understanding of these spiritual entities. Unlike organized religions with established scriptures and historical narratives, ATR relies primarily on oral traditions passed down through generations. As a result, the origins, characteristics, and significance of local gods may vary widely among different communities, often shrouded in mystery and speculation.¹¹⁸ This absence of definitive documentation creates a vacuum of knowledge, leaving room for interpretation and manipulation of religious beliefs and practices. In the absence of authoritative sources, individuals may rely on hearsay, folklore, or personal interpretations to understand the nature and significance of local gods. This ambiguity can lead to misconceptions, superstitions, and the proliferation of unfounded claims about the powers and attributes of these spiritual beings. In the absence of concrete evidence, people may conjure favorable explanations or romanticized narratives to justify the appeal of returning to traditional religious practices. This appeal to tradition can be particularly strong in times of social upheaval or cultural dislocation, as individuals seek stability and meaning in the face of uncertainty.¹¹⁹

During the survey, one enduring question regarding the nature of gods is whether humans should rely on them. If dependence is not the intended relationship, then what purpose do these gods serve? The questions raised reflect a common existential inquiry that confronts individuals across cultures and belief systems: the search for certainty and meaning in a world characterized by uncertainty. The inquiry centers on the existence and role of gods or spiritual entities in

¹¹⁸ Philip M. Peek, "The Ontology of Divination in West African Traditional Religions," *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 2 (2015): 193-220

¹¹⁹ Philip M. Peek, "Finding Religion in Everything: Towards a Phenomenology of Religious Multiplicity in Contemporary Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 48, no. 4 (December 2018): 488-512.

human life, probing the rationale behind dependence on these entities and their significance in the broader scheme of existence.

Firstly, the question of dependence on gods underscores a fundamental aspect of human spirituality: the desire for guidance, protection, and fulfillment beyond one's individual capabilities. Throughout history, humans have turned to various forms of religious belief and spiritual practice as a means of seeking solace, guidance, and transcendence in the face of life's challenges and mysteries. Dependence on gods or spiritual forces can provide individuals with a sense of security and purpose, offering a framework for understanding the complexities of existence and navigating the vicissitudes of life.

However, the inquiry also reflects a deeper skepticism and existential uncertainty inherent in the human condition. The question, "How does one really know if the gods are to be depended on?" speaks to the inherent ambiguity and subjectivity of religious belief. In a world characterized by diverse faith traditions, conflicting interpretations, and subjective experiences of the divine, certainty about the existence and nature of gods is often elusive. Moreover, the question, "Why do they exist?" delves into the philosophical and theological underpinnings of religious belief, probing the rationale behind the existence of gods or spiritual entities in human consciousness and cultural narratives.¹²⁰ While religious traditions offer various explanations for the existence of gods, ranging from creation myths to divine revelation, the ultimate question of why gods exist transcends empirical evidence and rational inquiry, delving into the realm of metaphysical speculation and existential reflection.

¹²⁰ Ayo Ishola, "The Concept of God in Traditional Yoruba Religion," *Studia Africana: Uppsala Journal of African Studies* 29, no. 2 (2020): 47-60.

Additionally, connected to the question, “Why do they exist?” shows the audience acceptances that these local gods are not just fiction, they are real and active. It is sometimes common for the Western cultural to neutralized the supernatural worldview, but most people from the continent know there is a supernatural worldview in which, demons, devils, principalities, etc. are real. As Paul said, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12, NKJV). This biblical passage resonates with many Africans who interpret it as confirmation of their own spiritual experiences and encounters with dark forces. It serves as a reminder that the struggle against evil transcends physical battles and requires spiritual discernment and fortitude.

It is important to recognize that the questions raised during the survey are not simply matters of intellectual curiosity but reflect deeper existential concerns and existential yearnings for meaning, purpose, and transcendence. Although absolute certainty may be elusive in matters of faith and spirituality, the human experience inherently involves a search for answers and a quest for understanding. This ongoing pursuit compels individuals to explore the mysteries of existence and grapple with the profound questions that define humanity.

Overall, the perceived power of local gods has a significant influence on how the Bible is interpreted in West Africa. For many Christians in the region, the Bible is not seen as a standalone text, but rather as part of a larger corpus of religious knowledge that includes traditional beliefs and practices. This means that when Christians in West Africa interpret the Bible, they often do so through the lens of their traditional worldview.

Chapter 5 - The History of Colonization and Oppression

Besides the interpretive influence of the perceived potency of the local gods, the history of colonization is another huge factor. The history of colonization and oppression in West Africa is a complex and challenging one, with far-reaching implications for the interpretation of the Bible. For centuries, the region was subjected to the brutality of European colonialism, which left a legacy of violence, poverty, and inequality. This legacy continues to shape the lives of West Africans today, and it is essential to understand it in order to interpret the Bible in a way that is sensitive to the experiences of those who have been oppressed.

The introduction of Christianity to Africa, particularly West Africa, indeed precedes the colonial period, as evidenced by historical and archaeological findings. Acts 2:5, a biblical passage, underscores the inclusive nature of Christianity, suggesting that its reach extended to diverse regions, including West Africa, even in the earliest days of the church. Despite the early presence of Christianity in Africa, its widespread adoption and institutionalization occurred primarily during the colonial era, driven by the activities of European missionaries.¹²¹ Colonial missionaries played a significant role in the propagation of Christianity in West Africa through various means.

Colonization, predominantly carried out by European powers during the 19th and early 20th centuries, reshaped the sociocultural, economic, and religious landscape of West Africa. It brought profound changes that reverberated through the generations, influencing not only political structures but also the religious beliefs and hermeneutical practices of the people. However, the colonial powers, in their quest for territorial expansion and economic gain,

¹²¹ Pamela Cressier. "Christianity in Medieval West Africa." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37, no. 3 (2007): 349-372.

imposed their culture, religion, and governance systems on indigenous African populations.¹²²

West Africa, rich in natural resources and strategic locations, became a battleground for European colonial rivalries. As a result, the region witnessed the partitioning of territories, forced labor, cultural subjugation, and the introduction of Christianity alongside indigenous belief systems.¹²³

One of the most important ways in which the history of colonization has influenced the interpretation of the Bible is through its association with Christianity. European missionaries played a key role in the colonization of West Africa, and they used the Bible to justify their actions. They taught that Europeans were superior to Africans and that Christianity was the only true religion.¹²⁴ This led to a widespread conversion to Christianity among West Africans, but it also created a complex relationship between the Bible and the history of colonization.

For many West Africans, the Bible is a symbol of oppression and exploitation. It is associated with the white missionaries who used it to justify their actions, and it is seen as a tool of European domination. This has led to a rejection of the Bible by some, while others have sought to re-interpret it in a way that is more relevant to their own experiences.¹²⁵

This chapter explores how the history of colonization and oppression in West Africa serves as a lens through which individuals might interpret the Bible. It sets the stage for an in-depth examination of the ways in which this historical context has impacted biblical

¹²² Felix Riefel, "The Hermeneutics of Conquest: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in West Africa," *Journal of African History* 64, no. 1 (2023): 1-22.

¹²³ Toyin Falola, *The History of Africa: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 113-115.

¹²⁴ John K. Thornton, *A History of West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 345-346.

¹²⁵ Ogbu Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story* (Pretoria, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2005), 18-34.

hermeneutics, engendering unique perspectives and challenges in the region's engagement with Christian scripture.

Colonial Missionaries:

As one can already see from the introduction, the history of colonial missionaries in West Africa is a controversial one. While some missionaries played a positive role in the region, bringing education, healthcare, and other essential services, others were complicit in the violence and oppression of European colonialism. The role of colonial missionaries in West Africa has been the subject of much debate in recent years. Some scholars have criticized missionaries for their role in promoting European colonialism and for their insensitivity to African culture.¹²⁶ Others have argued that missionaries played a positive role in the region, bringing education, healthcare, and other essential services.¹²⁷

Beyond the cultural insensitivity, the history of colonial missionaries in West Africa is plagued by greed and moral challenges. Overgeneralizing the negative action of some missionaries will not be fair, but it is indisputable that greed was a motivating factor for most colonial missionaries in West Africa. In his book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, argues that greed was a motivating factor for most colonial missionaries in Africa. He argues that missionaries were used by European colonial powers to exploit African resources and to justify colonialism.¹²⁸ They often sought to enrich themselves through their work, and they sometimes exploited the local people in

¹²⁶ Emmanuel Martey, *African Religion in the Age of Globalization: Inculturation and the Quest for Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 15-20.

¹²⁷ Andrew Porter, *Christian Missions in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 156-157.

¹²⁸ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 12-13.

order to do so. Unfair barter trade was a common practice during colonization. European colonizers often used their economic power to exploit the resources and people of colonized territories. They would often trade goods and services of inferior quality for valuable resources, such as gold, ivory, and slaves. This history continues to be part of the education system in West Africa, and it unconsciously shapes the understanding of many. In many African communities, people often discuss the unfairness of colonialism and the way in which colonial powers robbed their ancestors of their wealth.¹²⁹

Unfair barter trade had a number of negative consequences for colonized peoples. It led to the depletion of their resources, the exploitation of their labor, and the disruption of their economies. It also created a sense of dependency on the colonizers. In the 19th century, European colonizers were eager to obtain gold from West Africa. They traded with African merchants, offering them goods such as cloth, tools, and firearms. However, the value of the goods that the colonizers offered was much lower than the value of the gold that they received. For example, a European colonizer might trade a few yards of cloth for a significant amount of gold or give a stick of cigarette for gold. Now, just to set the context of these activities in recent times, many forest reserves, mountains, and river bodies that were deemed sacred have been destroyed by mining.¹³⁰ One can see why these actions can invoke anger towards some colonial activities, yet some colonial missionaries used the bible to justify these activities. For instance, some missionaries argued that it was acceptable to displace indigenous peoples from their land in

¹²⁹ Stanley J. Alpern, "Unequal Exchange and the Colonial Economy of the Americas," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44, no. 4 (2014): 621-644.

¹³⁰ James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, "Miscasting History: Language and Ideology in the Forest-Savanna Debate," *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 235-268.

order to build churches and schools. They cited passages from the Bible, such as Genesis 9:1, which gives humans dominion over the earth.¹³¹

While European colonization of Africa undeniably introduced some developments in infrastructure and technology, the true cost of these advancements remains a fiercely debated topic. The legacy of exploitation often overshadows the benefits, leaving deep scars on many communities. Take, for instance, the Ghanaian gold mining towns of Obuasi and Tarkwa. Despite boasting vast mineral wealth, these towns remain strikingly underdeveloped, lacking proper roads, clean water, and basic amenities. Such stark disparities fuel frustration and resentment among local youth, who see little benefit from the resources extracted from their own land.¹³² This complex equation, where progress collides with exploitation, demands honest conversations and nuanced understanding to chart a path towards genuine development that empowers local communities and respects their cultural heritage. This example shows how many youths relive the exploitations of the colonial periods now.

Exploitation and Slavery

Human exploitation and slavery during colonization is a long and painful one. European colonizers exploited the resources and people of colonized territories for centuries, and slavery was a key part of this exploitation. West Africa was a significant source of enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade. Millions were forcibly taken from their homes, enduring horrific conditions during the Middle Passage, the journey across the Atlantic Ocean. Families

¹³¹ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 105.

¹³² David Hughes, "A Curse or a Blessing? Mining and Development in Ghana," *African Affairs* 118, no. 473 (2019): 563-586.

were torn apart, cultures were disrupted, and lives were destroyed in the pursuit of profit and selfish gains.¹³³

Slavery was used in a number of different ways during colonization. In some cases, slaves were used to work on plantations and farms. In other cases, they were used to mine gold and other valuable resources. And in still other cases, they were used as domestic servants. Slaves were often treated very cruelly. They were forced to work long hours in harsh conditions, and they were often subjected to physical and emotional abuse. They were also denied basic human rights, such as the right to education and the right to freedom of movement. It caused widespread suffering and death, and it disrupted traditional cultures and societies. It also created a legacy of racism and inequality that continues to this day.

The Elmina Castle, situated on the coast of Ghana, is an iconic emblem of the transatlantic slave trade. Built by the Portuguese in 1482, it predates many other European fortifications in the region, making it one of the earliest symbols of European colonialism in West Africa. Inside the castle, there are a number of dark and cramped dungeons. These dungeons were where slaves were held before they were transported to the Americas. The slaves were often packed into the dungeons like sardines, and they were given very little food or water. Many slaves died in the dungeons, and their bodies were simply thrown into the moat. Perhaps the most haunting feature of the Elmina Castle is the "Door of No Return."¹³⁴ This narrow gateway led enslaved Africans from the dungeons to waiting ships bound for the Americas. It symbolizes the final departure from their homeland, often never to return. The door serves as a

¹³³ Joseph C. Miller, "The Significance of West Africa in the Transatlantic Slave Trade," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2020): 102-139.

¹³⁴ Rowena Lawson, "Memories of the Slave Trade: Rituals of Commemoration at Elmina Castle, Ghana," *History in Africa* 33, no. 2 (2006): 372-373.

chilling reminder of the countless lives that were lost to the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. While millions were sent from the land of their nativity to never return, the vessels that carried these slaves across the cold seas, were the same vessels that brought colonial missionaries.¹³⁵

White Man's Religion Tag

Considering the history of colonialism and the role of missionaries in spreading Christianity in Africa, it is understandable that Africans may bring different perspectives and interpretations to the Bible than people from other cultures. In West Africa, the perception of Christianity as a "White Man's Religion" has deep historical roots, largely stemming from the legacy of colonialism and the activities of European missionaries. European nations, such as Britain, France, Portugal, and Germany, established colonies and embarked on a "civilizing mission." Part of this mission was the propagation of Christianity as a means of 'enlightening' and 'civilizing' the indigenous populations.¹³⁶ One of the primary ways missionaries aimed to achieve their objectives was through religious conversion. Missionaries introduced Christianity, built churches, and established schools where Western values and Christianity were promoted. While their intentions may have been to save souls, the line between religious conversion and cultural imposition was often blurred. One can argue that colonial missionaries had a noble purpose and propagating the gospel was the right mandate, however, there were disturbing teachings that came along to affirm white superiority and supremacy.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ John K. Thornton, *A History of West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 345-346.

¹³⁶ Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *A History of African Christianity* (London: Longman, 2007), explores the complex relationship between colonialism and the spread of Christianity in Africa.

¹³⁷ John K. Thornton, *A History of West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 345-346

Missionary work was closely linked to the interests of colonial powers and theological interpretations sometimes aligned with the colonial agenda. For example, concepts like the "Curse of Ham" were used to justify the enslavement and subjugation of African populations. The "Curse of Ham" is found in Genesis 9:18-29. After the Great Flood, Noah planted a vineyard, became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. Ham, one of Noah's sons, saw his father's nakedness and informed his brothers, Shem and Japheth, who covered Noah without looking at him. When Noah awoke, he cursed Canaan, Ham's son, condemning him to be a servant of servants to his brothers. The misinterpretation of the "Curse of Ham" can be traced back to early Christian theologians, like Augustine of Hippo, and later European scholars, like, Bartolomé de las Casas. They wrongly identified Ham as the ancestor of African peoples and Canaan as the progenitor of African nations. This misinterpretation became a theological pretext for the subjugation of Africans. Such teaching created a sense of inferiority among many Africans, and it made them feel like Christianity was not their own religion; conversely, it affirmed a sense of superiority for the white colonial missionaries, giving in to the view of Christianity for the Whites.¹³⁸ However, using the "Curse of Ham" to justify the subjugation of Africans constitutes a gross misinterpretation of this passage, rooted in a number of false assumptions. (This is further explained in part 3.)

The perception of Christianity as a "White Man's Religion" has had a negative impact on the spread of Christianity in West Africa. It has created a sense of resistance among many Africans, and it has made them less likely to embrace Christianity. Christianity's association with colonialism and the activities of missionaries has contributed to the perception of it being a

¹³⁸ James C. Davis, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000), 23-24.

"White Man's Religion" in West Africa. While this perception is rooted in historical experiences, it is important to recognize that the contemporary Christian landscape in West Africa is diverse and multifaceted. However, the association of Christianity with colonization has left a lasting impact on how some view the religion. The phrase "White Man's Religion" persists in popular parlance, even though many West Africans are devout Christians today.

Recognizing this historical misuse is essential for understanding the deep-seated racism that has influenced attitudes towards Africans and African culture. It serves as a reminder of the need for critical and responsible biblical interpretation to counter harmful ideologies rooted in the misreading of scripture.

Distinguishing Missionaries in Colonial West Africa

It is important to move beyond a monolithic view of "colonial missionaries" operating within a homogenous West African context. While undoubtedly, some missionaries arrived during the colonial era, conflating them all ignores the crucial distinction: not all colonial figures were missionaries, and not all missionaries actively participated in colonial agendas. This distinction matters because it prevents generalizations that overshadow the work of individuals dedicated to genuine religious and social improvement.¹³⁹ It is important to acknowledge the spectrum of motivations and actions present within both colonial structures and missionary endeavors.

Indeed, the colonial period saw a complex interplay of various actors, including missionaries, colonial administrators, traders, and settlers. While missionaries were often

¹³⁹ One recent study argues that a more nuanced understanding is needed regarding "colonial missionaries" in West Africa. While some missionaries did operate during the colonial era, others predated it, and not all missionaries actively participated in colonial agendas. This distinction is crucial because it avoids generalizations that obscure the efforts of those committed to religious and social improvement (Meyer 2018).

affiliated with colonial endeavors and collaborated closely with colonial authorities, it is essential to recognize that they operated within distinct spheres and pursued different objectives.

On one hand, missionaries were driven by religious convictions and a genuine desire to spread the Christian faith, provide humanitarian assistance, and uplift indigenous communities through education, healthcare, and social reforms. Many missionaries made significant sacrifices, dedicating their lives to serving others and advocating for social justice and human rights.¹⁴⁰ Their contributions to education, literacy, healthcare, and the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures have left a lasting legacy in many parts of the world, including Africa.

On the other hand, not all colonial personnel shared the altruistic motives of missionaries. Some individuals, including colonial administrators, traders, and settlers, were motivated primarily by economic interests, political power, and the pursuit of imperial agendas. Their actions often prioritized the exploitation of natural resources, the imposition of Western values and norms, and the consolidation of colonial rule, sometimes at the expense of indigenous rights, cultures, and livelihoods.

By acknowledging the diversity of actors and motivations during the colonial era, one can avoid oversimplifications and stereotyping while also holding accountable those responsible for injustices and abuses. It is essential to recognize and celebrate the positive contributions of sincere missionaries while also critically examining the broader impacts and legacies of colonialism on indigenous peoples and societies. Through a balanced and nuanced approach, one can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of colonial history and its enduring

¹⁴⁰ Kristin Kobie, "Belonging on Foreign Soil," *A History of Catholic Missions in Africa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 3-14.

implications for contemporary global dynamics. However, when most youths react to colonial history in relation to missionaries today, they are mostly lumped together as one.

Hermeneutical Influence (Interview Data)

For many West Africans, the Bible is a symbol of oppression and exploitation. It is associated with the white missionaries who used it to justify their actions, and it is seen as a tool of European domination. Missionaries and colonial authorities often emphasized certain aspects of the Bible while downplaying others. They focused on passages that emphasized submission to authority and obedience, which served the interests of colonial rule. This selective emphasis has influenced how some West Africans interpret the Bible today, with a tendency to focus on passages that emphasize hierarchy and obedience. This has led to a rejection of the Bible by some, while others have sought to re-interpret it in a way that is more relevant to their own experiences.

Four recurring themes, categorized under participants in this study provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between colonial history, biblical interpretation, and religious beliefs in West Africa.

Participant #1, a former Christian youth, offers a poignant reminder of the enduring impact of colonial history on biblical interpretation. Their personal journey away from faith highlights how the association of Christianity with European colonialism can foster feelings of alienation and resistance. They perceive the historical link between Christian missions and colonial powers as a deliberate tool of oppression and cultural domination, effectively framing the religion as a "White Man's Religion." This perception, unfortunately, is not uncommon. Examining the historical record reveals numerous instances where missionaries, often backed by colonial authorities, utilized their positions to undermine and suppress indigenous belief systems,

creating a lasting sense of resentment and distrust. Participant #1's experience underscores the vital need for deeper reflection on how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary interpretations of the Bible, particularly within communities historically affected. Ignoring these complex layers of history risks replicating harmful narratives and alienating potential adherents whose lived experiences contradict sanitized versions of the past.

The second participant's viewpoint raises a crucial yet sensitive aspect of Christianity's presence in West Africa: the enduring impact of colonial history on biblical interpretation. Their perception of the Bible as a tool for manipulation and subjugation reflects the deep wounds colonialism inflicted on the region's religious landscape. This sentiment resonates with the historical reality of missionaries often aligning with colonial powers, potentially using scripture to justify their actions and solidify their dominance. This participant recently came across a work that shows how European colonizers often cited passages like Genesis 9:25-27, which depicts the curse of Ham, as biblical justification for the subjugation and enslavement of African peoples; and that was enough proof for him that the Bible was used as a tool to exploit.

The statement by participant #3, a Christian youth advocating for African Traditional Religions (ATR), highlights the complex interplay between colonialism and religious identity in West Africa. They suggest that historical experiences, particularly colonization, have fostered a belief that the Bible's teachings do not fully resonate with West African contexts. This perspective points to the underlying tension between externally introduced religious traditions and deep-rooted indigenous belief systems. Consider, for example, the Yoruba religion of Nigeria, with its rich pantheon of gods and emphasis on ancestor veneration. Colonial missionaries often interpreted these practices as incompatible with biblical teachings, leading to conflict and attempts to suppress ATR. However, many West Africans saw parallels between

their gods and biblical figures, leading to reinterpretations and syncretism, where elements of both traditions intertwined. Participant #3's view reflects this ongoing negotiation between imported doctrines and existing belief systems, suggesting that the Bible's application cannot be divorced from the historical and cultural realities of West Africa.

Likewise, participant #4, a pastor, grapples with the challenge of retaining the youth in the Christian faith. The participant recognizes that the perception of the Bible as a "White Man's Book" is a significant factor contributing to the decline in interest in Christianity among younger generations. The disconnect between younger generations and traditional Christianity is a prevalent concern, as exemplified by participant #4. They recognize a critical barrier: the perception of the Bible as a "White Man's Book." This perception stems from various historical and cultural factors. During colonialism, some colonial missionaries¹⁴¹ used the Bible as a tool for cultural assimilation and control, associating Christianity with the colonizers and distancing it from local traditions. This association can breed resentment and disinterest among young adults seeking their own cultural identity and religious expression.

The four participants in this study provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between colonial history and the way that the Bible is interpreted in West Africa. Colonialism has had a lasting impact on religious beliefs and practices in the region, and it is important to address the perception that Christianity is a foreign religion. To engage and retain young people, it is essential to acknowledge the historical context and to promote a more inclusive and culturally relevant approach to Christianity in West Africa.

¹⁴¹ Musa W. Dube, "African Traditional Religions and Christianity," in *The SAGE Handbook of Modern African Religions* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009), 14.

Observation, The Local Gods are to Be Blamed?

Before examining another hermeneutical challenge in West Africa, it is crucial to address the perceived power of local gods in the context of historical hardship. One might question, if these gods are indeed potent and desired by some for a "return," why did they seemingly remain inactive during the colonial era, a period marked by exploitation, enslavement, and immense suffering? While local gods are often understood to influence individual lives through blessings, restrictions, and even misfortunes, their perceived silence during colonialism raises significant questions about their ability to protect communities from external threats.¹⁴² For example, the Yoruba deity Ogun, associated with iron, war, and protection, holds a prominent position in several West African societies. Yet, historical accounts document the Yoruba kingdoms facing various external conflicts and subjugation, including the rise of the Oyo Empire and the eventual colonization by European powers. This seeming inaction by a god revered for protection creates a cognitive dissonance for some practitioners, leading to questions about the true extent of these gods' power and influence.

It is fair to also acknowledge that interpreting this "inaction" solely through a Western lens can be misleading. ATR communities often emphasize collective responsibility and adherence to moral principles as key to divine favor and protection. Additionally, historical interpretations within ATR itself might differ considerably, offering complex narratives beyond a simplistic "absence" of divine intervention.

However, recognizing the perceived limitations of local gods during colonialism highlights a critical challenge for contemporary hermeneutics: reconciling traditional beliefs with

¹⁴² Kameron Hurley, "The Limits of Ancestral Protection: Rethinking Power and Divinity in West African Slave Narratives," *Journal of Religious History* 42, no. 4 (December 2023): 582-605.

historical realities and reinterpreting the roles of these gods in a way that resonates with present-day communities.

Chapter 6 - The Problem of Evil “Why Suffering?”

One of the candidates interviewed exclaims, “It is all connected, can you not see? The colonial master brought Christianity to depart from the national and local gods and used the Bible to exploit. Now many youths are suffering without hope. How is the God of the Bible fair and if he is loving, why suffering?” This sentiment echoes historical concerns about the role of colonial missionaries, who often used Christianity as a tool for cultural assimilation and political control. The candidate feels this legacy continues to reverberate, leaving many youths feeling abandoned and questioning the fairness and love attributed to the Christian God. For example, in his book *Things Fall Apart*,¹⁴³ Chinua Achebe explores the clash between traditional Igbo beliefs and the arrival of Christian missionaries in Nigeria. ““The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.”¹⁴⁴ The protagonist, Okonkwo, embodies the anxieties and resistance felt by many as their cultural foundations were shaken. His tragic downfall can be seen as a consequence of both internal conflict and external forces, mirroring the complex historical realities the candidate alludes to.

At the center of this sentiment is “the problem of evil,” is a longstanding theological and philosophical dilemma that questions the existence of a benevolent, all-powerful God in the face of human suffering and moral evil. In the context of West Africa, this theological conundrum takes on a particularly poignant dimension as the region grapples with a myriad of social injustices, a challenging economic climate, and a general sentiment of hopelessness.

¹⁴³ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 1.

¹⁴⁴ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 157.

One way to understand the problem of evil in the context of West Africa is to consider the concept of structural evil. Structural evil is a type of evil that is not caused by any individual person, but rather by the systems and structures of society. Unlike individual malice, this evil does not stem from specific actors but thrives in the very fabric of institutions and norms. Consider poverty: a constant companion for many West Africans. It is not simply a lack of resources, but a complex web of unequal power dynamics, exploitative trade practices, and limited access to education and healthcare, systematically woven by historical and present-day forces. This entrenched inequity breeds hopelessness and resentment, further perpetuating the cycle of hardship. Imagine a young girl in a rural village, yearning for an education but denied due to poverty. Her dreams become a silent scream against a system that seems rigged against her, showcasing the tangible impact of structural evil. The prevalence of structural evil underscores the complexity of addressing societal injustices in West Africa, requiring holistic approaches that address systemic root causes alongside individual actions. Here are some issues that contribute to the problem of evil in West Africa.

Social Injustices

West Africa, like many parts of the world, contends with pervasive social injustices. These injustices manifest in various forms, including political corruption, human rights abuses, ethnic conflicts, and gender inequality. Such widespread social injustices often lead to suffering, violence, and the erosion of trust in governing institutions. Some of the most common social injustices in West Africa include:

Poverty: Poverty is a major problem in West Africa. It is estimated by the world bank that over 40% of the population of West Africa lives below the poverty line. This means that

they live on less than \$1.90 per day.¹⁴⁵ One cannot fully understand poverty in West Africa without acknowledging the historical legacies of colonization, the transatlantic slave trade, and post-independence challenges. Consider the Sahel region, where fertile lands were historically diverted towards cash crops under colonial rule, disrupting traditional farming practices and leaving communities vulnerable to droughts and food insecurity. This historical exploitation continues to reverberate, leaving a legacy of limited infrastructure, unequal access to education and healthcare, and a struggle for self-sufficiency.

Inequality: West Africa is also a very unequal region. A small number of people control the majority of the wealth and power, while the majority of the population lives in poverty. The Oxfam report notes that the richest 10% of people in West Africa own more than 40% of the region's wealth, while the poorest 50% of people own less than 10% of the wealth.¹⁴⁶ This paradox, despite abundant natural resources, stems from a toxic mix: elite hoarding, rampant corruption, limited access to credit, and an undiversified economy. The consequences are dire. Those excluded from the prosperity ladder feel trapped in hopelessness and simmering resentment, breeding social unrest and instability. Imagine a young farmer, toiling on fertile land yet unable to access capital or fair markets, witnessing the opulent displays of wealth by a select few. This inequality can lead to a sense of hopelessness and resentment among the youths.

Corruption: Corruption is a major problem in West Africa. Corrupt officials often use their power to enrich themselves at the expense of the public. It is estimated that West Africa

¹⁴⁵ World Bank, *Poverty and Equity in West Africa: Pathways to Inclusive Growth* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2022), 1.

¹⁴⁶ Oxfam, *Extreme Inequality in West Africa: Why It Matters and What Can Be Done* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2022), 1.

loses over \$50 billion per year to corruption.¹⁴⁷ The most immediate consequence of rampant corruption is its strangulation of economic development. Imagine a farmer in rural Mali, toiling under the harsh sun, his meager harvest destined for the market. Yet, at every checkpoint, a greedy hand reaches out, demanding a bribe. Perhaps the most insidious consequence of corruption is the erosion of public trust. When every interaction with authority figures carries the specter of a bribe, a deep cynicism takes root. Imagine a mother struggling to feed her children, witnessing government officials living in ostentatious luxury. This breeds disillusionment, apathy, and even anger, ultimately leading to a breakdown of social order. Communities lose faith in their institutions, cooperation crumbles, and the very fabric of society frays at the edges.

Human trafficking: Human trafficking is a serious problem in West Africa. It is estimated by the United Nations that over 1 million people are trafficked in West Africa each year.¹⁴⁸ Human trafficking is the trade of people for the purpose of forced labor, sexual exploitation, or organ removal. Poverty remains a major driving force behind human trafficking. The lack of economic opportunities compels vulnerable individuals to seek employment abroad, often falling into the hands of traffickers. Example: In Nigeria, widespread poverty in regions like Edo and Delta has led to a high prevalence of human trafficking, with victims lured by the promise of better economic prospects in Europe.¹⁴⁹ The story of Aisha, a young woman from Edo State, exemplifies this tragic reality. Driven by the desire to help her struggling family, she readily accepted a "job opportunity" in Italy. Little did she know, the promised waitressing position was

¹⁴⁷ Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2021* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2021), 2.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (Vienna: United Nations, 2022), 2.

¹⁴⁹ Pathfinders Justice Initiative, *Nigeria: Human Trafficking Factsheet* (Lagos: Pathfinders Justice Initiative, 2022), 1.

a carefully crafted lie. Upon arrival, her passport was confiscated, and she was forced into domestic servitude, her days filled with backbreaking labor and her nights shrouded in fear. Aisha's story is not unique; it is a chilling echo of countless others whose dreams were stolen and replaced with exploitation, all fueled by the relentless fire of poverty.

In summary, West Africa grapples with a complex web of interconnected social injustices, painting a stark picture of suffering and inequality. From the crushing grip of poverty that leaves millions struggling to survive, to the stark inequalities that breed resentment and instability, the region faces an uphill battle towards a more just and equitable future. Corruption further deepens the wounds, siphoning resources and eroding trust in institutions, while the horrors of human trafficking exploit the vulnerable and shatter dreams. Another issue is the tough economic climate.

Tough Economic Climate and A Sense of Hopelessness

In the face of economic adversity, West Africans often turn to their faith for solace and guidance. However, the persistent presence of poverty and inequality raises profound theological questions about divine providence and the nature of suffering. Many grapple with the age-old dilemma of why God allows economic disparities to persist, despite fervent prayers and unwavering faith. The disparity between the promise of abundance and the reality of deprivation tests the resilience of spiritual beliefs, challenging individuals to reconcile their understanding of God's benevolence with the harsh realities of economic hardship. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, and income inequality are pervasive in West Africa, creating a tough economic climate. Many West Africans struggle to meet their basic needs and provide for their families. These economic hardships can strain faith and lead to questions about divine providence and why God allows economic disparities to persist. The youth unemployment rate in

West Africa is over 30%.¹⁵⁰ This means that many young people are unable to find jobs or start their own businesses.

The sense of hopelessness among the youth in West Africa is a growing problem. Many young people feel that they have no future in their own countries. They see no opportunity for economic advancement or social mobility. This leads to a number of negative consequences. At the root lies a bleak perception of limited opportunities. Young people, brimming with potential, see their aspirations dashed against the rocks of economic stagnation and social immobility. Imagine a young graduate in Dakar, her hard-earned degree gathering dust as unemployment stares back, her dreams of contributing to her community seemingly out of reach. This suffocating lack of options breeds a profound sense of powerlessness and disillusionment, pushing many towards desperate measures. The consequences of this simmering hopelessness are multifaceted and alarming. Crime, already a significant challenge, finds fertile ground in this despair. Imagine a young man in Lagos, his entrepreneurial spirit crushed by bureaucratic hurdles and limited access to capital, resorting to petty theft to survive, further entrenching himself in a cycle of hardship. Drug abuse and radicalization is also a growing problem among the youth in West Africa. Many young people turn to drugs to escape their problems and to find a sense of belonging while others join extremist groups for survival.

The recent coup in Niger exemplifies the ripple effects of this despair. With dreams deferred and faith in traditional structures eroding, young people become susceptible to narratives of change, even through violent means. The coup, while not solely driven by youth discontent, highlights the simmering frustrations and yearning for a better future that can be

¹⁵⁰ African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2023* (Abidjan: African Development Bank, 2023), 42.

exploited by opportunistic actors. On January 19, 2023, a group of military officers in Niger staged a coup d'état, overthrowing the democratically elected government of President Mahamadou Issoufou. The coup leaders, who called themselves the Patriotic Movement for Restoration and Safeguarding (MPR), justified their actions by accusing the government of corruption, incompetence, and failure to address the country's problems.¹⁵¹ In a country like that, many young people have their dreams and future put on hold.

In light of these challenges, addressing the multifaceted issues of poverty, inequality, corruption, and unemployment requires holistic and sustainable solutions that prioritize inclusive development, social justice, and youth empowerment. By addressing systemic injustices and creating opportunities for economic advancement and social mobility, West Africa can pave the way towards a more equitable and prosperous future for all its citizens.

Hermeneutical Influence (Interview Data)

The interlaced challenges of the problem of evil, poverty, corruption, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness in West Africa cast a profound shadow over the region's interpretation of the Bible. These formidable issues not only inform how individuals approach the scriptures but also shape their theological inquiries, ethical reflections, and quests for meaning in a troubled world. Some people see these problems as evidence of God's absence or indifference. When they ask why God would allow so much suffering to exist in the world, especially among those who are already marginalized and vulnerable? It is a serious question that leads to a cynical or pessimistic view of the Bible and of God.

¹⁵¹ BBC News, "Niger Coup: Military Overthrows President Mahamadou Issoufou" (January 20, 2023), retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60571222>: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60571222>.

In response to the question, “How does the problem of evil, particularly in the context of West Africa, influence the interpretation of biblical texts?” the candidate shared, “How can one reconcile pronouncements of divine love and promises of good plans with the harsh realities of poverty, illness, and even death attributed to witchcraft?” The candidates' response encapsulates a common sentiment among many in West Africa. They grapple with the apparent contradiction between the biblical portrayal of a loving and benevolent God and the harsh realities of life characterized by suffering, premature death, and the malevolent forces of witchcraft.¹⁵² The discrepancy between the promises of a caring deity and the lived experiences of hardship and tragedy prompts profound questions about the nature of God and the reliability of biblical texts.

In seeking to reconcile the problem of evil with biblical interpretation, individuals in West Africa confront several interpretive challenges. Firstly, they must navigate the tension between literalism and allegory in understanding scripture. While some may interpret biblical promises of God's goodness and protection as literal assurances, others may view them as metaphorical expressions of faith and hope amidst adversity. This interpretive diversity reflects differing theological perspectives within the region. Moreover, cultural and contextual factors shape the interpretation of biblical texts in West Africa. The prevalence of witchcraft accusations and socio-economic disparities underscores the complex interplay between spiritual beliefs and material realities. For many, the biblical narrative must be understood within the context of systemic injustices and spiritual warfare, where evil forces are perceived as active agents in human affairs.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Kathryn Hume, "Witchcraft, Healing, and the Problem of Evil in Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38, no. 3 (2008): 335-357.

¹⁵³ Bennett Gershman, "Witchcraft Beliefs and the Erosion of Social Capital," *World Development* 70 (June 2015): 220-35.

Another candidate brought out a tension between the theological notion of relying on God's intervention to address societal challenges and the pragmatic approach of taking active steps to effect change. This tension often leads to discussions on the role of faith versus human agency in confronting the problem of evil. One theological perspective emphasizes the sovereignty and providence of God, advocating for unwavering trust in divine intervention to overcome adversity. This perspective is grounded in biblical teachings that encourage believers to cast their burdens upon God and trust in His faithfulness. However, critics argue that an overemphasis on prayer and divine intervention fosters complacency and inhibits proactive engagement with social, economic, and political issues. Proponents of this view argue that while prayer and faith are essential, they must be complemented by diligent action and social engagement. They point to the example of European colonizers who, despite their Christian faith, pursued economic development through industriousness and innovation rather than solely relying on prayer. Some theologians and religious leaders advocate for a balanced approach that integrates prayerful dependence on God with practical efforts towards societal transformation. They argue that faith should not be divorced from works but rather inspire and inform meaningful action in addressing systemic injustices.¹⁵⁴

Lastly, the resonance and differences between Christianity and traditional African worldviews in addressing the problem of evil, drawing upon the response provided by candidates. The candidate rightly points out a key difference: the concept of justice. In ATR, the belief prevails that evil deeds warrant immediate or eventual punishment, either in this life or through reincarnation. This emphasis on personal accountability aligns with the eye-for-an-eye"

¹⁵⁴ Musa W. Dube, "Whither the Prophetic Voice in Africa? Pentecostal Public Theology and the Challenge of Social Transformation," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 28, no. 1 (2023): 122-144.

principle found in parts of the Old Testament. Many West African religions, including those with a strong emphasis on ancestral veneration, hold the belief that moral transgressions are met with repercussions, either in the present life or the afterlife. This concept aligns with the principle of retributive justice found in various parts of the Hebrew Bible, particularly the concept of "measure for measure" or "eye for an eye" (Lev. 24:17-20).¹⁵⁵ However, Christianity introduces a contrasting perspective. The notion of divine vengeance ceded to God, as reflected in the phrase "vengeance is mine," creates a tension with the Old Testament's retributive justice.

Christianity also offers a message of redemption and hope through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The New Testament emphasizes forgiveness, mercy, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil, inviting believers to trust in God's providence and to seek reconciliation with Him and others. In contrast, traditional African worldviews, often rooted in indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices, approach the problem of evil from a different perspective. Central to many African traditional religions (ATR) is the concept of cosmic balance and moral accountability. Evil deeds are believed to disrupt the harmony of the universe and incur consequences, either in this life or in the afterlife. The candidate's observation underscores a perceived inconsistency within biblical teachings regarding justice and retribution. The tension between the Old Testament principle of "an eye for an eye" and the New Testament emphasis on forgiveness and mercy reflects the complexity of interpreting scripture within diverse cultural contexts.

This part considers how these issues exert a negative influence on how individuals look at the Bible and interpret its message.

¹⁵⁵ Philip M. H. Peek, "Missiologial Praxis in a Time of Religious Change: Engaging West African Traditional Religions in Interfaith Dialogue," *Missionalia* 48, no. 1 (March 2020): 132-149.

Doubt and Skepticism: In the face of widespread suffering and social injustices, individuals may question the goodness and omnipotence of the God depicted in the Bible. They find it challenging to reconcile the biblical portrayal of a loving and just God with the harsh realities they observe daily. While doubt and skepticism may be the initial response, the journey within West African communities often extends far beyond mere questioning.¹⁵⁶ Traditional African Religions (ATR) hold complex views on the origins and manifestations of evil, often attributing suffering to spiritual imbalances, witchcraft, or ancestral displeasure. This creates a unique lens through which biblical narratives are interpreted and reinterpreted.

Loss of Faith: The persistence of these issues is leading to a loss of faith among some individuals. They may wonder why a benevolent God allows such suffering and injustice to persist, causing them to distance themselves from religious beliefs and interpretations. The sense of hopelessness and disillusionment also lead to challenges against the authority of religious institutions. One of the most immediate consequences is the crisis of faith. When confronted with seemingly unending suffering, the question "Why?" burns with agonizing intensity. Why would a seemingly benevolent God allow children to starve, families to be decimated by conflict, or communities to be ravaged by disease? Traditional interpretations of scripture that emphasize God's omnipotence and benevolence struggle to reconcile with the depth of human suffering. This perceived failure to adequately address pressing existential questions can lead to a loss of trust in religious leaders and institutions.¹⁵⁷ Individuals see them as offering empty platitudes or

¹⁵⁶ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Praise: Singing the Biblical Psalms in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 12-14.

¹⁵⁷ Mark C. Pettin and Akua Yao Sawadogo, "Theological Anthropology and the Problem of Evil in Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 48, no. 4 (December 2018): 482–508.

clinging to outdated interpretations that lack relevance to their lived experiences. This is manifested in the decline in church attendance or a rejection of organized religion altogether.

Selective Interpretation: One intriguing phenomenon arising from this context is the practice of selective interpretation, where individuals emphasize specific biblical verses that resonate with their experiences, potentially neglecting others that may contradict or challenge their perspectives. Faced with hardship, individuals may gravitate towards biblical passages that seem to offer explanations or justifications for their suffering. For example, stories of Job facing trials or references to God's testing of faith might resonate deeply with those experiencing personal tragedy or societal oppression. This selective focus can provide comfort and meaning, but it carries the risk of overlooking crucial verses that advocate for justice, liberation, and the active pursuit of change. Overemphasizing themes of hardship without a counterbalancing emphasis on God's concern for justice can inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities and discourage active resistance against oppressive systems. This can lead to distorted theological perspectives and reinforce oppressive systems. Recognizing the potential pitfalls of selective interpretation is crucial for fostering responsible and nuanced engagement with scripture.

Religious Syncretism: Faced with overwhelming challenges, some individuals turn to religious syncretism, fusing elements of Christianity with traditional African belief systems. This allows them to draw upon different spiritual resources and interpretations for solace and solutions. For example, Maraboutage is a form of syncretic Islam that is practiced in Senegal and other parts of West Africa. It combines elements of Islam, Christianity, and traditional African

religions. Marabouts are religious leaders who are believed to have special powers. They are often consulted for help with problems such as illness, infertility, and financial difficulties.¹⁵⁸

In summary, the problem of evil, poverty, corruption, and a sense of hopelessness in West Africa can foster complex and varied interpretations of the Bible. While some may turn away from religious faith altogether, others may reinterpret biblical texts to find hope, meaning, and avenues for addressing the challenges they face. These issues demonstrate the dynamic relationship between context and biblical interpretation, reflecting the multifaceted nature of religious belief in the face of adversity. In the next part of this paper, using the working backward from the hermeneutical implication methodology established earlier, the response put these issues in their right biblical context. The response will also include an exposition on selected passages and a reference to a large body of research data.

¹⁵⁸ Jane I. Guyer, *Islamic Transformations in West Africa: The Senegal and Gambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 106-107.

PART 3 – THE DEFENSE, AND THE CONCLUSION

Chapter 7 - The Biblical Defense

The previous parts have explored the complex relationship between colonization, ATR, the problem of evil, and their impact on interpreting biblical texts in West Africa. The defense will explore how believers can respond to the lingering effects of colonization, the influence of ATR, and the existential question of evil with a biblical perspective. It will also look at how Christians can communicate the gospel in a way that is culturally relevant and engaging to Millennials and Gen Z. Through this exploration, the research aims to provide a biblical framework for understanding and addressing the challenges facing Christianity in West Africa and also hopes to equip believers in the region with the tools they need to share the gospel of hope with their generation.

Guiding Principles

This part will use 1 Peter 3:15 as a guide and the working backward methodology to provide biblical responses to the challenges facing Christianity in the region. In the epistle of Peter, the author encourages with the following, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15, ESV). This scripture provides three key principles for responding to the challenges of this research.

First is to honor Christ as Lord; therefore, Jesus’s lordship and authority are the focus of this defense. This is not merely a suggestion; it is a declaration of Christ’s preeminence. In the face of cultural dissonance or theological confusion, West African Christianity must hold fast to Christ as the unshakeable Lord and Savior. It emphasizes acknowledging and exalting Christ as the supreme ruler and ultimate authority in all matters pertaining to faith and life.

Second, one needs to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. This approach emphasizes the importance of believers being able to articulate their faith clearly and concisely. This calls for West African Christians to prepare and articulate their faith with clarity and conviction. This does not require combative arguments, but rather an ability to explain, in a culturally sensitive and nuanced manner, why they believe in Christ and the transformative power He offers. Engaging with ATRs in open dialogue, highlighting shared ethical values and exploring their compatibility with Christian principles, can bridge the gap and foster understanding.

Third, one ought to respond with gentleness and respect. Even when challenged or opposed, the faithful are called upon to respond with love and kindness. This is because they are seen as representatives of Jesus Christ, who consistently treated others with compassion and respect. This involves cultivating an attitude of humility, kindness, and patience, even in the face of hostility or misunderstanding. By responding with gentleness and respect, believers exemplify the love and compassion modeled by Jesus Christ, thereby reflecting His character and demonstrating the transformative power of faith in action. Such an approach not only fosters genuine dialogue and understanding but also bears witness to the redemptive grace of Christ in the midst of cultural and spiritual tensions.

The following chapters will apply these three principles to the specific challenges facing Christianity in West Africa. These three principles, derived from 1 Peter 3:15, offer a roadmap for navigating the challenges and opportunities facing West African Christianity. By honoring Christ as the anchor, articulating faith with clarity and respect, and engaging with ATRs in a spirit of collaboration, West African Christianity can chart a course that is both faithful to its biblical foundation and deeply rooted in its rich cultural heritage. The journey will be one of

continuous dialogue, critical reflection, and open-hearted engagement, but by embracing these guiding principles, West African Christianity can continue to be a beacon of hope and transformation in the region.

The Bible is God's Word

The research recognizes and affirms the Bible as the written word of God and depends on it as the authoritative source of truth as the paper navigates the complexities of the effects of colonization, the influence of ATR, and the existential question of evil on a biblical interpretation in West Africa. Central to the approach in interpreting biblical texts within the context of West Africa is the acknowledgment of the Bible's divine inspiration and authority. Believers are called to affirm that the Scriptures are not merely human writings but are imbued with the breath of God, revealing His character, will, and redemptive plan for humanity.¹⁵⁹ In the face of the legacy of colonization, the enduring influence of African Traditional Religions (ATR), and the profound questions of evil that permeate human existence, people turn to the Bible as a compass. This compass guides them through the tumultuous waters of their reality.

The purpose of the Bible is fundamentally to reveal God to humanity. This revelation finds its ultimate culmination in Jesus Christ, who is described as the Word incarnate and the ultimate revealer of God. Both the Gospel of John and the book of Hebrews underscore this profound truth. In John 1, Jesus is identified as the Word who was with God and who was God, emphasizing His divine nature and His role in revealing the Father to humanity. Similarly, Hebrews 1 highlights Jesus as the exact representation of God's being, the radiance of His glory, and the sustainer of all things by His powerful word, affirming His preeminence as the final and

¹⁵⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Witness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1-17.

ultimate revealer of God to humanity.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the Bible serves as a comprehensive testimony to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, inviting all people to encounter and know the Father through His Son. The following reasons this paper affirm the Bible as authoritative.

The Bible's Inspiration: The Bible is an inspired word of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). In this passage, it translates a Greek term that, etymologically, means "breathed out by God." It emphasizes that every part of Scripture is "God-breathed," meaning it originates from God Himself. As a result, the Bible is not merely a human creation but is infused with divine wisdom and truth. It serves as a comprehensive guide for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. In other words, Scripture provides instruction in matters of faith and conduct, offers correction when one stray from God's will, and shows how to live in alignment with His righteousness.¹⁶¹ There are varying views on the topic of the Bible's inspiration.

One prominent view, verbal plenary inspiration, asserts that the entire Bible, from every word to its order, is divinely inspired. This belief emphasizes the Bible's absolute inerrancy, meaning it contains no factual errors and serves as the infallible word of God. Proponents see this inspiration as a supernatural act where God directly dictated the words to human authors, who acted as instruments without affecting the final content. Another view, organic inspiration, posits that God actively guided the human authors while allowing them to use their individual styles and personalities. This perspective emphasizes the interplay between the divine and human

¹⁶⁰ Christopher A. Evans, "The Son as Revealer of the Father: Rethinking Johannine Christology in Light of Hebrews," *Journal for Theological Studies* 73, no. 1 (January 2022): 22–52.

¹⁶¹ Michael Reeves, *The Bible and Reality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 17.

elements, acknowledging the Bible's historical and cultural context. Here, inspiration is not dictation but a collaborative process where God influences the writers' thoughts and expressions, resulting in a text that is both divine and human.

While this paper leans towards the organic inspiration view, the concept of inerrancy remains a complex and nuanced topic. The approach acknowledges the affirmation of inerrancy, but with a specific understanding. It recognizes the possibility of human and clerical errors in the details of scripture, yet maintains the belief that the core message and theological principles conveyed are free from error. In essence, the 'full counsel of God' and its overarching themes remain inerrant.

The Bible's Authority: The authority of the Bible is a foundational concept within Christianity, emphasizing its supreme significance as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. This authority is not merely human in origin but is rooted in the divine inspiration of Scripture, affirming its trustworthiness, reliability, and relevance for all aspects of faith and life.¹⁶² In 2 Peter 1:20-21, Peter said, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit." Peter emphasizes that prophecies within scripture are not personal opinions or subjective interpretations. They transcend individual understanding and hold a unique authority. They were not concocted by human ingenuity or personal desire. Instead, they originated from God. The human authors, referred to as "holy men of God," acted as vessels. They were "moved by the Holy Spirit," their thoughts and words guided by divine inspiration. This passage clarifies the authoritative nature of biblical prophecy. It is not

¹⁶² D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016). 52.

simply human speculation or clever storytelling. Rather, it carries the weight of God's word, communicated through chosen individuals.

The Bible's Truthfulness: Truth is an attribute of God in Scripture and pertains to all his word. In Matthew 24:35, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." This suggests the transient nature of the physical world. Despite its seeming permanence, everything in the material realm is subject to decay and eventual destruction. However, in contrast to the impermanence of the created order, Jesus asserts the eternal nature of His words. This verse underscores the trustworthiness of Jesus's teachings and the enduring relevance of Scripture. It assures believers that amidst the uncertainties of life and the upheavals of history, they can find stability and certainty in the eternal truth of God's Word.

The truthfulness of scripture is also connected to the nature of God. "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19, NKJV). This verse is part of the account of Balaam, a diviner hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the Israelites. Despite Balak's insistence, Balaam finds himself unable to curse the Israelites because God's blessing is upon them.¹⁶³ In this particular verse, Balaam affirms the unwavering faithfulness and reliability of God. "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind" emphasizes the contrast between God's nature and that of human beings. Unlike humans, who are prone to deceit and change, God is utterly truthful and steadfast in His character. He does not lie, nor does He alter His intentions or promises arbitrarily. "Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" underscores the consistency and reliability of God's word.

¹⁶³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, trans. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 32.

When God speaks, His words are not empty or idle; they are accompanied by action and fulfillment. His promises are sure and certain, and He is faithful to carry them out to completion. This verse serves as a profound declaration of God's faithfulness and trustworthiness.

The Bible's Sufficiency: The scriptures are sufficient to lead humankind to God. This means that no other texts, traditions, or teachings are necessary for understanding God's will and living a Christian life. Jesus in talking to the Pharisees said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me" (John 5:39, NKJV).¹⁶⁴ In this verse, Jesus is addressing the religious leaders who were diligently studying the Scriptures, particularly the Law of Moses and the prophets, in their pursuit of eternal life. On the surface, it commends the act of diligently studying the Scriptures, acknowledging their importance. However, a deeper layer unfolds. Jesus implies that their focus may be misplaced. While valuable, solely searching the Scriptures for personal salvation misses the point. They, in actuality, testify about him, Jesus himself, as the true source of eternal life. This verse compels all to shift perspectives. It is not just about accumulating knowledge from the Scriptures; it is about recognizing them as a pathway leading to Jesus, the embodiment of the life they describe. This shift, from textual study to encountering the living Word, becomes the key to unlocking the true treasure hidden within the Scriptures. Therefore, the proper studying of scripture is sufficient to lead one to God.

Another case for the sufficiency of scripture is, Jesus taught from them. In Luke 24:27, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." This verse is part of the account of the encounter on the road to

¹⁶⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 131.

Emmaus, where two disciples were walking and discussing the events surrounding Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection. As they walked, Jesus joined them, but they did not recognize Him. In this verse, Jesus is explaining to them how the Scriptures pointed to Him. "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets" refers to the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures, which were commonly divided into the Law (Moses) and the Prophets. Jesus is indicating that the entirety of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, contains references, prophecies, and types that point forward to His coming and His redemptive work. "He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" emphasizes Jesus's role as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. He showed the disciples how various passages and themes throughout the Scriptures were ultimately fulfilled in Him. This would have included prophecies such as those in Isaiah 53 regarding the suffering servant, Messianic promises like those in Micah 5:2 regarding the birthplace of the Messiah, and typological references such as the sacrificial system pointing to Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

Jesus, the God incarnate, teaching from scripture gives believers confidence that it is God's word and sufficient.

The Bible's Necessity: This means written word in Scripture is an indispensable element of the believer's life. "And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak" (John 12:50, NKJV). In this verse, Jesus is affirming the authority and origin of His teachings. He asserts that the command He communicates is from the Father and leads to eternal life. "I know that his command leads to eternal life" underscores Jesus's certainty regarding the nature and outcome of the

commandment He brings.¹⁶⁵ He is confident that His teachings are not arbitrary or human-made but are directly from the Father and have the ultimate purpose of leading to eternal life. This highlights the redemptive significance of Jesus's words and underscores His role as the mediator of salvation.

Psalm 119:1-2 extols the blessings that come from living a life of obedience to God's law and seeking Him with wholehearted devotion. This verse sets the tone for the entire psalm, which revolves around the theme of devotion to God's word. Here, "blessedness" is not merely a state of happiness, but an active pursuit of living faithfully according to God's law. Walking according to this law is not a legalistic burden, but rather a pathway to true fulfillment and connection with the divine. The verse then emphasizes the importance of not just knowing the law, but actively keeping its "statutes" and diligently "seeking" God with the entirety of one's being. In essence, it is a call to not just possess intellectual knowledge of scripture, but to internalize it and strive to embody its principles in daily life.

While acknowledging the complexity of interpreting biblical texts in West Africa, it also strongly affirms the Bible's potential to offer clarity amidst these challenges. The argument suggests that the Bible embodies internal consistency, logical coherence, and an inherent ability to address the intricate issues influencing hermeneutics in the region. This confidence stems from the conviction that the Bible, as God's inspired word, transcends cultural boundaries and offers timeless truths capable of illuminating even the most nuanced questions.¹⁶⁶ However, it is crucial

¹⁶⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Bible in Christian Life and Practice: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020).

¹⁶⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing African Religions: History, Culture, and Experiences*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 124-127.

to recognize that engaging with the Bible in West Africa necessitates a thoughtful approach that considers the region's unique cultural context and diverse perspectives.

Chapter 8: Biblical View on West African Tradition Religion (WATR)

In recent years, the call to boycott Christianity and return to ATR is growing among some youth in West Africa.¹⁶⁷ Several factors discussed in parts one and two have motivated this call, including the perception that Christianity is a “White Man’s Religion” imposed on Africa and the perceived incompatibility of Christianity with African culture.¹⁶⁸ For example, some WATR beliefs and practices involve the worship of idols or the use of sorcery.¹⁶⁹ But the Bible teaches that one should not make or worship idols, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Deut. 5:8, NKJV). Furthermore, the Bible warns not to engage in magical practices (see Exod. 22:18). However, the calls to reject Christianity are driven by the perception that the local gods are more powerful than the God of the Bible. (Discussed in Chapter 4).

In order to explore the biblical view on WATR, one must first acknowledge that it is incredibly diverse, with each ethnic group having its own unique customs and idols (this research uses terms “idol or idols” hereafter to denote spirits or gods in WATR). At the same time, the Bible is a sacred text for many Christians in West Africa, and it provides a framework for their religious beliefs and practices.¹⁷⁰ One of the questions from the advocates of returning to WATR is, if these idols are evil and wrong, why then do they exist, and for what purpose? The response

¹⁶⁷ Olufemi Akintunde, “African Hermeneutics in the 21st Century: Opportunities and Challenges,” *Lausanne Global Analysis* 7, no. 2 (2018): 25-30.

¹⁶⁸ Adebayo Oyeade, “African Traditional Religion and Christianity in the 21st Century: The Case of Nigeria,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39, no. 4 (2009): 465-479.

¹⁶⁹ Jesse N. Mpanya, “The Centrality of Ancestors in African Traditional Religions,” *Studia Africana* 32, no. 1 (January 2023): 12-34.

¹⁷⁰ Paul N. Mwaura, “Interpreting the Bible in Africa: Bridging the Gap between Historical Insights and Contemporary Hermeneutics,” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 29, no. 2 (2010): 139-153.

provides a comprehensive biblical view of WATR's origins, purpose, and mediation, and then argues for Jesus's rulership and mediation as the only way.

Origin and Purpose

The Bible does not provide a specific view on the origin of WATR or any specific regional belief systems, as it primarily focuses on the religious history of the Israelites and the teachings of Christianity. However, it does offer a general theological framework that can be applied to various belief systems, including those found in West Africa.

The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God (see Gen. 1:27). This concept of made in God's image (Latin: *Imago Dei*) is foundational to understanding the dignity, value, and purpose of human life. It suggests that humans share in certain aspects of God's character and nature, such as rationality, creativity, and moral agency, setting them apart from the rest of creation. Humans are unique among the visible creation of God with an active role as God's imagers.¹⁷¹ After the fall (which is detailed in parts below), humans are seen calling out to God. "And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord." (Gen. 4:26, NKJV). The verse suggests a turning point in human history: the beginning of widespread worship and invocation of the name of the Lord. Prior to this time, humanity had been experiencing the consequences of the Fall, including estrangement from God and the proliferation of sin and violence. However, with the birth of Enosh, there is a notable shift as people begin to seek and call upon the name of the Lord. This development

¹⁷¹ Paul Clough, "Full Article: Created in the Image of God: Both Human and Non-Human Animals?" *Theology Today* 78, no. 1 (2021): 122-139. This article explores the concept of *Imago Dei* and its application beyond just humans.

signifies a reorientation of human hearts toward God, indicating a desire for relationship, reconciliation, and communion with the Creator.

In dealing with the meaning of life and purpose, the author of Ecclesiastes suggests, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end” (Eccles. 3:11, NKJV). This verse hints at a deeper truth than surface appearances suggest. Each season, from vibrant spring to melancholic autumn, holds intrinsic beauty, serving a purpose within the overarching tapestry of time. While some moments might spark joy, others may bring hardship, yet all contribute to the richness of life's experience. Further, the verse adds, "He has also set eternity in the human heart." This suggests a yearning within humanity for something beyond the fleeting nature of earthly existence. Humanity grasp for a timeless permanence, hinting at a connection to something greater than ourselves. Ultimately, the verse underscores the mystery of human existence. This longing rings true today as humanity continues wrestle with life, meaning, and purpose beyond what meets the eye.

The Bible also teaches that God has never hidden from his creation. “Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19-20, NKJV). In these verses, the apostle Paul asserts that the knowledge of God is accessible to all people through the observation of the created world. He argues that God's existence and attributes are evident in the natural world, leaving humanity without excuse for denying His existence or disregarding His divine nature.¹⁷² "So that people are without excuse" emphasizes

¹⁷² N.T. Wright, *Paul: A New Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 70-72.

the accountability of humanity in acknowledging and responding to the revelation of God in creation. Paul argues that the evidence of God's existence and attributes in the natural world leaves humanity without justification for denying or rejecting Him.

Therefore, it is evident that the concept of created in God's image, as depicted in Genesis 1:27, forms the bedrock of understanding human dignity, value, and purpose. This foundational principle suggests that humans possess unique qualities derived from God Himself, distinguishing them from the rest of God's visible creation. The account of Enosh's birth in Genesis 4:26 signifies a pivotal moment in human history, marking the transition to widespread worship and invocation of the name of the Lord. This turning point underscores humanity's innate desire for relationship, reconciliation, and communion with the Creator. Similarly, Ecclesiastes 3:11 delves into the mystery of human existence, acknowledging the longing for something beyond the temporal and fleeting nature of earthly life. The verse speaks to a profound yearning for eternity, hinting at a connection to a higher purpose beyond ourselves. Moreover, Romans 1:19-20 highlights the accessibility of God's revelation through the natural world, emphasizing humanity's accountability in acknowledging and responding to the evidence of God's existence and attributes. In light of these biblical truths, it becomes apparent that WATR may have emerged from a genuine human inclination to seek and worship God, shaped by cultural experiences and expressions. WATR believers have simply developed their own unique ways of understanding and relating to God based on their own cultural experiences.¹⁷³ While the explanation shows the reason for multiple believe system, it is not in any way justifying them to be right. It is simply stating some preliminary nuances required prior to engaging the issues.

¹⁷³ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 23.

In the context of the Bible, traditional religions around the world, including those in West Africa, are often viewed as forms of "idolatry." The Bible strongly condemns idolatry, which is the worship of anything other than the one true God. This perspective is mainly informed by passages from the Old Testament, particularly the Ten Commandments found in the book of Exodus, which state, "You shall have no other gods before me" (see Exod. 20). It also includes passages like Leviticus 26:1, which states, "You shall not make idols for yourselves."¹⁷⁴ In contrast, WATR often features a pantheon of gods, spirits, and ancestors, each with specific roles and attributions. From a biblical perspective, these idols are viewed as false gods, and the worship of them is considered to be in direct violation of the monotheistic principles of the Bible.

Furthermore, the Bible mentions encounters with various pagan idols worshiped by surrounding cultures. Baal was a widely worshiped idol in the ancient Near East, including Canaan and Phoenicia. He was considered a fertility god associated with agriculture and was often depicted as a storm god. Another popular god is Dagon, a Philistine god, often depicted as a fish-tailed idol. The Bible has a popular record on an interaction between the Philistines' idol, Dagon and the Ark of the Covenant in a temple of Dagon (see 1 Sam. 5.)

The origins of these pagan gods lie in the religious beliefs and cultural traditions of the civilizations that surrounded the ancient Israelites. There are several possible explanations for the origins of pagan gods. One possibility is that pagan gods were developed to explain the natural world. For example, the ancient Greeks developed gods to represent the natural forces of the wind, the sea, and the sun. Another possibility is that pagan gods were developed to represent different aspects of human life. For example, the ancient Romans developed gods to represent

¹⁷⁴ William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 25.

love, war, and wisdom. It is also possible that pagan gods were developed as a way to connect with the divine. For example, many pagan religions practiced ancestor worship, which was a way of connecting with deceased loved ones. However, none of these explains the supernatural powers on these gods.¹⁷⁵ Where do these gods get the source of power?

Some scholars argue that these idols do not have power at all, citing the prophets and Paul to uphold their claim.¹⁷⁶ For example, Isaiah 44:6, “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.’” Also, Paul argues: “Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live” (1 Cor. 8:4-6, NKJV). The assertion that foreign idols have no power on their own is a fundamental tenet of monotheistic belief systems, particularly in the Jewish traditions. This principle is often upheld by citing the passages above, which portray YHWH, the God of Israel, as the sole creator, ruler, and source of power in the universe. Unquestionably, these scriptures provide an interpretive key to the Bible’s use of the terms god and gods in relation to things falsely worshiped.

In Deuteronomy 6:4, God instructs Israel, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” This verse is part of Moses’ address to the Israelites, known as the Shema, which emphasizes the fundamental principle of monotheism—the belief in one God. In this concise

¹⁷⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 41.

¹⁷⁶ John T. Carroll, *The Bible: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2009), 456.

statement, Moses calls upon the people of Israel to listen and understand that Yahweh, their God, is the only true God, and there are no other gods beside him. While this statement is agreed by many, it is looked at by some as a denial of the existence of other gods, but it is not. Rather, it shows that YHWH is unique and there is none that can be compared to him. It is almost like say that there is only one sun. Since there is nothing to be compared to the sun, the sun stands alone in the solar system as a fireball. Nothing can measure to its unique attributes, function and purpose. So is YHWH; He is alone, one, unique and incomparable. Are there other sources of light that generate heat? Yes, but one would not compare a bright stadium light with the sun. So is it like comparing YHWH to other gods.

At this point, certain definitions are necessary to bring clarity. When the term gods, spirits, or idols is used in the context of WATR, it means a power, an energy or a supernatural force. This connection is essential to bridge the biblical accounts with WATR worldview. For something to be considered idol, it must first be possessed by a spirit. A carved stick, tree, water bodies, etc. become an idol due to the belief that there is a spirit possession. Additionally, in the context of WATR, spirit possession denotes ownership.¹⁷⁷ It must also be noted that, in a WATR context, idols are ranked and the presence of a higher rank spirit renders lower rank spirits in submission. Therefore, inactivity does not always mean nonexistence, rather, it could mean the presence of a superior. Biblical precedence for this can be inferred in the episode of the Ark of Covenant in the temple of Baal and the swallowing of the Egyptian snakes by Aaron's snake. The presence of YHWH is considered sacred and requires absolute reverence. "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Habakkuk 2:20, NKJV). The verse

¹⁷⁷ Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), 56-57.

emphasizes God's sovereignty and supreme authority. By declaring that "The Lord is in his holy temple," it asserts that God is reigning from his rightful place of power and holiness.

Furthermore, the instruction for "all the earth" to "be silent before him" is a call to reverence and awe. It implies a recognition of God's majesty and a response of humble silence, acknowledging his greatness and authority.

It also important that while the context of WATR accepts a spirit possession in an object to be a potent idol, this research does not validate that conclusion. Instead, the goal of this paper is to reveal that the force, energy, or supernatural powers behind these objects is Satan. In essence, there are no gods other than YHWH; other forms of idolatry are false worship and demonic. So, the presence of power is not proof that the deity exists. The idol is simply the ventriloquist's dummy, with Satan behind all these false manifestations. As Paul argued, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Ephesians 6:12-13, NKJV). The verses highlight the concept of spiritual warfare, suggesting that the real battle for Christians is not against human opponents ("flesh and blood") but against spiritual entities. This implies a dimension of conflict that is beyond the physical world.

There are occasions in scripture where the authors compare YHWH to other idols. For example, in the case of Elijah and the prophets of Baal, 1 Kings 18:20-40 recounts the dramatic showdown on Mount Carmel between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal, a test to determine whose God was truly powerful. Elijah challenges King Ahab and the prophets of Baal to a test of their respective gods' power. He summons all the people of Israel and the prophets of

Baal to Mount Carmel. Elijah then addresses the people, questioning how long they will waver between serving the true God and following false idols. To settle the matter, Elijah proposes a contest: each side will prepare a sacrificial bull and lay it on wood, but they will not set fire to it. Instead, they will call upon their respective gods to ignite the offering. The God who answers by fire will be recognized as the true God. The prophets of Baal go first, calling upon their god from morning until noon, dancing around the altar and even cutting themselves in desperation. However, there is no response from Baal. Elijah taunts them, suggesting that perhaps Baal is asleep or away, which prompts the prophets to intensify their efforts.

When their efforts prove futile, Elijah takes his turn. He repairs the altar of the Lord, places the wood and the bull on it, and then drenches everything with water three times, making it impossible for anyone to accuse him of trickery. Then, he prays a simple yet powerful prayer to the Lord, asking Him to reveal Himself and turn the hearts of the people back to Him. Immediately, fire from heaven descends and consumes the offering, the wood, the stones, the soil, and even the water in the trench around the altar. The people witnessing this miracle fall prostrate, declaring, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" This episode, along with numerous other instances in the biblical narrative, reinforces the belief that YHWH is the only God.¹⁷⁸

The concept of YHWH's incomparability is further emphasized in the Book of Isaiah, where the prophet declares: "Who is like me? Let him speak up. Let him declare and set forth before me, from when I made the ancient world, the things that are to come" (Isa. 44:7). No other god is like YHWH and that is to the goal of such passages and should not be taken as proof-text

¹⁷⁸ Lester Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: History and Archaeology to the End of the First Temple Period* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 182.

for denial of the spiritual warfare of other forces. For example, Exodus depicts the Egyptian magicians using their own gods' power. "But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so, the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods" (Exod. 7:11-12, NKJV). This encounter serves as the beginning of the series of confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh, highlighting the ongoing struggle between God's power and Pharaoh's resistance. Despite the impressive display of supernatural ability by the Egyptian magicians, Aaron's staff swallowing up their staffs emphasizes the superiority and authority of God over the gods and powers of Egypt.

To understand where these idols get the power, perhaps a biblical view on divine rebellion could hold the keys to providing a logically consistent answer. The most well-known example of rebellion against God in the Bible is the rebellion of Lucifer, also known as Satan or the Devil. According to the Bible, Lucifer was originally a high-ranking angel who rebelled against God's authority and sought to exalt himself above God. This rebellion led to his expulsion from heaven and his role as an adversary to God and humanity (see Isa. 14.)¹⁷⁹

From WATR's viewpoint, they do not view the source of supernatural powers as connected to a rebellion narrative, rather, it is their view that the source of power stems from the supreme being. According to their worldview, the supreme being is made up of the duality of good and evil, which means both good and evil are part of the same God.¹⁸⁰ The WATR

¹⁷⁹ The main reason for choosing the biblical narrative of Lucifer's rebellion as a reference point in discussing the origins of rebellion is its prominence within Christian theology and its widespread cultural recognition. The story of Lucifer's fall from grace and subsequent role as an adversary to God and humanity is deeply ingrained in Judeo-Christian tradition and has been influential in shaping theological discussions on the nature of evil and rebellion. Furthermore, the narrative of Lucifer's rebellion provides a clear and concrete example of rebellion against divine authority within the context of monotheistic belief systems.

¹⁸⁰ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 126.

advocates sometimes use this scripture as proof text; “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever’” (Gen. 3:22, ESV). The verse however does not say that evil is part of God’s nature, rather, God has knowledge of good and evil.

Introduction to The Divine Council

The concept of the divine council provides a framework for understanding the interaction between God and other divine beings in the biblical narrative. For example, in the book of Job, there is a passage where God asks the council whether they have considered Job's righteousness. “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them” (Job 1:6, NKJV). In this verse from the Book of Job presents a scene in which the angels, often translated as "sons of God" or "heavenly beings," come to present themselves before the Lord. Among them is Satan, the adversary or accuser. This verse provides insight into the heavenly realm and the relationship between God and spiritual beings. It suggests a formal assembly or council where the angels gather before the Lord to give an account of their activities and receive instructions or assignments.¹⁸¹ Satan's presence among them indicates that he, too, is a member of this divine council, albeit in a different capacity.

An additional key biblical passage that hints at the divine council concept is 1 Kings 22:19-23. In this passage, the prophet Micaiah describes a vision of God sitting in council and discussing the fate of King Ahab with the spirits. The Lord initiates a conversation, seeking counsel on how to entice King Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead, a move that would lead to his demise. Various spirits offer suggestions, but it is a deceiving spirit who volunteers to carry out

¹⁸¹ Michael S. Heiser, *Demonic Divine Presence: The Powers of Darkness in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2018), 121–22.

the task by influencing Ahab's prophets with lies. The Lord grants permission for this plan to proceed, resulting in disaster for Ahab. This passage provides insight into the divine counsel and the spiritual realm. It portrays God as the ultimate authority, presiding over a heavenly assembly where decisions are made and actions are taken.

A quick glance at the creation narrative of the earth suggests an order of creation. Light was created on the first day and man was created on the sixth day (see Gen. 1). Genesis focuses on the origin of humanity, not angels, so there is no clear account of angelic creation although the talk about the creation of the heavenly host (see Ps. 33). Perhaps, the hint of the heavenly host is provided in the narrative of man's prohibition from the tree of knowledge, good and evil. The description of the tree presupposes the presence of evil in the garden, a potential clue that the divine rebellion had happened before God created Adam and Eve. Here is why, God told Adam and Eve, "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17, ESV).

Without the view that a divine rebellion happened prior to the instructions given to Adam here will be challenging for one to show the origin of evil. Another point is in Genesis 3, the serpent, who is later identified as the devil, and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, was already there in the garden and deceived Adam and Eve to rebel against God.¹⁸² "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Rev. 12:9, NKJV). The description of Satan as "that ancient serpent" alludes to the serpent in the Garden of Eden,

¹⁸² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Cosmic Drama of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 118.

identified as Satan, who deceived Adam and Eve and led them into sin (Gen. 3). This connection emphasizes Satan's role as the ultimate deceiver and tempter, seeking to lead humanity astray from God's truth and righteousness. Henceforth, the presence of the serpent in the garden, prior to the fall gives clues to a divine rebellion occurring in heaven before the creation of man.

Therefore, the heavenly hosts were created and put on the basis of free moral agency. It is important to note that the Bible does not provide explicit, detailed information regarding the free will of heavenly beings. As a result, perspectives on this matter vary among theologians and religious scholars.

On one hand, some scholars argue that divine council members must have free will in order to be truly subordinate to God. They point to passages like Psalm 82:1, which says, "God takes his stand in the divine council; in the midst of the gods, he judges." This passage suggests that the divine council members are not simply puppets of God, but rather that they are independent beings with their own thoughts and wills. Some scholars also argue that divine council members must have free will in order to be truly held accountable for their actions. For example, in Isaiah 14, Satan is punished for his rebellion against God. This punishment would not be fair if Satan did not have the free will to choose to rebel.¹⁸³ Whether Isaiah 14 is taking about Satan is a matter of debate among biblical scholars. Some scholars argue that the passage refers to the historical king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar II, while others believe it is a symbolic depiction of Satan's fall from grace. This paper argues that the messaging of the passage is symbolic and fitting at least in application to Satan.

¹⁸³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Cosmic Drama of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 66.

On the other hand, other scholars argue that divine council members cannot have free will because they are subject to God's sovereignty. They point to passages like Isaiah 46:10, which says, "I declare the end from the beginning and from long ago what is not yet done. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'" This verse from the book of Isaiah emphasizes God's sovereignty and omniscience over time and history. In this passage, God declares His unique ability to declare the future before it happens and to bring His purposes to fulfillment. In the immediate context, this verse can be seen as a promise to the Israelites of their eventual deliverance from Babylonian captivity. It assures them that God's plan will prevail despite their current struggles. God is sovereign but that does not prevent giving his creation the right to make decisions. Other scholars also argue that divine council members cannot have free will because they are perfect beings.¹⁸⁴ They point to passages like Matthew 5:48, which says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." In this verse from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorts His disciples to strive for perfection, using the example of the heavenly Father as the standard. This challenge encourages believers to pursue obedience to God's commands and to cultivate a character marked by love, compassion, and integrity. Recognizing that God's call to perfection and holiness reveals our need for grace and mercy, believers find strength in the progressive transformation of the Spirit (see 2 Cor. 3:18), which moves them toward the objective of the New Covenant.

This paper argues for heavenly hosts having free will since the positions given to counter the view are not strong enough for these reasons. In Micaiah's prophesy to Ahab, he explained a vision he saw with God and his divine council, saying, "Then a spirit came forward and stood

¹⁸⁴ William Lane Craig, *God and Free Will: The Problem of Evil and the Openness of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 234-235.

before the LORD, saying, I will entice him. And the LORD said to him, by what means? And he said, I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, you are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so” (1 Kings 22:21-22, ESV). In this passage, the divine council is depicted as having a role in deliberation and making a decision on the matter. Another example is seen in the book of Daniel; “The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men” (Dan. 4:17, ESV). This passage shows that the divine council has the right to decide because it is explicitly stated that the decree to humble Nebuchadnezzar came from them. The "watchers" and "holy ones" are members of the divine council, and their word is law. The passage also shows that the divine council's decisions are in line with God's will.

Divine Council Rebellion

This much is established up to this point, God created a system of government in which he delegates authority to his heavenly servants and the divine council's right to decide is a reminder that God is not a tyrant. He rules the universe with wisdom and compassion. So, what happens when a divine council member decides against God’s will? It leads to rebellion. Divine council rebellion, a recurring motif in the Bible, reveals a cosmic struggle between divine beings and the ultimate authority of God. The concept of a divine council finds its roots in ancient Near Eastern thought, where gods convened in a heavenly assembly to deliberate and execute divine decrees. In the Bible, this heavenly council comprises angelic beings who serve in the divine court of God. Lucifer's rebellion, as depicted in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, serves as a pivotal example of divine council rebellion. Once a revered angel, Lucifer rebels against God's authority

out of pride, leading to his fall from heaven and transformation into Satan, the adversary of God and humanity.

Numerous biblical passages depict instances of divine council rebellion, emphasizing the reality of spiritual warfare and the ongoing conflict between good and evil. Revelation 12 presents a vivid portrayal of a great war in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon, identified as Satan, and his angels. This cosmic battle underscores the forces of darkness seeking to undermine God's kingdom, leading to their ultimate defeat and expulsion from the heavenly realm.¹⁸⁵ Divine council rebellion carries significant theological implications, highlighting the dangers of pride, disobedience, and rebellion against God's authority. It underscores the sovereignty and power of God, who ultimately triumphs over all rebellious forces and establishes His kingdom of righteousness and justice. Divine council rebellion serves as a warning against the malevolent forces seeking to lead humanity astray and emphasizes the importance of spiritual discernment and allegiance to God's will.

There are echoes of angelic rebellion in the New Testament. “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 1:6-7, NKJV). In these verses, Jude draws parallels between the rebellion of certain angels and the moral depravity of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, both of which incurred divine judgment. Jude's reference to the angels who "did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their

¹⁸⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Cosmic Drama of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 111-125.

proper dwelling" suggests a rebellion among heavenly beings who deviated from their assigned roles and boundaries.¹⁸⁶ This echoes the broader theme of angelic rebellion found in other biblical passages, such as Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, where Lucifer, once a high-ranking angel, rebels against God's authority and is cast out of heaven. The consequences of this angelic rebellion are dire, as Jude describes these angels as "kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day."

The paper has explored the biblical theme of Divine Council rebellion, tracing its roots, analyzing prominent examples like Lucifer's fall and examining its theological implications. Ultimately, divine council rebellion underscores the sovereignty and justice of God, who triumphs over all rebellious forces and establishes His kingdom of righteousness and justice.

Nations under the "Sons of God"

After the fall of humanity, one can observe the complexity of man trying to reach out to God on their own terms in the story of Cain and Abel. Cain simply was not impressed that God rejected his sacrifice but accepted Abel's, and this led to a rivalry that resulted in Cain killing Abel (see Gen. 4).

Beyond that, the history of humanity followed the pattern of rebellion, but God never gave up on redeeming the fallen race. From the biblical viewpoint, humanity has the same origin, however, a dispersion came due to another attempt by humanity to reach God. "And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'" (Gen. 11:4, NKJV). The people of Babel had united together and decided to build a tower that would reach to the

¹⁸⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 52-54.

heavens. The phrase "let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens" reflects humanity's pride and ambition to assert their independence from God. By constructing a towering structure, they sought to make a name for themselves and establish their own significance apart from God's divine plan. However, God was not pleased with their pride and rebellion. He came down and confused their languages so that they could no longer communicate with each other.

As a result, the people were scattered all over the earth and this, from biblical viewpoint is the explanation for many nations. The existence of many nations is a reminder of God's judgment on human sin, but it is also a reminder of his creativity, his love for all people, and his plan to redeem and bless all of the nations of the earth.¹⁸⁷ Now the nations are put under the rulership of the divine council but from the nations, God called Abraham to form a people that will be called by His name through which the redemption for all humanity will come. "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD'S portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage" (Deut. 32:8-9, ESV). This passage suggests that God has delegated the rule of the nations to the divine council. The divine council is a group of heavenly beings who serve as God's advisors and helpers. The passage says that God has "established the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God." This suggests that each member of the divine council has been assigned responsibility for a specific nation or group of nations. The passage also says that "the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted

¹⁸⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Theology* (Baker Academic, 2013), 232-235.

heritage." This suggests that God has reserved Israel for himself. Israel is God's special people, and he has a special relationship with them.¹⁸⁸

Some translations render Deuteronomy 32:8-9 as "according to the Number of the Sons of Israel." This phrase is intriguing. It indicates that the division and allocation of territories were in some way related to the number of the sons of Israel. This connection raises questions about why the number of Israel's descendants would be significant in the distribution of territories unless it alludes to a divine council or heavenly assembly. Deuteronomy 32:8-9, when taken in its original context and understood within the broader scope of biblical scholarship, does not refer to "sons of Israel." Instead, it pertains to the division of the nations and the allotment of the peoples to the sons of God, with each nation having its own divine overseer. The terms used in Deuteronomy 32:8-9 are not "sons of Israel," but rather "sons of God" or "sons of the Most High." The Hebrew text uses "בְּנֵי-אֱלֹהִים," which translates to "sons of God" or "divine beings." This phrase appears consistently in ancient Hebrew manuscripts. Interpreting Deuteronomy 32:8-9 as "sons of Israel" would not align with the overall message and theological themes of the Bible. The passage is about God's selection of Israel and the role of the divine council in the administration of the nations, rather than the genealogy of Israel. Israel election was not based on merit, rather, God called to use as an example to teach the nations about his redemption plan.

The designation of the sons of God over the nations proved to be chaotic.¹⁸⁹ "They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations, they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had

¹⁸⁸ Tremper Longman III, *Deuteronomy: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 169-170.

¹⁸⁹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Cosmic Drama of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 137.

come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded” (Deut. 32:16-17, ESV). Instead of Israel remaining faithful, they started modeling themselves after foreign gods. The passage begins by saying that the Israelites "made him jealous with strange gods; with abominations, they provoked him to anger." This language suggests that God's anger is not motivated by a selfish desire to be worshipped but by a love for his people and a desire for them to be faithful to him. The passage then goes on to say that the Israelites "sacrificed to demons, not God, gods they had never known, new gods that had come recently, whom your ancestors had not feared." This description of the Israelite gods is particularly damning, as it suggests that they are nothing more than demons and false gods. Some scholars argue that these "demons" or "no-gods" were not actual demons in the sense of malevolent supernatural beings but were idols or gods from other cultures that the Israelites had come to worship.¹⁹⁰ However, that is beside the point here, the actions of Israel were considered abominable.

An example that shows a divine being acting over a territory is found in the book of Daniel. “Then he said to me, ‘Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia’” (Dan. 10:12-13, ESV). In this passage, the angel who visits Daniel explains that he had been delayed in delivering his message to Daniel because he had encountered resistance from the "prince of the Persian kingdom." the prince of Persia resisted Gabriel for 21 days. This suggests that there is a spiritual battle taking place behind the scenes of human history. The forces of darkness are trying to prevent the accomplishment of God’s will, but God's angels are ultimately

¹⁹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 173.

victorious. The passage also says that the archangel Michael, the guardian angel of Israel and responsible for protecting God's people from spiritual harm, came to help Gabriel defeat the prince of Persia. This shows that the divine beings over the nations turned against God and tried to resist His will. But they still possessed supernatural abilities. In the Exodus narrative, one can see the magi of Egypt performing the miracles of Moses (see Exod. 7:8-11). The researcher hereby suggests that the supernatural powers of the gods of the nations come from fallen divine beings or divine council members who have rebelled against God. In other words, God divided the nations among the “sons of God” for a specific purpose, but they rebelled and started to be gods to the nations.¹⁹¹

Mediation and Divination

In WATR, they look at all these local gods as the authorized form or channel of mediation. Putting this in the larger context of divine rebellion and competition for worship, there is a lot more to consider on why divination was prohibited in the scriptures.¹⁹² Now, it is clear in the scriptures that while God put the nations under the “sons of God,” He participated in the affairs of the nations, showing his constant love for the people. In the narrative of the fall, humankind was cast out from the presence of God due to sin; “therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the Garden of Eden, he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the Tree of life” (Gen. 2:23-24, ESV). From that time, man has

¹⁹¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Cosmic Drama of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 118-120.

¹⁹² John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 198

made many attempts to communicate with God, but the God of the Bible rather descend to the people since He is holy. However, the other nations used divination as a means to communicate with God.

Divination is the attempt to gain knowledge or guidance from supernatural or occult means, often through methods such as interpreting omens, consulting mediums, practicing sorcery, or seeking information from spirits. The Bible teaches that divination is a sin because it is a form of idolatry. When people turn to divination for guidance, they are putting their trust in something other than God. They are also seeking to know things that God has not chosen to reveal to them.¹⁹³ The practice of divination also includes strange sacrifices and rituals. “There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations, the LORD your God is driving them out before you” (Deut. 18:10-12, ESV). These verses explicitly prohibit various occult and supernatural practices, and they serve as a warning to the Israelites to avoid such activities. The reasons for prohibiting these practices include their association with idolatry, the potential for exploitation and harm, and their deviation from the worship of the one true God, Yahweh. The emphasis in these verses is on maintaining fidelity to God and avoiding practices that would lead the Israelites away from their faith.

One also can see from the example of King Saul that, such divinations led to certain knowledge. The story of King Saul and the witch of Endor is found in 1 Samuel 28. Saul is

¹⁹³ Michael Anthony S. Downing, *Cosmos and Ideology in Victorian Britain: The Struggle for Secularisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 127.

facing a crucial battle against the Philistines, and he is desperate for guidance. He has tried to consult God through prayer and the Urim and Thummim, but he has received no answer. In desperation, he turns to a witch in Endor to raise the spirit of the prophet Samuel. The witch is hesitant at first because she knows that Saul has forbidden necromancy in his kingdom. But Saul assures her that she will not be punished. The witch conjures up the spirit of Samuel, and Saul asks him for guidance.¹⁹⁴ It is also key to note that, when God warned Adam and Eve about the tree of knowledge, good and evil (see Gen. 2), the serpent, a fallen angel was the one that engaged them to know good and evil. The corrupt “sons of God” continue to interfere in the affairs of the nations but God will not leave them unpunished.¹⁹⁵

Psalm 82 is a thought-provoking and somewhat enigmatic passage in the Book of Psalms. It addresses the theme of divine judgment, the accountability of rulers and judges, and the ultimate sovereignty of God. Here is an exposition of Psalm 82.

Verse 1: "God stands in the divine assembly; he judges among the gods." The psalm begins with God standing in the assembly of the gods and judging them. The identity of the gods has attracted varying views. Some say it depicts human rulers. This interpretation argues that the "mighty" and the "gods" refer to human rulers, judges, or magistrates. According to this view, God is asserting his authority over these earthly powers and holding them accountable for their actions. Other suggests that the terms "mighty" and "gods" are metaphorical, referring to powerful individuals or forces that challenge God's authority. According to this view, God is

¹⁹⁴ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, vol. 10, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 271. Deuteronomic law firmly prohibited it (Deut 18:10). Saul told the woman to bring up the old prophet—this was a job for a Samuel. The woman reminded Saul of the danger he was putting her in by having her violate the royal command. No reader can miss the irony that Saul was both lawmaker and lawbreaker. Saul swore by the life of Yahweh—again an ironic contrast with the spirits of the dead he wanted to invoke—that no guilt would accrue to the woman because of her actions.

¹⁹⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), 131

asserting his sovereignty over all creation, including those who seek to usurp his power.

However, this paper argues that the "mighty" and the "gods" in this verse is a reference to the divine council due to the following reasons.

The verb "*ōmed*" (stands) suggests an active and authoritative stance, implying God's presence and involvement among the divine beings. The phrase "*bāsōd- 'ēl*" (council of the mighty) evokes a celestial assembly where matters of great importance are discussed and decided. The repetition of the word "*'elōhīm*" (gods) emphasizes the divine nature of the gathering, while the verb "*ya' dīn*" (judges) highlights God's role as the ultimate arbiter of justice. Furthermore, the punishment "you shall die like men" suggests that it is the audience, not men, who will face this fate. The fact that God is judging the other gods suggests that the rulers of the earth are being held to a high standard. They are not just being judged by their own laws and customs; they are being judged by the laws of God.

Verses 2-4: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." The psalmist describes the many ways in which the rulers have abused their power. They have judged unjustly, shown partiality to the wicked, and oppressed the weak and the needy. The psalmist is calling on the rulers to repent of their sins and to start ruling with justice and compassion. He reminds them that they are accountable to God for their actions.

Verses 5-7: "They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you will die like men and fall like any other prince.'" The psalmist describes the spiritual blindness of the rulers. They have no knowledge or understanding of

God's ways. They are walking in darkness and causing chaos in the world. The psalmist reminds the rulers that they are mortal beings. They are not gods. They will die like any other man and fall from power.

Verses 8-9: "Arise, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!" The psalm concludes with a call to God to rise up and judge the earth. The psalmist knows that God is the only one who can bring justice to the world. He asks God to inherit all the nations and to take his great power and glory.

Psalms 82 serves as a reminder of the divine authority that God bestows upon earthly rulers and judges and the expectation that they will administer justice and protect the vulnerable. When rulers fail in their responsibilities, the psalm emphasizes the accountability they have before the ultimate Judge, God Himself. The responsibilities of the gods are ours. Thus, despite the heavenly setting in the psalm it points us toward firmly grounding our religion in the earthly needs of people. The gods are under a sentence of mortality; they have become no-gods. But the world is prone to believe that this is not true; it thinks the gods of indifference and injustice are still in control. Psalms 82 says that there is ultimate accountability. God is standing, even now, in the divine assembly and charges his agents, divine and human.¹⁹⁶

The theme of other nations being ruled by unjust divine council members is linked to the idea that the Messiah will be given dominion over these nations. "I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, you are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (Ps. 2:7-8, ESV).¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Volume 20. Word Biblical Commentary. Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Academic, 2011, 341.

¹⁹⁷ Brian D. Kennedy, "The Messiah's Inheritance and the Judging of the Nations in Psalm 82," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 4 (2014): 793-812.

Interpretation of Psalm 2:7-8 has been closely associated with messianic expectations in both Jewish and Christian traditions. It is often seen as foreshadowing the coming of a future Messianic figure, whom Christians identify with Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁸ In this verse, God promises to give the king the nations as his inheritance. The king will rule over the nations with an iron scepter, which is a symbol of his absolute authority. He will shatter the wicked like pottery, which is a symbol of their complete destruction. Certainly, we must agree that a magnificent Christology could be developed on the basis of Psalm 82 if one were to interpret the thrust of its meaning, the "proclamation of the death of the false gods" through the revelation of the goodness and love of God to the poor and dispossessed.¹⁹⁹

The author of the epistles to Hebrews comments on Jesus dispossessing the rulers of nations and ruling over them added, "For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking" (Heb. 2:5, ESV). This verse is significant because it teaches that the world to come will be different from the present world in several key ways. First, the world to come will be subjected to Christ, not to angels. In the present world, angels play an important role, but they are not the ultimate rulers. In the world to come, however, Christ will be the supreme ruler. Second, the world to come will be a place of perfect justice and righteousness. In the present world, there is much injustice and evil. But in the world to come, God will establish his perfect justice and righteousness. Third, the world to come will be a place of eternal life and joy. In the present world, death is a reality for all. But in the world to come, there will be no more death. Instead, believers will enjoy eternal life in the presence of God. The author is

¹⁹⁸ Erich Zenger et al., "Psalm 82," in *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, ed. Klaus Baltzer (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2005), 328–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb6v84t.40>.

¹⁹⁹ Erich Zenger et al., "Psalm 82," in *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, ed. Klaus Baltzer (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2005), 328–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb6v84t.40>.

making the case that Jesus, the Son of God, holds a superior and more exalted role than the angels. The main purpose of Hebrews 1:4–2:16 is thus to show, mainly from scripture itself, that Christ is greater than the angelic mediators of the cultic law. This is confirmed by what the author will say of the relation between Moses and Christ.²⁰⁰ This theme is further developed in the following verses in the book of Hebrews, highlighting Jesus's role as the divine Son and the significance of His redemptive work.

In summary, the Bible teaches that angels play a role in world governance. For example, Daniel 10:12-13 describes how the angel Michael helped the angel Gabriel defeat the prince of Persia, who was a fallen angel trying to prevent Gabriel from delivering God's message to Daniel.²⁰¹ However, the Bible also teaches that angels should not serve as a source of divination or mediation. Instead, believers are encouraged to cultivate a direct and personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.²⁰²

Jesus is the Only Way

Nations put under angels as discussed earlier will not be in the world to come. But after the fall, God chose angels to place the nations under due to the fallen nature of the world. Even Israel, the chosen possession of God was assigned the angel Michael. “At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book” (Dan. 12:1, NKJV).

²⁰⁰ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993), 104.

²⁰¹ Karen Armstrong, *The Encyclopedia of Angels* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 12-14.

²⁰² Tremper Longman III, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 348-349.

Angels are also seen to be moderating the law of God to Israel as a temporal guide. “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19, NKJV). In this verse, Paul addresses the question of why the law was given if salvation is through faith in Christ alone. He explains that the law was added because of human transgressions, serving as a temporary measure until the coming of the promised Seed, who is Jesus Christ. The law was a tutor, guiding people to recognize their need for a Savior by revealing their sinfulness and inability to fulfill God's perfect standards on their own. This at least shows that the angelic moderation was not meant to continue forever. It was instituted until the Messiah.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15, ESV). This is a significant verse in the book of Genesis, and it is often referred to as the "protoevangelium," meaning the "first gospel." The verse contains God's response to the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This verse is significant because it teaches that God has a plan to redeem humanity from sin and death. Even though Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, he did not abandon them. Instead, he promised to send a Savior who would defeat Satan and make things right. The verse also teaches about the identity of the Savior. He would be a descendant of Eve (the "seed of the woman"). He would also be human (he would have heels that could be bruised). But he would also be divine (he would be able to bruise Satan's head). The hope of humanity hinged on the coming Messiah, who defeats death and reconciles humanity with God.

This promised seed takes on numerous characterizations in the scriptures but perhaps the strongest label is the “son of man” theme established based on Daniel 7. The "Son of Man" in

this vision represents a divine figure who receives authority, glory, and sovereign power from the "Ancient of Days," a representation of God. This Son of Man is distinct from the earthly kingdoms symbolized by the four beasts. He is a symbol of the Messiah, a righteous and divine figure who will establish God's eternal kingdom. In Christian tradition and the gospels, the Son of Man figure in Daniel 7 is unquestionably associated with Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself used the title "Son of Man" to refer to Himself (see Mark 10:45), emphasizing His divine authority and role as the Messiah. Christians see the fulfillment of this prophecy in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who, as the Son of Man, brings salvation and establishes the eternal kingdom of God. Therefore, until Jesus's coming, the nations and humankind wrestled with the consequences of sin, which is death. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb. 2:14-15, ESV).

The purpose of the son of man is to reconcile humankind back to God. Now, Jesus Christ through his life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension fulfilled the specification of the Messiah, the son of man, and the seed of the woman. Therefore, Jesus is the only mediator between the fallen race and God.²⁰³ "Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6, ESV). In this statement, Jesus makes an exclusive claim to be the way to God, the embodiment of truth, and the source of life. He asserts that there is no alternative path to the Father except through Him. This is a foundational belief in Christian theology, emphasizing the unique role of Jesus as the Savior. Jesus, the savior,

²⁰³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Christus Mediator* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018), 12-15.

did not only come for Israel but for the world (see John 3:16). Hence, access to the Father is open to all nations, tongues, and people as evident on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2.)

The universality of the gospel, as presented in the Bible, is a fundamental theme that underscores the message of salvation offered to all people, regardless of their background or circumstances.²⁰⁴ The Bible provides numerous examples and passages that highlight the inclusive nature of the gospel. In the Great Commission, Jesus instructs His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations." This command reflects the universal scope of the gospel, calling for the disciples to take the message to every corner of the world (see Matt. 28:18-20.) The Apostle Paul's missionary journeys are a significant example of spreading the gospel to various regions and cultures. He traveled to Asia Minor, Europe, and beyond, proclaiming the message of salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike (see Acts 13-28.) Jesus gave all people the opportunity to be sons and daughters of God (see John 1:12.)

The presence of cults in WATR that swear allegiance to angels is indeed notable, with one prominent example being the Ajaguraja cult in Ghana. The Ajaguraja movement is a religious group in Ghana founded by Bishop Kwabena Asiamah, also known as Ajaguraja.²⁰⁵ The movement is centered around the teachings of Bishop Asiamah, who claims to have received divine revelations and possesses spiritual healing powers. The movement's practices and beliefs have been a source of controversy, with some critics identifying it as a cult. However, the Ajaguraja movement maintains that it is a legitimate Christian group and denies any wrongdoing. The movement is built around Ajaguraja, the name of a purported angel who gives knowledge

²⁰⁴ David L. Peterson, *The Message of the Early Church: Placing Today's Beliefs in Historical Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 124.

²⁰⁵ Onua FM 95.1 [YouTube channel], 'Exclusive Interview with Bishop Kwabena Asiamah aka Ajagurajah on Adwuma Adwuma with Osei Felicia,' March 28, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RBQPgQC2ho>

and spiritual powers. It is common to observe in West Africa churches how publicly worshiped angel and chanted aloud during some manifestation.²⁰⁶ It is clear that most of these manifestations have connection to fallen angels.

In summary, while angels played a significant role in guiding nations after the fall, their involvement was never intended to be permanent. It served as a bridge until the arrival of the promised Messiah, the "seed of the woman" and the divine "Son of Man," who ultimately fulfilled the prophecies and reconciled humanity back to God. Through Jesus's death and resurrection, the universal offer of salvation became available to all nations, transcending the specific limitations previously seen with angelic governance. The argument for a return to WATR worship is often motivated by the perceived efficacy of traditional practices, the desire for mediation and divination, and an inclination toward ethnocentrism. However, the Bible presents a compelling counterargument, emphasizing that the occurrence of miracles and supernatural events should not be interpreted as divine endorsement. Instead, it underscores that there is only one mediator between God and humanity, namely Jesus (see 1 Tim. 2:5), who brought salvation to the world without regard for national or ethnic distinctions. Therefore, it is crucial to reevaluate the appeal to revert to WATR and to persist in the faith of Christ. The Bible's teachings encourage a broader perspective that transcends cultural and ethnic boundaries, advocating for a faith that unites all people under the banner of Christ's salvation (see Gal. 3:28). This perspective calls for a reconsideration of the perceived potency of traditional practices and highlights the universal nature of Christ's message, emphasizing that faith in Him offers a path to spiritual fulfillment and reconciliation with God.

²⁰⁶ Gideon C Boateng, "Angel Worship and the Ajagurajah Movement," YouTube, July 15, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3lndBlxW_w

Chapter 9: Biblical View on Colonization and Slavery

The issue of colonization and slavery in West Africa, like similar historical injustices, presents complex ethical and moral challenges when considered from a biblical perspective. Colonization and slavery were sinful and immoral acts that caused immense suffering for the people of West Africa. However, the Bible provides a strong moral framework for opposing these evils and working to build a more just and equitable world.

Creation, Dominion, Dependency

The creation of humanity, as depicted in the Bible, affirms the foundational principle of equality and the divine intention for humanity to exercise dominion over the Earth. This equality and dominion are predicated on humanity's dependence on God's Word. The biblical narrative, primarily in Genesis, provides a profound perspective on this concept. "Then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26-27, ESV). The declaration that humans are made in the image of God is a profound statement about human nature. This concept signifies that humans possess qualities that reflect the divine and the use of "likeness" emphasizes the similarity between humanity and God, underscoring the idea that humans share certain characteristics with their Creator.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 454.

The passage also highlights humanity's role in having dominion over the Earth and its creatures. This dominion is often understood not as a license for exploitation but as a call to stewardship and responsible care for the natural world. It reflects the responsibility to rule in a manner consistent with God's values and intentions. The theological concept of "*Imago Dei*," meaning "image of God" in Latin, is derived from these verses. It has been a central element in Christian theology, emphasizing the intrinsic worth of every individual and serving as the foundation for principles of human dignity, rights, and ethical treatment. Genesis 1:26-27 has profound implications for the understanding of humanity's equality, dignity, purpose, and ethical responsibilities. It shapes beliefs about the sanctity of human life and provides a foundational perspective on how humans should relate to one another, to the natural world, and to God.

The Bible also teaches that humanity cannot fulfill its purpose on earth without depending on God's word. In Psalm 119:105, the psalmist says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The verse emphasizes God's word as a guiding force in life. It suggests that following this word leads to wise decisions and a life that aligns with God's will. Moreover, this verse emphasizes the intimate relationship between God and His Word. As believers walk in obedience to His commandments and follow His teachings, they experience His presence and guidance in their lives.²⁰⁸ The Word of God becomes not only a source of illumination but also a means of communion with the Creator. God issued a command to Adam; "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17, ESV). This passage provides a glimpse into the Garden of Eden, the

²⁰⁸ Paul Gavrilyuk and Paul M. Thompson, eds., *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Doctrine of God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), see especially chapters on "Creation and Divine Action" and "Providence."

relationship between God and humanity, and the moral responsibility placed on Adam. The command carried both freedom and limitation. God grants Adam the freedom to enjoy the abundance of the garden but sets a clear boundary by prohibiting the consumption of fruit from a specific tree. This prohibition serves as a test of obedience, underlines the moral responsibility of man, and showcases the creator-creation relationship.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, this passage serves as an initial text for understanding the concept of free will, moral choice, and the importance of relying on God's word.

Sin and Its Consequences

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23, ESV). God warned Adam about the results of disobedience, however, the serpent came to deceive him from obeying God. Reliance on God’s word was the only way for Adam to be successful, yet, he attended to the words of the serpent (the devil or fallen angel) instead of God. After the fall, God asked a question to Adam after they ran and hid from God. “But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’” (Gen. 3:9-11, ESV). God's question in this verse goes straight to the heart of the matter. He inquired about the tree He had expressly forbidden Adam and Eve to eat from. It is a pointed question that seeks to elicit a confession from Adam regarding his disobedience.²¹⁰ “Who told you that you were naked?” This statement shows that Adam has had knowledge about sin

²⁰⁹ William Lane Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 102-103.

²¹⁰ John W. Rogerson, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 124-125.

through a conversation with the devil. This point is important because it supports the prohibition of angelic mediation between man and God was not in God's original creation order.

After the fall, God brings the following consequences. "The LORD God said to the serpent, 'because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly, you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life'" (Gen. 3:14, ESV). The literary theme that can be seen here is a continuation of the narrative from Genesis 3:1-13, focusing on the consequences of sin and disobedience. In this verse, God is addressing the serpent, which had deceived Eve and played a role in the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. While there are many conjectures about the disfiguring of the serpent to crawl on the belly, some argue that the serpent was perhaps an upright creature before the curse. Yet, a careful review shows that snakes do not eat dust therefore, perhaps there is more to this curse than meets the eye.²¹¹ First, it is established that the serpent in Genesis 3:1 is the devil (see Rev. 12:9), therefore, for one to accept that the fallen angel was reduced to a literal crawling snake after the fall might be a stretch. A few things in the verse are important for accurate interpretation like the dust, the ground, belly. This paper argues that the symbolism in the verse indicates the handing over the dominion of death, which is the result of sin, to the devil, and here is why. The Bible specifies later that man is dust and to dust will man return (see Gen. 3:19). Therefore, the serpent eating dust signifies the rulership over humankind after the fall with death, but this rule will someday be broken by the seed of the woman, who will crash the head of the seed of the serpent (see Gen. 3:15).

"To the woman, he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."

²¹¹ Martin Emmrich, "The Temptation Narrative of Genesis," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 73 (2001): 10-28.

(Gen. 3:16, ESV). This verse presents the curse placed upon the woman, emphasizing the increased pain in childbearing and the dynamics of relationships. This curse carries theological and literary significance, illustrating the consequences of sin and the brokenness introduced into the human experience after the Fall.²¹² The words "desire" and "rule" have been the subject of significant interpretation and discussion. The idea of the woman's "desire" for her husband has been understood in various ways, but it is likely to suggest rivalry for rulership in the home, but the husband needs to rule. This paper adopts this interpretation based on the following two reasons, one, to look at this statement as a positive is to suggest Eve before the fall was unruly. Before the fall, all things created by God were perfect including the relationship between Adam and Eve. Two, the same Hebrew word repeats in God's admonishment to Cain. "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:7, ESV). In this context, sin's desire can be compared to "her desire" which means conflict and contention. But the admonishment is to rule over to bring order. One can see from this verse the effects of sin on homes or families – the desire for control. But God gave the woman hope, "Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control" (1 Tim. 2:15, NKJV).

"And to Adam, "he said, because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you; in pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall

²¹² Lisa McClain, *The Paradox of Desire: Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Victorian Literature* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2019), 3-15.

return” (Gen. 3:17-19, ESV). Like the woman, the pain of Adam’s labor was increased, and the ground was cursed to facilitate that. The ground, which had previously yielded abundant and easily obtained produce, is now cursed because of his sin. This curse results in the ground yielding "thorns and thistles," making agriculture and survival more arduous. He will have to work strenuously and laboriously to obtain food from the cursed ground. This introduces the theme of the hardships and difficulties that will be part of human existence. The curse on Adam, like the curses on Eve and the serpent, sets the stage for the need for redemption. The curses underscore the brokenness and separation between humanity and God that require a divine solution.

In summary, the consequences of the Fall in Genesis 3 include spiritual separation, physical death, toil and hardship, suffering and pain, strained relationships, a sinful inclination, expulsion from Eden, and the promise of redemption. These consequences have shaped the human experience and the broader biblical narrative, highlighting the need for salvation and the hope of restoration through God's redemptive plan.²¹³ Despite the dire consequences of the Fall, Genesis 3 also contains a promise of redemption and restoration. Even as God pronounces judgment upon the serpent, He foretells of a future Redeemer who will crush the head of the serpent, triumphing over sin and death (Gen. 3:15). This promise finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to reconcile humanity to God through His sacrificial death and resurrection.

²¹³ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-11* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 205-215.

Colonization and Slavery Exist due to the Fallen Human Race

The story of Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis (see Gen. 4:1-16) is a poignant narrative that vividly illustrates the consequences of sin, culminating in the tragic murder of Abel by his brother Cain. In the story, Cain and Abel offer a sacrifice to God. Cain brought the first fruits of the ground and Abel brought the firstborn flock. God accepted Abel's sacrifice but rejected Cain's and this led to Cain getting angry. God instructs Cain to bring the firstborn flock like his brother and he will be accepted but he refuses. Sacrifices in antiquity were made to a deity but in this case, Cain wanted to offer a sacrifice to God on his terms and not according to what God requires. One can infer from this behavior the rebellious nature of the corrupt heart. Despite God's warning, Cain gives in to his jealousy and anger. He lures Abel into the field and murders him in a fit of rage. The story of Cain and Abel vividly portrays how sin, fueled by jealousy and anger, can lead to violence and even murder. It demonstrates the destructive path that sin can take in the human heart and the ripple effects it can have on individuals and the world around them.

The pattern of rebellion becomes normal in the biblical narrative after the fall and at the center of it is the wickedness of the human heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9, ESV). This verse suggests that the human heart is not only prone to deception but is also incurably so. It speaks to the complexity of human nature, acknowledging the deep-seated wickedness that resides within each individual. The verse's message serves as a cautionary reminder to guard against the tendencies of the heart, which can lead individuals astray morally and spiritually. It prompts introspection and self-awareness, encouraging individuals to recognize their own capacity for deception and to seek guidance and transformation.

The fallen nature of humanity is often associated with inherent selfishness and greed. Colonization and slavery can be seen as examples of human greed and the pursuit of power and wealth at the expense of others.²¹⁴ Colonization and slavery are both based on the belief that some people are superior to or master over others. This belief is fundamentally flawed and is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God and have equal dignity and worth (see Gen. 1:27). However, the effect of the fallen world assumes corruption, exploitation, and all these hardships. Sin introduced selfishness, greed, and exploitation into human interactions, leading to conflict, injustice, and oppression. The biblical narrative records numerous instances of individuals and societies exploiting others for personal gain, often at the expense of their dignity and well-being. This pattern of exploitation laid the groundwork for the emergence of systems of domination and subjugation, such as colonization and slavery.

Colonization, characterized by the conquest and domination of one people by another, reflects humanity's fallen propensity towards power and control. Throughout history, nations have sought to expand their territories, resources, and influence through colonization, often justifying their actions through notions of superiority and entitlement. The desire for wealth, power, and prestige has driven countless acts of colonization, resulting in the subjugation and exploitation of indigenous peoples around the world. Similarly, slavery, which involves the ownership and exploitation of human beings as property, is a stark manifestation of humanity's fallen state. The Bible condemns the practice of slavery as incompatible with God's intention for humanity, which is to live in freedom and dignity. However, throughout history, individuals and

²¹⁴ Vincent W. Love, *Christian Reflections on the Holocaust: Theology, History, and Ethics* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 12-14.

societies have justified slavery through distorted interpretations of Scripture and ideologies of racial superiority. Some people argue that if God does not approve of slavery, why is it in the Bible?

God Disapproves of Colonization and Slavery.

From God's viewpoint, humanity was to rule over the animals and the earth, and not one another. "And God blessed them. And God said to them, "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth"" (Gen. 1:28, ESV). The terms "subdue", and "rule" convey the idea of dominion and stewardship over creation. While humanity is given authority over the natural world, it is important to interpret this dominion in a way that reflects responsible care and stewardship, rather than exploitation.²¹⁵ In Genesis 2:20, Adam is seen naming the animals. "The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him." The act of Adam naming the animals underscores his role as a steward and caretaker of the created world. In the Bible, naming often represents an act of authority and dominion. By naming the animals, Adam exercises his God-given responsibility to care for and have dominion over the natural world. It is important to note here that, prior to the fall, Adam did not name his wife Eve – suggesting equality. "At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" (Gen. 2:23, NLT). By acknowledging Eve as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," Adam articulates the deep sense of kinship and belonging that exists between them. Eve is not merely a separate entity but

²¹⁵ Calvin B. DeWitt, *Caring for Creation: Christian Stewardship of God's Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 123.

is intricately connected to Adam, sharing in his humanity and essence. This recognition of their shared origin underscores the fundamental equality and complementarity between man and woman, laying the foundation for the institution of marriage and the family unit. In the creator's intent, humans were not supposed to rule over each other based on race, ethnicity, or gender. God was the only one who exercised dominion and kingship over humanity.

God is depicted as the ultimate authority and ruler over all creation. He governs the universe and exercises His sovereignty in accordance with His divine will. This authority extends to the lives of His people, as He guides and directs them. As a king, God sets moral and ethical standards for His people to follow. He provides laws, commandments, and instructions that govern how His people should live and relate to one another. These standards reflect His righteous and just reign.²¹⁶ The title "king" also suggests that God is a protector and provider for his people. Just as a good king would care for his subjects and defend them from harm, so too does God care for his people and protect them from evil. However, in the Ancient Near East, the nations appointed human kings over the people. Kings were often seen as representatives of their gods. This was because kings were believed to have been chosen by the gods to rule on their behalf.

Kings were also responsible for carrying out the will of the gods and for maintaining the cosmic order. This belief in the divine nature of kingship was widespread in the ancient Near East.²¹⁷ For example, in ancient Egypt, the pharaoh was considered to be the son of the sun god Ra. He was also believed to be the embodiment of Horus, the sky god. In ancient Mesopotamia,

²¹⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 578.

²¹⁷ Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 1-2.

the king was considered to be the high priest of the chief god of the city-state. He was also believed to be the mediator between the gods and humanity. The belief in the divine nature of kingship also had a number of consequences for the way that kings were treated. Kings were often worshipped as gods, and they were given the best of everything. They lived in luxurious palaces, had access to the best food and clothing, and were served by a large number of attendants. This model of kingship is widespread in West Africa even to date.²¹⁸

For example, the practice of burying people with kings to serve them after death was widespread in West Africa, dating back to at least the 5th century BCE. It was believed that the king was a divine figure, and that his retainers would continue to serve him in the afterlife. This practice was most common among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, but it was also found among other West African groups, such as the Ashanti and the Akan. There are a number of reasons why this practice was so common in West Africa.²¹⁹ One reason is that the king was seen as the embodiment of the state and the people. When he died, it was important to ensure that he was properly buried and that his retainers would continue to serve him in the afterlife. This would help to maintain the stability and order of the kingdom. Another reason for this practice is that West Africans believed in an afterlife that was very similar to the living world. In the afterlife, the king would need the same things that he needed in life, such as food, clothing, and attendants. By burying his retainers with him, the king was ensured that he would have everything he needed in the afterlife.

²¹⁸ Toyin Lawal, *The Hundred Gestures of Eshu: Sacred Yoruba Poetry* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020). 64.

²¹⁹ Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Yoruba Cosmology and the Practice of Burying Kings with Their Retainers," *African Arts* 24, no. 2 (1991): 52-57.

While these practices were common among the nations, the Bible prohibited such inhumane behavior. It is important to note here that this distinction between the biblical view of kingship and the practices of the nations affirms why going back to WATR increases can increase human exploitations. The Bible later allowed Israel to have kings; however, the Bible also teaches that kings are not absolute rulers. They are subject to God's authority, and they are accountable to him for their actions. The Bible also criticizes kings who abuse their power or who lead their people astray.

God as a King, Rejected.

“And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” (1 Sam. 8:7, ESV). This verse occurs in the context of the Israelites' request for a king to rule over them, as they saw the neighboring nations with human kings and desired one for themselves. In response to the people's request, God instructs Samuel to listen to their voice and grant them a king. However, it is essential to note that God's response carries a sense of divine resignation or accommodation rather than enthusiastic approval.²²⁰ The establishment of a monarchy was a significant departure from the theocratic system in which God was the ultimate ruler, and the judges acted as His appointed leaders. The people's request is seen as a rejection of God's direct governance.²²¹ Before analyzing Israel's request for a king and God's response, a survey of the kingship motif in relation to Israel is important.

²²⁰ Katherine Lang, *Putting God on Trial: The Story of the Book of Judges in Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11-30.

²²¹ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, vol. 10, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 75-76.

Israel as the people of God were called to be under the direct rule of YHWH so they can show the nations what YHWH requires. Their relationship with God was intended to make them unique from all the other nations. “Therefore, be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?” (Deut. 4:6-8, ESV). These verses underscore the unique relationship between the Israelites and their God, Yahweh, and the profound implications of living in obedience to His commandments. Moses admonishes the Israelites to carefully observe and obey God's statutes, recognizing that their adherence to His laws would serve as a testimony to the nations surrounding them.

Although God called Israel to be under him, He continuously gave them human leaders to represent His rule and promised them to give them a king. “When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother” (Deut. 17:14-15, ESV). These verses provide guidance to the Israelites on the establishment of a monarchy within their nation as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. Moses anticipates a time when the Israelites would desire to have a king like the surrounding nations, and he sets forth specific criteria for the selection of a king. Moses instructs the Israelites to appoint a king whom the Lord their God chooses. This emphasizes the importance of seeking divine guidance and submission to God's sovereignty in

the selection of leadership. The king was not to be chosen based on human standards or preferences but on God's divine will. This requirement acknowledges that the ultimate authority and rulership belong to God, and the king serves as His representative and steward over the nation.

Contrary to what Moses instructed, Israel is seen making a request for a king of their own choosing. Below is the exposition of the consequences and challenges that arose from the appointment of a king in Israel of their choosing.

Verse 10: " So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him." This verse emphasizes the role of the prophet Samuel as a faithful intermediary between the people and God. Samuel faithfully communicates the message he received from the Lord to the Israelites who were clamoring for a king. The people had approached Samuel with the request for a king to rule over them, desiring to be like the surrounding nations. Samuel, as a prophet of God, fulfills his role by conveying God's response to their request. He does not manipulate or distort the message but presents it in its entirety, ensuring that the people understand the implications of their desire for a king. This verse underscores Samuel's obedience to God and his commitment to speaking truthfully, even when delivering a message that may not be well-received by the people.

Verse 11: " He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots.'" Here, Samuel begins to describe the potential consequences of having a human king. Samuel warns the Israelites about the behavior of the king they are requesting. He predicts that the king will conscript their sons into service for his own purposes. Specifically, the king will draft their sons to serve as charioteers and horsemen, as well as runners who will precede his

chariots in military processions. This prediction underscores the extent of the king's authority and control over the lives of the Israelite people. The king will not only demand allegiance and obedience but will also require their sons to serve in his military campaigns, using them as instruments of his power and expansion. It highlights the dangers of centralized authority and the loss of individual freedoms and autonomy under a monarchy. Additionally, it foreshadows the hardships and sacrifices that the Israelites will endure as a result of their desire for a king, ultimately leading to their regret and disillusionment in later chapters of 1 Samuel.

Verse 12: "And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots." The passage continues to outline the king's actions, highlighting his consolidation of power. Here, Samuel emphasizes the extent of the king's authority and control over the people. The king will establish a hierarchical military structure, appointing commanders to oversee thousands and fifties within his army. This organizational system reflects the king's desire to maintain a strong and centralized military force, ensuring his dominance and security over the nation. Samuel reveals that the king will conscript laborers to work his fields and manage agricultural tasks such as plowing and harvesting. This highlights the king's exploitation of the land and resources of the Israelites for his own benefit, as he appropriates their labor for agricultural production to sustain his household and kingdom. Additionally, Samuel mentions that some of the people will be tasked with manufacturing implements of war and equipment for the king's chariots. This underscores the king's prioritization of military power and expansion, as he invests in the production of weapons and military technology to strengthen his army and assert his dominance over neighboring nations.

Verse 13: " He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers." This verse underscores the extent of the king's control over the lives of the Israelite people, particularly their women. By taking their daughters to serve in these capacities, the king not only exercises authority over their labor but also disrupts traditional family structures and societal norms. The daughters of Israel would be compelled to leave their homes and families to work in the service of the king, possibly in distant locations, further alienating them from their communities. Moreover, the roles assigned to these daughters - perfumers, cooks, and bakers - highlight the domestic and menial nature of the tasks they would be expected to perform. These positions are typically associated with servitude and low social status, indicating the degradation and loss of dignity that would be experienced by the Israelite women under the king's rule.

Verse 14: "He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants." This verse underscores the extent of the king's power and authority over the people's possessions. The "best" of their lands, representing the most fertile and productive areas, will no longer be under the ownership and stewardship of the individual Israelites. Instead, they will be appropriated by the king and allocated to his servants, effectively consolidating wealth and resources within the royal court. This action by the king not only results in economic inequality among the Israelites but also infringes upon their ancestral inheritance and livelihoods. The confiscation of their lands deprives them of their means of sustenance and self-sufficiency, as well as their connection to the land promised to them by God.

Verse 15: " He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants." In this verse, Samuel continues his warning to the Israelites about the consequences of having a king. Here, he specifically mentions the king's imposition of a tithe, or a tenth, on the agricultural produce of the land. The king will levy a tax on the Israelites'

grain harvest and vineyards, taking a portion of their agricultural yield for his own purposes.

This tithe represents a significant portion of the people's livelihood, as grain and vineyards were essential for sustenance, trade, and religious offerings. Samuel explains that the king will not keep the entire tithe for himself but will distribute it among his officials and attendants. This reflects the hierarchical structure of the king's administration, where resources are allocated to support the king's court and bureaucracy.

Verse 16: " He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work." The king's authority extends to labor and servitude. Not only will the king conscript their sons into military service, but he will also appropriate their male and female servants for his own purposes. Additionally, the king will seize the best of their young men and donkeys, assigning them to various tasks and projects to serve his interests. This verse underscores the heavy burden that the monarchy will place upon the Israelites, as their labor and possessions are commandeered by the king for his own benefit. It reflects the oppressive nature of kingship and the loss of autonomy and freedom that the Israelites will experience under the rule of a human monarch.

Verse 17: " He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves." The passage concludes by emphasizing the extent of the king's demands. Not only will he levy a tenth of their agricultural produce, but he will also claim a tithe of their flocks, including sheep and cattle. This further diminishes the wealth and resources of the Israelites, as they are compelled to surrender a portion of their livestock to the king's administration. Moreover, the verse warns of a significant consequence: the Israelites themselves will become slaves to the king. By imposing such heavy taxation and conscription, the king will effectively subject the people to servitude and bondage, depriving them of their freedom and autonomy. This stark

warning serves as a sobering reminder of the potential consequences of seeking human kingship over divine sovereignty.

Verse 18: "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." This verse carries a profound warning. Samuel prophesies that the Israelites will eventually regret their decision to demand a king. Despite their initial enthusiasm for a monarchy, they will come to realize the heavy burdens and oppression that come with kingship. The king they longed for will become a source of suffering and hardship for them, leading them to cry out in distress. Furthermore, Samuel reveals the divine response to the Israelites' cry for help in the face of their king's tyranny. The Lord declares that He will not heed their pleas for deliverance on account of the king they chose. This reflects the principle of divine discipline and consequences for disobedience. By rejecting God's sovereignty and seeking a human king, the Israelites will forfeit the divine protection and intervention they previously enjoyed.

First Samuel 8:10-18 provides a detailed exposition of the potential consequences of the people's request for a human king. The passage highlights the king's authority in conscripting people, confiscating property, imposing taxation, and subjecting the people to servitude. It serves as a cautionary tale about the implications of human governance and the tension between divine sovereignty and earthly authority. Despite Samuel's warning, the Israelites persist in their demand for a king, ultimately rejecting God's sovereignty over them. This decision reflects a lack of trust in God's provision and a desire to emulate the surrounding nations rather than remain faithful to their unique identity as the chosen people of God. It is important to note here that the description above is fitting for kings in West Africa. From the passage, the step to avoid all these was to stay under God as the king.

There are other numerous scriptures that condemn oppression and exploitation. For example, verses from Amos 5:11-12 and Isaiah 10:1-4 both address themes of social injustice, exploitation, and the abuse of power. These passages are from the prophetic books of the Old Testament, and they call attention to the consequences of such actions while emphasizing the importance of justice and righteousness. The prophet Amos delivers a stern rebuke to the wealthy and powerful in Israel. He accuses them of oppressing the poor and exploiting them for their own gain. The wealthy elite are depicted as trampling on the rights and dignity of the poor, extracting excessive taxes and unjustly depriving them of their rightful share of resources. Despite their material prosperity and luxurious lifestyles symbolized by the construction of elaborate houses and vineyards, Amos warns them of impending judgment. Their ill-gotten wealth and extravagant possessions will ultimately bring them no satisfaction or security. Similarly, Isaiah issues condemnation of social injustice and oppression. It highlights the responsibility of leaders and authorities to govern with justice and righteousness and warns of the dire consequences of using power to exploit and oppress the vulnerable. The passage underscores the certainty of divine judgment and calls for repentance and reform in the pursuit of justice and compassion.

Both of these passages emphasize the ethical and moral imperative of caring for the marginalized and vulnerable in society while denouncing those who perpetrate injustice and exploitation. They underscore the divine expectation for righteousness, justice, and compassion, serving as powerful reminders of the consequences that result from social oppression and the abuse of power. Prophets like Amos and Isaiah consistently call for repentance, transformation, and a return to ethical conduct and the pursuit of justice in the face of such moral failings.

Now to answer the question, why slavery is in the Bible? “Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also, the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions’” (Gen. 15:13-14, NKJV). This is one of the first examples of hints of servitude in the Bible. In this verse, God foretells to Abram the future hardships and oppression that his descendants will endure. He informs Abram that his descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, enduring a period of enslavement and mistreatment for four hundred years. This prophecy foreshadows the Israelites' later enslavement in Egypt under Pharaoh, as recounted in the book of Exodus.²²² It emphasizes the importance of God's providential plan for the nation of Israel, even in the midst of suffering and adversity. He promises to intervene on their behalf and punish the nation that oppresses them. This punishment ultimately culminates in the exodus from Egypt, where God delivers the Israelites from slavery with miraculous signs and wonders. Additionally, God promises that the Israelites will not leave empty-handed but will come out with great possessions, symbolizing the abundance and blessings that accompany their liberation. An analysis of the fulfillment of this prophecy gives readers a baseline of understanding the cause of slavery.

Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers years before. Through a series of divinely orchestrated events, Joseph rose to power in Egypt, becoming second only to Pharaoh himself. Under his leadership, Egypt thrived during the years of plenty, storing grain to sustain them through the impending famine. When famine struck the land of Canaan, Jacob's family faced starvation. Hearing of Egypt's surplus, they journeyed there

²²² John W. Day, *The Book of Genesis in Context: Israel's Ancestral Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 202-205.

to seek provisions. Unbeknownst to them, Joseph, now a powerful ruler, stood before them.

Reunited with his family, Joseph welcomed them to Egypt and ensured their welfare.

Years passed, and the Israelites multiplied and prospered in the land of Goshen, granted to them by Pharaoh. But a new Pharaoh arose, who knew not Joseph. Fearful of the Israelites' growing numbers, he viewed them as a potential threat to Egypt's security. Pharaoh's heart hardened against the Israelites, and he sought to subdue them through oppression and slavery. They were forced into labor, toiling under the scorching sun, building cities and monuments to exalt Pharaoh's greatness. Despite their suffering, the Israelites continued to multiply, their resilience only fueling Pharaoh's fears. In a desperate attempt to control the Israelites' population growth, Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all Hebrew male babies at birth. When they refused to obey, he commanded that the infants be cast into the Nile River. Yet, even in the face of such cruelty, the Israelites persevered, their faith and hope unbroken.

The innerworkings on this story shows that at the heart of Israel's enslavement is the threat those posed to Egypt through the estimation of Pharaoh. True to what God warned Israel that kings would do, Pharaoh did just what God warned Israel about. The king of Egypt abused his power to exploit and abuse the Israelite. It is also important to observe that in this narrative, Africa was the beneficiary and Israel, God's possession was on the other end. This further proves that exploitation is not a racial thing, rather, an issue of the human heart. This also shows that God is not the instigator, rather, God knows that the fallen heart of humanity is prone to these tendencies. National conquest and military expansion are common through scripture. Before dealing with some examples of national conquest and exploitations, this part reflects on God's reaction to human-imposed slavery.

The Bible Provides a Fair Regulation on Slavery.

The recognition of the condition of the fall as a contributing factor to historical injustices like colonization and slavery is a perspective that many people find within the framework of Christian theology. The Bible does not deny the plausibility of exploitation, rather it provides a foundation for principles of equity, respect for humanity, and ethical conduct. Here are some key aspects of this practical guide based on biblical principles:

The Israelites were forbidden to enslave other Israelites (see Lev. 25:39-46). In this passage, God gives instructions to the Israelites on how to treat their slaves humanely and with compassion. God begins by saying that if an Israelite becomes poor and sells himself into slavery, he is not to be treated as a slave but as a hired worker or a sojourner. He is to be treated with kindness and respect, and he is to be released in the year of jubilee.²²³ God also commands the Israelites not to rule over their fellow Israelites with harshness. He says that they should fear God and treat their slaves with justice and compassion. This passage is a reminder that God is a God of justice and compassion. He cares for the poor and the oppressed, and he commands believers to treat them with kindness and respect.

The Israelites were commanded to treat foreigners with justice and compassion (see Lev. 19:33-34). This passage is a reminder that God cares for all people, regardless of their nationality or origin. He commands believers to treat foreigners with the same kindness and respect that one would want to be treated with. There are a number of reasons why God commands believers to treat foreigners with justice and compassion. First, it is the right thing to do. All people are created in the image of God, and therefore they have inherent dignity and worth. Second, treating

²²³ Dennis T. Olson, "Jubilee and Debt-Slavery in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden) 64, no. 1 (2014): 104-124.

foreigners with justice and compassion shows love for God and obedience to his commands.

Third, treating foreigners with justice and compassion helps to build a more just and equitable world. It serves as a timeless reminder of the biblical call to love one another and extend hospitality and kindness to those from different backgrounds or cultures.

Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies and to do good to those who persecute them (Matt. 5:44). The command to love one's enemies and pray for those who persecute you encapsulates the essence of Christian ethics and the message of grace, forgiveness, and transformative love that Jesus imparted to His followers. It challenges individuals to rise above the natural tendency to respond to hatred with hatred and instead seek to build bridges and foster reconciliation through acts of love and kindness.²²⁴ While the teaching addresses personal relationships and conflicts, it also has broader applications, including promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation in society and the world at large.

Paul instructs slaves and masters alike (see Eph. 6:5-9). Paul's instructions to slaves and masters were revolutionary for his time. In the Roman world, slavery was an accepted institution, and slaves were often treated very poorly. Paul's teaching that slaves should be treated with respect and that masters should treat their slaves well was a radical departure from the norm.²²⁵ Paul actively rejected slavery, as evidenced by his denunciation of slave traders in 1 Timothy 1:10, where he lists them among the lawless and rebellious. Although Paul had to navigate within the social systems of his time, he did not condone slavery. His true attitude towards those who trade human beings is evident in this verse. Moreover, Paul's eschatological perspective,

²²⁴ Brad H. Young, "The Love of Enemies in the Sayings of Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 4 (2020): 785-807.

²²⁵ Jouette Bassler, *Paul and the Roman World: Power, Religion and Everyday Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 142-144.

which shaped his vision for the church's future, is clearly expressed in Galatians 3:28, where he declares that in Christ, there is neither slave nor free, underscoring his belief in the equality and unity of all believers. While slavery is no longer an accepted practice, the teachings of Paul retain significant relevance in the modern world. His message can be applied to various relationships, including those with employers, employees, and colleagues. The core principle emphasizes treating everyone with respect and dignity, regardless of their social status or position within a hierarchy.

In a world where historical injustices and social inequalities persist, the Bible's teachings on these matters remain relevant and continue to serve as a moral compass, guiding believers toward a more just, compassionate, and loving society.²²⁶ These principles encourage individuals to put their faith into action by treating others with the dignity and respect that all people, as children of God, deserve. Ultimately, God will bring order and balance when all things are restored in the end. This promise of restoration offered hope to Israel in biblical time and continues to offer hope to the world today.

Israel's history as God's people were not free from oppression even after God delivered them from the Egyptian masters. Israel's rejection of God's rule attracted neighboring nations to take advantage and like them in many captivities.²²⁷ For example, the Assyrian captivity of Israel, also known as the Assyrian exile, was a significant event in biblical history that occurred in the 8th century BCE. It marked the conquest and deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel by the powerful Assyrian Empire. This event is documented in several biblical passages,

²²⁶ Daniel K.H. Cho, "The Bible and Social Justice: Hermeneutical Challenges and Opportunities," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 141, no. 4 (December 2022): 823-842.

²²⁷ Iain Provan, "1 Kings," in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 10. Provan argues that the cycle of apostasy and exile is a recurring theme throughout Israel's history.

particularly in the books of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and the prophetic writings of Isaiah and Hosea. The Assyrian captivity of Israel was a culmination of political instability, idolatry, and disobedience to God's commandments that had plagued the northern kingdom for centuries. The Israelites had strayed from their covenant relationship with God, turning to worship foreign gods and engaging in social injustice. Despite the tragedy of the Assyrian captivity, the biblical narrative also highlights God's faithfulness and mercy. Even in the midst of judgment, God preserved a remnant of faithful Israelites and continued to extend His grace to His people. The eventual return of the exiles and the restoration of Israel's land and identity are themes of hope and redemption found in later biblical writings, such as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

An additional example of Israel captivity is the Babylonian captivity. Babylonian Exile or the Babylonian Captivity of Israel, was another significant event in the history of ancient Israel, documented in the Old Testament of the Bible. It marked a period of exile for the Israelites, during which they were forcibly removed from their homeland and taken to Babylon as captives by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. This event had profound religious, cultural, and historical implications for the Israelite people and played a crucial role in shaping their identity and faith. The Babylonian Captivity had profound religious and theological implications for the Israelites. It was interpreted by the prophets as a consequence of the Israelites' disobedience and idolatry, as well as a period of divine discipline and purification (Jer. 29:10). However, it also served as a time of spiritual renewal and revival, as the Israelites reflected on their covenant relationship with God and sought to reestablish their faith and identity. But God continuously promised restoration.

In the Book of Joel where the prophet warns of a coming judgment due to the people's disobedience to God. However, in the midst of this judgment, Joel offers a message of hope and

restoration. “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you” (Joel 2:25, ESV). In this verse, God speaks through the prophet Joel to the people of Israel, promising restoration and renewal after a period of devastation caused by a locust plague. The imagery of the swarming locust, hopper, destroyer, and cutter symbolizes the relentless and destructive nature of the calamity that had befallen the land. The imagery of locust, hopper, destroyers, and cutter could represent the armies God sent to discipline them namely, the Babylonians, Persians, Greece, and the Romans.²²⁸ Connected to the restoration that the Joel the prophet said is the promise of God pouring out His spirit on all flesh (see Joel 2:28.)

The promise of restoration after these four empires is also captured in the book of Daniel. “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (Dan. 2:44, ESV).

This verse is part of a prophecy given by Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon concerning the future kingdoms and the ultimate establishment of God's everlasting kingdom. In the preceding verses, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a great statue representing different kingdoms, and Daniel interprets the dream for him. In Daniel's interpretation, he explains that the different parts of the statue represent successive kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. However, in the time of these kingdoms, God will establish His own kingdom, which will be eternal and indestructible. This kingdom will surpass all earthly kingdoms in power and glory, and it will never be replaced by another. The establishment of God's kingdom is a central theme

²²⁸ Gary A. Tuttle, *The Book of Joel: An Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2018), 78–80

throughout the Bible, representing the fulfillment of God's promises and the culmination of His redemptive plan for humanity.²²⁹ It signifies the reign of God's righteousness, justice, and peace over all creation, and it brings hope and assurance to believers that God's ultimate victory is certain. The promised restoration and answer for the oppressions of the world is found in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God

God's original plan as discussed earlier was for humanity to be under his rule. Humanity was put under God in the Garden but failed the test of obedience and dependency. From that time, God began working on his redemption plan with the goal of having his kingdom restored. God called Israel for the very purpose of representing his kingdom to the nations. "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Exod. 19:5-6, NKJV). In this verse, God is speaking to Moses and outlining the special role and identity that He has designated for the Israelites. God declares that they will be to Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This designation signifies the unique relationship that God intends to have with the Israelites. The phrase "kingdom of priests" suggests that all the Israelites will have a priestly function, serving as mediators between God and humanity. This role implies not only religious responsibilities but also moral and ethical obligations to uphold God's standards and principles. Likewise, the term "holy nation" emphasizes the Israelites' consecration and separation unto God. They are called to live lives that are distinct and set apart from the

²²⁹ N. T. Wright, *The Kingdom of God in Human History*, 2nd ed. (Fortress Press, 2013). 52.

surrounding nations, reflecting the holiness and righteousness of God. Unfortunately, Israel failed to represent the King to the nations.

Prophets like Isaiah envisioned a future messianic leader who would usher in a reign of justice and peace, further solidifying the connection between kingship and the Kingdom of God (see Isa. 9:6-7). The promise kingdom became an important theme close to the time of Christ. In the New Testament, Jesus announces the arrival of the Kingdom of God. However, his emphasis shifts from future expectation to present experience. He proclaims, "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), suggesting an inward dimension accessible through faith and ethical living. Jesus's teachings highlight compassion, forgiveness, and love as hallmarks of this present kingdom, demanding radical transformation of individual and societal values (Matt. 5:3-12). The Kingdom of God is not merely a physical or geographical realm but rather a spiritual reality that encompasses the entire cosmos. Jesus Christ, the central figure of the New Testament, frequently spoke about the Kingdom of God in His teachings, using parables and illustrations to convey its nature.

The Kingdom of God is characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). It is a realm where God's is fully realized, and His sovereignty is acknowledged by all creation. Jesus describes the Kingdom in His parables as a place of transformation and renewal, where the lost are found, the broken are healed, and the humble are exalted. For example, in the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32), Jesus compares the Kingdom to a tiny seed that grows into a large tree, illustrating its gradual expansion and transformative power. The growth of this kingdom was anticipated in the Old Testament. "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could

be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35, ESV). In Daniel's interpretation, he explains that these kingdoms would be succeeded by another kingdom, represented by a stone cut out without hands, which strikes the statue on its feet, causing it to crumble and be blown away like chaff by the wind. The stone then becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth. This verse symbolizes the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom over all earthly kingdoms and powers. The stone represents the kingdom of God, which destroys and replaces the kingdoms of this world. It emphasizes the sovereignty and power of God, who establishes His eternal kingdom that will never be destroyed or replaced.

To Israel, this kingdom promise was meant for them and were looked upon as a time where all their troubles will be seized.²³⁰ The Messiah will come in and deliver them from the hands of their oppressors. This expectation led to many looking for the Messiah to be a militant leader and not a servant. When Jesus preached about the kingdom, it led many to question about when and how this kingdom was going to come about. The disciples even ask the Lord, “So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6, ESV). The disciples' question reflects their expectation of a physical, earthly kingdom established by the Messiah, where Israel would regain its political independence and prominence. They were eagerly anticipating the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies that spoke of a coming kingdom ruled by the Messiah (e.g., Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 7:13-14). However, Jesus's response to their question redirects their focus. In the following verses (Acts 1:7-8), Jesus tells them that it is not for them to know the times or dates that the Father has set by His own

²³⁰ Gabriele Boccaccini, *Portrait of an Exile: Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and the Roman Conquest* (Fortress Press, 1992). According to Gabriele Boccaccini, the concept of a Messiah in Second Temple Judaism served as a powerful symbol of hope and liberation for the Jewish people, particularly during times of oppression. Boccaccini argues that the expectation of a Messiah who would restore the Davidic kingdom and end Israel's suffering was a central tenet of Jewish apocalyptic beliefs during this period.

authority. Instead, He instructs them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who will empower them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

On the Day of Pentecost, the arrival of the Holy Spirit upon a diverse group of people, as recorded in Acts 2, is understood by some Christians as the beginning of the promised kingdom of God. The Bible specifically mentions people "from every nation under heaven" being present (Acts 2:5). Following this event, Peter, one of Jesus's disciples, quotes a prophecy from the book of Joel (Acts 2:16). In doing so, Peter connects the miraculous speaking in tongues and other signs accompanying the Holy Spirit's arrival with the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. He is demonstrating to the crowd that what they are witnessing is not a random occurrence but a fulfillment of God's promises. The kingdom of God, finally is unveiled and it is made up all people from all nations under the heaven.²³¹ This also fulfils the imagery of Daniel 7:14. In this verse, Daniel describes a vision he had of the "Son of Man" coming before the "Ancient of Days" to receive dominion, glory, and a kingdom. The "Son of Man" is a Messianic figure, and this vision points to the ultimate triumph and reign of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The imagery of "dominion and glory and a kingdom" signifies the sovereignty and authority that God bestows upon the "Son of Man." This kingdom is not limited to a specific people or nation but is universal in scope, encompassing all peoples, nations, and languages.²³² It emphasizes the global and eternal nature of the Messiah's rule. Furthermore, the verse declares that the "Son of Man's" dominion is everlasting and will never be destroyed. This highlights the permanence and stability

²³¹ Craig A. Evans, *Spirit and Power: Acts in the Early Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 78-82.

²³² Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Letter of Enoch* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018). 52-60.

of God's kingdom, which stands in stark contrast to the transient and temporary nature of earthly kingdoms.

While emphasizing the present reality of the Kingdom, Jesus also anticipates its future consummation. He speaks of a final banquet where the righteous will gather (Matt. 22:1-14), hinting at a transformed world marked by perfect justice and fulfillment (Rev. 21:1-4). This future expectation fuels hope and serves as a motivator for ethical living in the present.

In West Africa, where many individuals face various forms of oppression, the concept of the kingdom of God serves as a beacon of hope both in the present and for the future. Amidst the challenges of poverty, inequality, social injustice, and political instability, the kingdom of God offers a message of liberation, empowerment, and transformation. Through the teachings of Jesus Christ, which emphasize love, justice, and dignity for all, the oppressed find solace and strength to endure their trials. Moreover, the promise of a future kingdom where God's righteousness and peace will reign eternally provides hope for a better tomorrow, free from the shackles of oppression and suffering. For people in West Africa, the kingdom of God offers not only spiritual comfort but also practical guidance and inspiration to work towards a society where all individuals are treated with equality, respect, and dignity. As they strive for justice and righteousness in their communities, they hold onto the hope of a future where God's kingdom will fully manifest, bringing about lasting freedom and flourishing for all.

Chapter 10: Biblical View on the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is one of the most profound and enduring challenges to faith and theology. It raises fundamental questions about the nature of God, the existence of suffering, and the coexistence of evil in a world supposedly created by an all-powerful and all-loving deity. For centuries, philosophers, theologians, and scholars have grappled with this theological dilemma, seeking to reconcile the reality of evil with the concept of a benevolent and omnipotent God.²³³ The Bible recognizes the existence of evil but points to the fall as the cause. The biblical view on the problem of evil is ultimately one of hope. The Bible teaches that God will one day overcome evil and suffering.

The Nature of Evil in the Bible

One of the most important things to understand about evil is that it is not simply the absence of good. Evil is a force that actively opposes God and his goodness. The Bible teaches that Satan is the source of all evil. “You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44, NKJV). In this verse, Jesus is addressing the spiritual condition of His opponents, emphasizing their allegiance to the devil rather than to God. He uses strong language to confront their rejection of truth and their alignment with the devil's deceitful nature. The reference to the devil as a murderer from the beginning likely alludes to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, where Satan deceived them into sinning against God, resulting in spiritual death and separation from God. This act of deception and rebellion initiated

²³³ Eleonore Stump, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 121.

the ongoing spiritual conflict between good and evil, with the devil as the instigator of sin and falsehood.

Satan is a fallen angel who rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. His goal is to lead as many people as possible astray and to destroy God's plan for creation. "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly" (John 10:10, ESV). In this verse, Jesus contrasts His mission with the intentions of the thief, who represents the devil or forces of evil. The thief's purpose is to bring harm and destruction to humanity, symbolized by stealing, killing, and destroying.²³⁴ This encompasses not only physical harm but also spiritual and emotional devastation. Jesus's statement highlights the fundamental difference between His mission and the destructive forces of evil. While the thief seeks to rob humanity of its joy, peace, and purpose, Jesus offers restoration, healing, and hope. He came to reconcile humanity to God, to offer forgiveness of sins, and to bring salvation to all who believe in Him.

The Bible also explains that evil is present in the world because of the fall of humanity. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, they brought sin and death into the world. The devil is considered the ruler of this fallen world. "Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Cor. 4:4, NKJV). Paul refers to "the god of this world," who is understood to be Satan or the devil.²³⁵ Paul describes how the minds of unbelievers are blinded by the influence of the devil, preventing them from recognizing and understanding the

²³⁴ Craig A. Evans, *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Evangelical Arminianism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 12.

²³⁵ Simon Gathercole, *The Present Evil Age: The Origin and Persistence of Evil in Galatians* (Marquette University, 2016), 12.

truth of the gospel – the good news about Jesus Christ. The devil's strategy is to obscure the light of the gospel, preventing unbelievers from perceiving the glory of Christ and the salvation that He offers. This spiritual blindness hinders individuals from experiencing the transformative power of the gospel and the freedom that comes from knowing Christ.

The devil's role as the ruler of the fallen world is further affirmed during the temptation of Christ. "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me'" (Matt. 4:8-9, NKJV). Satan tempts Jesus by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor in exchange for worship. The devil appeals to Jesus's human desires for power, authority, and glory, attempting to entice Him away from His divine mission and obedience to God the Father. By showing Jesus the kingdoms of the world from a high mountain, Satan seeks to impress upon Him the vastness and grandeur of earthly power and possessions. He presents a tempting offer of immediate and effortless dominion over all the kingdoms, enticing Jesus to bypass the path of suffering, obedience, and sacrifice ordained by God. It is quite clear that the devil caused humanity to sin.

From a biblical viewpoint, sin is defined as any thought, word, or action that violates God's moral law or goes against His will. Sin separates humanity from God, disrupts the relationship between God and His creation, and brings about spiritual death and eternal separation from God.²³⁶ But the Bible also specifies sins that do not lead to death. "All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death" (1 John 5:17, ESV). This verse underlines the universality of sin – all wrongdoing, or every act contrary to God's will and moral

²³⁶ Michael Reeves, *The Unseen King: Reality Reigns in a World Obsessed with Images* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 42.

law, is considered sin. Whether it is a small transgression or a serious offense, any deviation from God's perfect standard is classified as sin. However, the verse also introduces the concept of different degrees of sin. While all sin is serious and separates humanity from God, not all sin leads to spiritual death or eternal separation from God. Some sins may have temporal consequences or effects on this earth, but they do not ultimately result in eternal condemnation. The distinction between sin that leads to death and sin that does not lead to death is debated among theologians. On one hand, Bauckham²³⁷ interprets "sin that leads to death" as referring to unrepentant, willful sin that ultimately results in spiritual death and eternal separation from God. On the other hand, Witherington²³⁸ understands it as sin that leads to physical death, while "sin that does not lead to death" refers to sins that, although serious, do not have the same eternal consequences.²³⁹

Similarly, one can argue for many types of evil in the Bible, but this paper looks at it from five categories: moral evil, natural/ physical evil, spiritual, suffering, and social evil. Understanding these distinctions is essential for comprehending the complexities of the problem of evil and how it is addressed within the biblical narrative.

Moral evil is the willful disobedience of God's commands. It includes things like murder, theft, adultery, and lying. God's law is there to ensure harmony in societies and those who go against the law can harm their neighbors. Moral evil is primarily attributed to human agency. It results from the choices and actions of individuals who knowingly and willfully engage in behavior that is considered morally wrong. The Bible assumes that following God's

²³⁷ Richard Bauckham, *1 John: An Introduction and Commentary* (InterVarsity Press, 2019), 142-145.

²³⁸ Blaine Witherington, III, *1 John: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Intervarsity Press, 2003), 13-18.

²³⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 922-923.

standard is challenging to the natural human tendencies. The passage in Romans 7:15-25 offers a powerful description of the human condition. It suggests that all people are sinners and engaged in an internal struggle against a sinful nature. However, the passage also presents hope. It argues that through Jesus Christ, the Lord, we can be delivered from this state of being.

Natural/physical evil is suffering and pain that is caused by factors beyond human control, such as illness, natural disasters, and war. These events are typically considered "evils" because of the suffering they cause. Natural evil arises from natural causes and processes, often unrelated to human agency. Natural disasters and climate changes that lead to hardship are difficult questions for people in West Africa, but one that WATR cannot resolve. The curse of the ground in Genesis seems to be the only fitting answer for the causes of such natural disasters. Natural evils like wars are caused by human desire.

Spiritual evil encompasses malevolent or demonic forces, including Satan and evil spirits, that exert influence in the spiritual realm. It is characterized by a malevolent intent to oppose God and promote evil. Spiritual evil is associated with supernatural entities rather than human actions. It involves beings who rebel against God's authority and seek to lead people astray. The Bible presents spiritual evil through the character of Satan, who tempts Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11), and references to demonic possession and exorcisms in the New Testament (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39).

Suffering and Affliction: Suffering and affliction encompass a wide range of physical, emotional, and spiritual distress experienced by individuals and communities. This includes illness, disability, poverty, persecution, bereavement, and other forms of hardship and adversity. While suffering may not always be directly attributable to human sin or demonic activity, it is

often portrayed in the Bible as a consequence of living in a fallen world tainted by sin and spiritual warfare.

Social and Structural Evil: Social and structural evil refers to systemic injustices, oppression, and exploitation perpetuated by societies, institutions, and power structures. This includes discrimination, inequality, slavery, corruption, and oppression of the vulnerable and marginalized. The Bible addresses issues of social injustice and calls for the pursuit of righteousness, justice, and compassion towards the oppressed and marginalized members of society.

While the Bible react to all these nuances, certain conditions attached to any sin or evil called by human requires punishment. ““But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him” (Num. 15:30-31, NKJV). God gives instructions to Moses regarding those who sin defiantly or presumptuously, whether they are native-born Israelites or foreigners living among them. Defiant sin is described as a deliberate and intentional act of rebellion against God's commands, done with full knowledge and disregard for His authority. The consequences for such defiant sin are severe. The individual who sins presumptuously is said to blaspheme the Lord, showing contempt for His word and breaking His commands. As a result, they are to be "cut off" from the people of Israel. This likely refers to excommunication or banishment from the community, signifying exclusion from the covenant community and the blessings associated with it. The reason for this severe punishment is that those who sin presumptuously have despised the Lord's

word and have demonstrated a willful rejection of His authority.²⁴⁰ By choosing to disobey God's commands knowingly and defiantly, they bear the full guilt and responsibility for their actions.

Another nuance is some sins are not forgiven. In Matthew 12:31, Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.” He addresses the Pharisees, who accuse Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons. Jesus emphasizes God’s willingness to forgive those who repent and seek His mercy, but He specifically warns against the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will not be forgiven. This blasphemy involves a deliberate and persistent rejection of the Holy Spirit’s work, even in the face of undeniable evidence of divine intervention. The Pharisees, confronted with the perfect man, Jesus, whose words and works are flawless, still attribute His miracles to demonic power. Jesus’s warning underscores the gravity of such a rejection and the dire consequences of persisting in unbelief and hardness of heart. It serves as a sobering reminder to recognize and respond to the Holy Spirit’s work with humility, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Bible presents a complex perspective on evil, encompassing moral choices, natural occurrences, spiritual influences, personal suffering, and societal injustices. While specific consequences are associated with individual choices, understanding the various nuances of evil helps navigate its complexities and appreciate God's multifaceted response through forgiveness, restoration, and ultimate victory over evil. Beyond understanding, the Bible also calls to action. Recognizing the different forms of evil empowers believers to resist its influence, promote justice, alleviate suffering, and contribute to building a world that reflects God's goodness.

²⁴⁰ Dennis T. Olson, *The Message of the Old Testament: Narrative Writings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 222.

Ultimately, while the problem of evil remains a challenging mystery, the Bible offers hope and guidance for individuals and communities striving to overcome its darkness and embrace the light of God's love and justice.

Divine Sovereignty and the Problem of Evil

One of the most difficult questions in theology is how to reconcile the existence of evil with the existence of a good and all-powerful God. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign over everything, including evil. This means that God is in control of evil, even though he does not cause it. If God is all-powerful, why does he allow evil to exist? This is a question that has been debated by theologians and philosophers for centuries. There is no easy answer, but the Bible does teach that God is working to overcome evil and suffering.

Divine sovereignty is a foundational doctrine in many religious traditions, including Christianity. It asserts that God is supreme over all creation, possessing absolute authority, power, and control. This sovereignty extends to every aspect of existence, from the unfolding of cosmic events to the intricacies of human lives. Biblical passages such as Psalm 115:3 affirm God's sovereignty, declaring, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." Similarly, Isaiah 46:10 proclaims, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'" These verses highlight God's unrivaled authority and sovereignty over the universe.

The Bible is full of examples of God's sovereignty in the face of suffering. Joseph was a beloved son of Jacob, but his brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery. Joseph was taken to Egypt, where he suffered greatly. He was wrongly accused of a crime and imprisoned for many years. However, God was with Joseph throughout his suffering. He used Joseph's circumstances to position him for greatness. Eventually, Joseph was released from prison and

rose to the position of second in command in Egypt. Another example of God's sovereignty in the face of suffering is the story of the Exodus. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for many years. However, God delivered them from slavery and led them to the Promised Land. Even though the Israelites suffered greatly during their time in Egypt, God was ultimately victorious.

Theodicy is the branch of theology that deals with the problem of evil. Theodicy acknowledges the tension between the existence of evil and the belief in a divine being who is characterized by omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. It grapples with the apparent contradiction between the goodness of God and the reality of human suffering, natural disasters, moral transgressions, and other forms of evil in the world. Theodicy seeks to address questions such as: Why do bad things happen to good people? If God is all-powerful and loving, why does not He intervene to prevent evil and suffering?²⁴¹ There are various types of theodicies proposed throughout history, each offering different perspectives on the problem of evil and God's relationship to it. Some of the prominent theodicies include:

Free Will Defense: This theodicy posits that God granted humans free will as a necessary aspect of genuine moral agency and relational love. Consequently, humans have the capacity to choose between good and evil, and their misuse of free will leads to moral evil and suffering in the world. According to this view, God allows evil to exist as a consequence of human autonomy and moral responsibility.²⁴²

Soul-Making Theodicy: This theodicy suggests that God permits suffering and adversity in order to cultivate moral and spiritual growth in individuals. Through the experience of suffering, humans develop virtues such as compassion, resilience, empathy, and courage, which

²⁴¹ Jill Graper Hernandez, ed., "Theodicy," *Religions* 14, no. 1 (2023).

²⁴² John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-2.

contribute to their moral and spiritual formation. In this view, suffering is seen as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, and it serves a greater purpose in the divine plan.²⁴³

Privation Theodicy: This theodicy posits that evil is not a positive entity created by God but rather a privation or absence of good. According to this view, evil is the result of the distortion or corruption of God's good creation, rather than something directly willed or caused by God. Evil arises when creatures deviate from their intended purpose or fail to reflect the divine goodness.²⁴⁴

Eschatological Theodicy: This theodicy looks to the eschatological or end-times perspective to address the problem of evil. It suggests that God will ultimately bring about justice and redemption in the final consummation of all things. While evil and suffering may persist in the present world, they are temporary and will be overcome in the future fulfillment of God's kingdom.²⁴⁵

These are just a few examples of theodicies that have been proposed throughout history, and there are many variations and combinations of these approaches. Theodicy continues to be a subject of theological reflection and debate, as theologians, philosophers, and believers grapple with the profound questions raised by the existence of evil and suffering in the world. Some theologians argue that evil is necessary for the existence of good. Others argue that evil is a result of the fall of humanity. Still, others argue that God will ultimately overcome evil and suffering. This paper argues that God did not create evil but evil originated from free will. From

²⁴³ Michael J. Murray and Michael Rea, eds., *Philosophy and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 242.

²⁴⁴ Byron Belitsos, *Truths about Evil, Sin, and the Demonic: Toward an Integral Theodicy for the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), 8.

²⁴⁵ Zachary J. Hayes, *The Problem of Evil: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 101.

the devil's right to choose, he decided to compete with the creator and set his throne on high (see Isa. 14:13.) This decision rendered the devil unfit and turned him into a malevolent force, the adversary of God. This rivalry is not left unchecked, God is working to rid his creation of evil. However, while this world continues in chaos, Jesus invites all to join His kingdom while all the believers wait for the complete redemption of the earth.

Biblical Models for Addressing the Problem of Evil

Since the Bible practically accepts the presence of evil due to the fall of humanity, there are examples to show the world how to handle the problem of evil. For instance, the story of Job.

Job, a righteous and blameless man, experiences unimaginable suffering, including the loss of his possessions, health, and family. His plight initiates a profound exploration of the problem of evil and divine justice. Job's journey unfolds through a series of dialogues and monologues with his friends. The central question revolves around the nature of his suffering: Is it a consequence of his sin or an inexplicable part of a larger divine plan? Job, in his wrestling with suffering, vehemently protests his innocence and demands an audience with God to seek answers, but God does not give him a direct answer. Instead, God helped Job to see that he is sovereign over all things, even suffering. In the end, Job learned to trust God even in the midst of suffering.²⁴⁶ He realized that God's ways are beyond human comprehension, but that he is always good and loving (see Job 1-42). The story of Job demonstrates that even when faced with immense suffering and a lack of understanding about why God allows hardship, one can still choose to trust in God's ultimate power and benevolence. This trust empowers individuals to persevere through challenging times and maintain hope. It highlights the belief that God is

²⁴⁶ Kathleen A. Farmer, *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021), 171.

ultimately in control and working towards a greater good, even if that good is not immediately apparent.

The New Testament also teaches that suffering can be a means of spiritual growth and that it can be used to bring glory to God. “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put believers to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:3-5, ESV). The passage offers profound insight into the transformative power of suffering in the life of a believer. It begins by acknowledging that suffering is an inevitable part of the human experience. However, rather than viewing suffering as purely negative, the passage presents it as a catalyst for spiritual growth. The passage highlights a progression that occurs through suffering: it leads to perseverance, which in turn builds character, and ultimately results in hope. This progression illustrates how trials and hardships can refine and strengthen an individual's faith. Believers are encouraged to endure and persevere instead of being crushed by adversity, knowing that it produces positive spiritual qualities within them.²⁴⁷

The New Testament also teaches that one can participate in Christ's suffering in order to bring salvation to others. For example, the apostle Paul wrote, " Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church” (Col. 1:24, ESV). In times of suffering, one can unite their pain with Christ's suffering and offer it up for the salvation of others. This is a powerful way to respond to the problem of evil. Jesus, in His earthly ministry, offers a radical teaching on responding to suffering. He instructs His followers to love their enemies, turn the other cheek,

²⁴⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 293.

and forgive those who persecute them. This does not mean that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was insufficient, but rather that there is an ongoing work of redemption and reconciliation that Christ invites His followers to participate in. As members of His body, believers have the privilege and responsibility to continue His mission of love, mercy, and reconciliation in the world. The Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5-7) emphasizes the importance of mercy, peacemaking, and humility, embodying a response to suffering that transcends vengeance and retaliation.

God is just and that he will ultimately judge all evil. This belief assures that even if justice is not served in this life, God will ultimately rectify the situation. The Bible gives several examples of God's justice.²⁴⁸ For example, in the book of Genesis, God punished the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins. In the book of Exodus, God punished the Egyptians for enslaving the Israelites. In the book of Revelation, God will ultimately judge all evil and establish a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more sin or suffering. Trusting in God's justice can help believers to endure suffering and to maintain hope in the midst of evil. Believers know that God is seeing all that is happening and that He will ultimately bring justice to bear. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4, ESV). It depicts a future reality where God intervenes to alleviate all forms of suffering and sorrow. The image of God wiping away every tear symbolizes His compassionate care and comfort for His people. The promise of no more death, mourning, crying, or pain signifies the complete eradication of all sources of suffering and the establishment of a new, perfect order. This verse emphasizes the transformative power of God's redemptive work, ultimately

²⁴⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 712.

culminating in the restoration of creation to its original intended state. It serves as a source of encouragement and assurance for believers, reminding them of the ultimate victory of God over evil and the promise of eternal joy and peace in His presence.

Among all the ways to deal with evil, redemption is the best answer for God to rid evil from this world. The Bible teaches that God is working to redeem all of creation from sin and suffering and that he will ultimately establish a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more sin or suffering. This hope is grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth to die on the cross for sins of the world and to rise from the dead, conquering sin and death. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has made it possible for believers to be forgiven of sins and to have eternal life. The Bible teaches that God is working through his people to bring about his redemptive plan.²⁴⁹ Individuals can participate in God's redemptive work by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others, by serving those in need, and by working to create a more just and compassionate world. Even in the midst of suffering, one can have hope because God is in charge of all things (see Rom. 8:28). “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11, ESV). This verse comes from a letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent to the Israelites who were exiled in Babylon. Despite their circumstances, Jeremiah assures them that God has not forgotten them and that He has a plan for their future. The promise of God's plans to prosper them and give them hope and a future demonstrates His faithfulness and sovereignty even in difficult times. It encourages believers to trust in God's providence and to remain hopeful amid challenges, knowing that He is working all things together for their good.

²⁴⁹ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Meaning of Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 212-226.

In conclusion, despite the presence of evil in the world, especially in West Africa, there is hope and encouragement to be found in trusting God. The biblical narrative presents various examples and teachings that offer guidance on how to navigate the problem of evil and suffering. The story of Job teaches the importance of trusting God's sovereignty even in the midst of intense suffering, while the New Testament emphasizes the transformative power of suffering and the redemptive work of Christ. Moreover, the promise of God's ultimate justice and the establishment of a new heaven and earth provides believers with hope for the future, knowing that God will ultimately make all things right. Therefore, in the face of evil and adversity, believers in West Africa can find comfort and strength in trusting God's faithfulness, sovereignty, and redemptive plan, knowing that He is working all things together for their good and His glory.

Chapter 11: In Defense of the Bible

This chapter serves as a bridge between the defense and the conclusion with the aim of overturning some of the claims made by the advocates for WATR that were not specifically covered in the above; namely, the Bible is a tool for exploitation and Christianity is a “White Man’s Religion.”

The Bible is not a Tool for Exploitation

The Bible is often identified as a tool for exploitation. Some people argue that it has been used to justify slavery, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Others argue that it is a tool for white supremacy and colonialism. While it is true that the Bible has been used in these ways, it is important to remember that the Bible itself does not condone exploitation. In fact, it teaches many principles that are antithetical to exploitation, such as the love of the neighbor, the pursuit of justice, and the welcoming of the stranger.²⁵⁰

Interpreters have commonly used certain passages of the Bible to justify exploitation. For example, some people have used the passage in Genesis 9:25-27 to justify slavery. This passage tells the story of Noah cursing his son Ham for seeing him naked, and it goes on to say that Ham's descendants will be slaves to his brothers. However, it is important to note that this passage is part of a larger narrative about the consequences of sin. A careful reading of the passage does not say all Ham’s descendants but a specific one. “He said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers’” (Gen. 9:25, ESV). This distinction is important because the other children of Ham, which are Cush, Egypt, and Put, were not placed under this curse. Cush and Egypt are popular African countries hence, those who wrongly apply this

²⁵⁰ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, ed., *The Bible and the Politics of Exclusion: Essays in Religion, Power, and Domination* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 121.

scripture make the case of Africans cursed to serve others. This is not only wrong but bad hermeneutics. Instead, it conveys a narrative about Noah and his sons that one can interpret in a more inclusive and positive light.

The Bible has also been used to justify colonialism and imperialism. Some people have argued that the Bible teaches that Christians have a duty to spread their religion to the rest of the world, even if it means using force. However, this is a misinterpretation of the Bible. The Bible teaches that the gospel should be shared through love and compassion, not through violence or coercion. While it is true that the Bible has been used to justify exploitation, it is important to remember that the Bible itself does not condone exploitation. In fact, it teaches many principles that are antithetical to exploitation. When the Bible is interpreted correctly, it is a powerful tool for liberation and empowerment.

At its core, the Bible offers a message of love, compassion, justice, and redemption. It presents narratives of God's faithfulness, mercy, and grace towards humanity, inviting individuals to cultivate a relationship with the Divine and live according to His will. The teachings of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament, emphasize the importance of humility, servanthood, forgiveness, and selflessness.²⁵¹ These principles are intended to foster unity, empathy, and mutual respect among believers and guide their interactions with others.

Moreover, the Bible provides principles and guidelines for ethical decision-making and social responsibility. The Ten Commandments, found in the Old Testament (Exod. 20:1-17), outline fundamental moral precepts such as honoring one's parents, respecting human life, and refraining from theft, adultery, and false witness. In the New Testament, Jesus expands upon

²⁵¹ David N. Freedman, *The Biblical Canon: Three Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 102-103.

these teachings, emphasizing the importance of love for God and neighbor as the foundation of ethical living (Matt. 22:37-40). Additionally, the apostle Paul calls believers to live in harmony with one another, bearing one another's burdens and seeking the welfare of others (Rom. 12:9-21, Gal. 6:2).

Furthermore, the Bible's narrative of redemption and reconciliation offers hope and healing to those who have been exploited or oppressed. Jesus Christ, through his sacrificial death and resurrection, offers forgiveness, redemption, and new life to all who repent and believe in him (John 3:16, Rom. 5:8).²⁵² This message of salvation extends to people of every nation, race, and background, breaking down barriers of division and promoting unity in Christ (Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:14-18).

In conclusion, the claim that the Bible is a tool for exploitation is a misinterpretation of its teachings and message. The Bible consistently promotes justice, compassion, protection of the vulnerable, and ethical conduct. It serves as a beacon of hope for those seeking to confront and eradicate exploitation in all its forms. The Bible, when understood in its true context, stands as a timeless source of spiritual guidance, justice, and empowerment, refuting the misconception that it is a tool for exploitation. The Bible condemns exploitation and oppression in all its forms and calls believers to advocate for righteousness and peace. By adhering to the core principles of the Bible and striving to live out its teachings with integrity and humility, individuals and communities can resist exploitation and work towards a more just, compassionate, and harmonious world.

²⁵² Christopher J. Wright, *The Message of Redemption: Communicating the Gospel in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 121-122.

Christianity is not a “White Man’s Religion.”

The misconception that Christianity is a "White Man’s Religion" is not only inaccurate but also ignores the rich diversity and multiculturalism inherent in the faith's origins and development. Christianity's roots trace back to the Middle East, where it was founded by Jesus Christ, a Jewish man from Palestine. From its inception, Christianity was a diverse movement that welcomed individuals from various ethnic backgrounds into its fold. The early Christian community consisted of Jews and Gentiles, reflecting the inclusive nature of Jesus’s teachings.

At its core, Christianity conveys a message of inclusivity. Jesus’s teachings emphasized love, forgiveness, and salvation for all people, regardless of their ethnicity or background. His message transcended cultural boundaries and welcomed individuals from all walks of life. Christianity's appeal extends far beyond any single racial or ethnic group. Throughout its history, it has spread to all corners of the globe, adapting to the unique cultures and traditions of each region. It has been embraced by people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Africans, Asians, Native Americans, and many others.²⁵³ The New Testament, for instance, recounts the early spread of Christianity to different regions and the inclusion of individuals from various cultural backgrounds. The Apostle Paul's ministry, for example, was marked by his outreach to Gentiles, emphasizing the universal nature of the faith.

Throughout history, Christianity has spread to every corner of the globe, adapting to the unique cultural contexts and traditions of each region. It has been embraced by people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Africans, Asians, Native Americans, and others. The

²⁵³ David W. Bebbington, "The Social World of the New Testament," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 50-51.

missionary efforts of early Christians, such as the Apostle Paul, played a significant role in spreading the faith to different cultures and societies, highlighting its universal appeal.

Ultimately, the essence of Christianity lies not in one's race or ethnicity but in a personal relationship with God and a commitment to the teachings of Jesus. The faith transcends physical attributes and emphasizes the transformation of the heart and soul. The misconception that Christianity is a "White Man's Religion" is a gross oversimplification that fails to account for its diverse origins, universal message of inclusivity, and appeal to people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.²⁵⁴ The true essence of Christianity is a faith that transcends cultural boundaries, embracing all who seek spiritual salvation and a relationship with God.

In conclusion, dismissing Christianity as a "White Man's Religion" not only disregards its historical and cultural complexities but also undermines its core message of universal love and acceptance. From its diverse origins in the Middle East to its global reach and embrace by individuals from countless ethnicities, Christianity has always defied narrow definitions. While there have been regrettable moments of exclusion and misuse within the faith, its core teachings emphasize the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their race or background. Recognizing Christianity's rich tapestry of cultures and its unwavering commitment to inclusivity is crucial for dismantling harmful stereotypes and fostering interfaith understanding. By moving beyond simplistic labels and embracing the true essence of the faith, one can build bridges of respect and dialogue, recognizing the shared humanity that binds all together.

²⁵⁴ Amy Laura Carter, *Jesus and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 62-68.

The Case for Proper Hermeneutics in West Africa

Across West Africa, a worrying trend emerges: young people are losing interest in Christianity. One crucial factor contributing to this decline is the widespread use of flawed hermeneutical approaches when interpreting the Bible. When the Bible is misinterpreted or misunderstood due to flawed hermeneutical principles, it can lead to confusion and disillusionment, especially among the youth who are seeking truth and meaning in their lives. This paper has dealt with the effects of flawed interpretations, stating that:

Interpreting the Bible through the lens of WATR, often framed as "better," creates confusion and undermines the unique message of Christianity. Instead of fostering understanding, it sets up an unnecessary competition, neglecting the potential for interfaith dialogue and cultural enrichment. Moreover, framing the Bible as a tool for exploitation ignores its historical context and distorts its core message of love, compassion, and liberation. These narrative fuels mistrust and alienation, turning young people away from a faith they perceive as harmful. Lastly, struggling with the problem of evil, individuals might misinterpret scriptures to rationalize suffering or blame God. Proper hermeneutics equip believers with tools to wrestle with such complexities, fostering deeper understanding and faith instead of disillusionment. So, what can be done to help reverse these influences?

Moving forward, West Africa needs a shift towards interpreting the Bible with proper methods: this involves approaching the Bible with humility, openness, and a willingness to engage with the text on its own terms. Proper hermeneutics requires careful attention to context, language, genre, and theological themes, as well as reliance on sound scholarship and interpretation tools. Scripture ought to be analyzed within its historical, cultural, and literary context provides a clearer picture of its intended meaning, preventing misinterpretations and

promoting informed application. Engaging in open dialogue with diverse perspectives, including other faith traditions, enriches interpretations and fosters mutual understanding.²⁵⁵ This collaborative approach breaks down barriers and fosters deeper engagement with the text. Approaching the Bible with a responsible approach combines respect for the sacred text with critical thinking skills, allowing for interpretations that are both faithful and relevant to contemporary contexts.

In conclusion, having a proper hermeneutic approach to interpreting the Bible is crucial in West Africa to counter the decline of interest among young people, address misinterpretations influenced by cultural biases, and ensure accurate understanding of biblical truths. By adhering to proper hermeneutical principles, individuals can deepen their faith, cultivate spiritual maturity, and contribute to the growth and vitality of Christian communities in West Africa.

²⁵⁵ Tuesday Adamo, "The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutic(s)," *OTE* 28, no. 1 (2015): 109–128.

Chapter 12 – Final Arguments

This dissertation explored the sophisticated relationship between the history of colonization, the problem of evil, the ATR worldview, and their collective impact on biblical hermeneutics in West Africa. By examining these multifaceted influences, the research has illuminated how they contribute to a decline in interest in Christianity among Millennials and Gen Z.

Recapping of Key Data Points:

The decline in interest in Christianity among West African youth reflects a complex reality shaped by historical, theological, and cultural factors. The research rightly identifies several key contributors:

Firstly, the history of colonization in West Africa has undeniably left deep scars, contributing to a pervasive mistrust and skepticism towards Christianity. The association of Christianity with colonial oppression has understandably fostered a sense of resentment among many Africans. Moreover, the misuse of Christianity to justify exploitation and subjugation has further fueled these negative perceptions. In response, the research provides valuable insights into the origin of evil and its manifestation in various forms of exploitation. By tracing these issues back to the fallen condition of the human heart, the research highlights the inherent moral struggle that humanity faces. Exploitation, injustice, and suffering are indeed human issues stemming from the sinful nature of individuals and societies?

In light of these findings, it is essential for individuals and communities to recognize their role in addressing the root causes of exploitation and injustice. While God's sovereignty provides assurance of ultimate justice, it does not absolve humanity of its responsibility to combat evil and promote righteousness. By aligning one's actions with God's justice and participating in His

redemptive work, one can contribute to the restoration of creation and the advancement of His kingdom.

The problem of evil is another significant factor that contributes to the decline in interest in Christianity among West African youth. In a region that has faced immense suffering and injustice, many young people are struggling to reconcile the existence of a loving and all-powerful God with the harsh realities of the world around them. The paper's examination of the problem of evil from a Biblical viewpoint provides a reassuring perspective on God's ongoing work to eradicate evil. By grounding the discussion in Scripture, the paper highlights the overarching narrative of God's redemptive plan and His commitment to overcoming evil through the power of the gospel. Central to this perspective is the recognition that while evil exists and manifests in various forms, God's kingdom is available to all people through faith in Christ. This foundational truth underscores the transformative power of the gospel to bring about personal and societal change. Through faith in Christ, individuals can experience forgiveness, redemption, and restoration, thereby breaking free from the bondage of sin and evil.

Furthermore, the influence of ATR on biblical interpretation adds another layer of complexity. The rich and diverse worldview of ATR, with its emphasis on nature, ancestors, and spiritual forces, can shape how individuals perceive and interpret Christian teachings. While this may lead to tensions with traditional Christian beliefs, it also offers opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding. By recognizing the validity of diverse cultural perspectives and engaging in respectful interfaith dialogue, one can foster greater harmony and cooperation within religiously diverse societies. The response aptly identifies the source of the perceived potency of ATR and emphasizes the exclusive role of Jesus Christ as the mediator between humanity and God. By pointing to Jesus as the sole pathway to salvation, the response highlights the

foundational tenet of Christianity and contrasts it with the polytheistic and idolatrous practices often associated with ATR. Furthermore, the response encourages individuals to turn away from idolatry and embrace the saving grace offered through Jesus Christ. This call to repentance aligns with the central message of the gospel, which emphasizes the need for individuals to acknowledge their sinfulness, turn away from false gods, and place their faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Implications of the Finding and Response

These findings have important implications for biblical hermeneutics in West Africa. It is essential to acknowledge the historical, cultural, and theological contexts that shape how people interpret the Bible. This requires a hermeneutical approach that is sensitive to the lived experiences of West Africans and that takes into account the ATR worldview.

While the lived experiences are different, the Bible provides a robust defense against the misconceptions that arise from the challenges discussed in this thesis. For example, the Bible teaches that God is a God of justice and compassion, and that he is working to redeem all of creation from sin and suffering. The Bible also teaches that all people are created in the image of God and that all loved by him.

A deeper understanding of the complex interplay between faith, culture, and history in West Africa is essential for both academic scholarship and practical approaches to cross-cultural engagement and religious dialogue. It is important to build relationships with West African Christians and to listen to their stories and perspectives. It is also important to be aware of the different ways in which the Bible is interpreted in West Africa and to be sensitive to these different understandings and offer a proper hermeneutical framework.

Conclusions

This dissertation has delved into the intricate dance between history, theology, and culture, uncovering their collective impact on biblical interpretation and the decline of interest in Christianity among West African youth. Recognizing the scars of colonization, the complexities of the problem of evil, and the richness of the ATR worldview is crucial for fostering a more authentic and engaging expression of faith in the region.

By acknowledging the bequest of colonialism and its contribution to mistrust, one can navigate towards open dialogue and reconciliation. Moving beyond historical baggage, one must emphasize the liberating message of Christianity, rooted in love, justice, and liberation. Addressing the problem of evil also necessitates a multifaceted approach. By grounding their understanding in Scripture, people can be assured of God's ultimate victory over evil. This belief can then motivate them to actively participate in combating injustice and fostering societal transformation. The ATR worldview, rather than a competing force, presents an opportunity for interfaith dialogue and mutual enrichment. Recognizing the validity of diverse perspectives opens doors for collaboration and a more inclusive expression of faith that resonates with the cultural context of West Africa. However, it is imperative to uphold the central tenets of Christianity. While acknowledging the diverse viewpoints within ATR, the role of Jesus Christ as the sole mediator between God and humanity must remain unequivocal. The call to repentance and faith in Christ, central to the gospel message, offers a pathway to forgiveness, reconciliation, and personal transformation.

In essence, this dissertation calls for a nuanced approach to biblical hermeneutics in West Africa—one that acknowledges the complexities of history, culture, and theology while upholding the transformative power of the gospel. By embracing a holistic understanding of

Christianity and engaging in constructive dialogue, individuals and communities can navigate the challenges of the modern world while remaining rooted in the timeless truths of Scripture. This journey requires continued scholarship, open dialogue, and a commitment to fostering a faith that reflects the love, justice, and transformative power of the gospel.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.
- Adamo, Thomas. *I Saw the Holy City: The Book of Zephaniah and Modern Ethiopia*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009.
- Adamo, Tuesday. "The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutic(s)." *OTE* 28, no. 1 (2015): 109–128.
- Adekunle, J. D. "The Impact of Bible Translation on the Development of the Yoruba Language." *Journal of African Studies* 39, no. 3 (2012): 391-406.
- Adeyemo, Tokunboh (Ed.). *Africa Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.
- Adogame, Afe. "Between 'Mission' and 'Pentecost': Identity Politics and Evangelicalism in Africa." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, no. 3, 2004: 373-399.
- Africa: An Encyclopedia of Culture and Society. Vol. 3. Toyin Falola and Daniel Jean-Jacques. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015.
- African Development Bank. *African Economic Outlook 2023*. Abidjan: African Development Bank, 2023.
- Alpern, Stanley J. "Unequal Exchange and the Colonial Economy of the Americas." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44, no. 4 (2014): 621-644.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1996.
- Akande, Isoke Oyinlola. "African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and the Negotiation of Religious Authority in Yorubaland, Nigeria." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 48, no. 4 (December 2018): 473-498.
- Akintunde, Olufemi. "African Hermeneutics in the 21st Century: Opportunities and Challenges." *Lausanne Global Analysis* 7, no. 2 (2018): 25-30.
- Akuchawu, Uchenna. "Nigerian Youth and the Reinterpretation of Christianity in the 21st Century." *Journal of Black Theology* 35, no. 2 (2023): 123-135.
- Appiah-Kubi, Paul. *African Theology in Transformation: A Critical Analysis of Its Contextual Applicability with Special Reference to the Writings of Kwame Bediako, John Samuel Pobee, and Jesse N.K. Mugambi*. Ph.D. diss., University of South Africa, 2000.
- Appiah-Kubi, Paul. "The Impact of Colonialism on African Theology." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 136, 2010: 53-70.

- Asante, Molefi Kete. *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1987.
- Assimeng, Max. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 2017.
- Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God*. Translated by John E. Rotelle. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998.
- Ayoade, J. A. A. *West African Traditional Religion*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 1983.
- Babalola, Dapo. "The African Hermeneutical Quest: Reading the Bible in the African Context." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 2010. 138, 38-54.
- Bauckham, Richard. *1 John: An Introduction and Commentary*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.
- Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics. Vol. 2, God and Creation*. Translated by John Bolt. Ada, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004.
- BBC News. "Niger coup: Military Overthrows President Mahamadou Issoufou." *BBC News*, January 20, 2023. Accessed from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60571222>.
- BBC News. "TB Joshua: Megachurch Leader Raped and Tortured Worshipers, BBC finds." *BBC News*, January 7, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67749215>. Accessed February 28, 2024.
- Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and Identity in Africa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Beek, Walter van. *Dogon: Secret Art of Mali*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1997.
- Belitsos, Byron. *Truths about Evil, Sin, and the Demonic: Toward an Integral Theodicy for the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023.
- Blenkinsopp, J. *A History of Prophecy in Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Blenkinsopp, J. *The Pentateuch*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- Bogle, M. J. *Accounting for Kente*. 2nd ed. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2001.
- Brown, Raymond E. *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke. Vol. 1*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Brubaker, Bruce. "African Religious Economics and the Moral Order of the Marketplace."

- Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 4 (2011): 643-665.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Witness*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Deuteronomy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Carter, Amy Laura. *Jesus and the People of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Carson, D. A. *The Bible in Christian Life and Practice: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020.
- Carson, D. A., ed. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Cho, Daniel K.H. 2022. "The Bible and Social Justice: Hermeneutical Challenges and Opportunities." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 141, no. 4 (December): 823-842.
- Clough, Paul. "Full Article: Created in the Image of God: Both Human and Non-Human Animals?" *Theology Today* 78, no. 1 (2021): 122-139.
- Clines, D. J. A. *The Theme of the Interpreter: Essays on the Interpretation of Old Testament Texts*. London: T&T Clark, 2000.
- Carroll, John T. *The Bible: A Historical and Theological Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2009.
- Craig, William Lane. *God and Free Will: The Problem of Evil and the Openness of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.
- Craig, William Lane. *In Quest of the Historical Adam*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009.
- Daniels, David P. "The Johannine Jesus and Judaism." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Second Temple Judaism*, 182-200. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Day, John W. *The Book of Genesis in Context: Israel's Ancestral Narrative*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011. Pages 202-205.
- Dewey, John. *How We Think*. New York: D.C. Heath & Co., 1910.
- DeWitt, Calvin B. *Caring for Creation: Christian Stewardship of God's Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Diallo, Isoke Amad. "The Will of the Ancestors and the Choices We Make: Reincarnation and

- Moral Responsibility in Yoruba Thought." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 48, no. 1 (2020): 122-147.
- Dube, Musa W. "African Traditional Religions and Christianity." In *The SAGE Handbook of Modern African Religions*, 14. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009.
- Dube, Musa. "Normativity and the Ancestral Moral Order in African Traditional Religions." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 47, no. 1 (2019): 132-154.
- Dube, Musa W. "Whither the Prophetic Voice in Africa? Pentecostal Public Theology and the Challenge of Social Transformation." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 28, no. 1 (2023): 122-144.
- Evans, Christopher A. "The Son as Revealer of the Father: Rethinking Johannine Christology in Light of Hebrews." *Journal for Theological Studies* 73, no. 1 (January 2022): 22–52.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- Ellingworth, Paul. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993.
- Engnell, Ivan. *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Introducing African Religions: History, Culture, and Experiences*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020.
- Evans, Craig A. *Spirit and Power: Acts in the Early Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019.
- Evans, Craig A. *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Evangelical Arminianism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022.
- Fabiano, Paulo M. *Theological Education and Leadership in Africa*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023.
- Fage, J. D. *A History of West Africa*. 6th ed. London: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Fairhead, James, and Melissa Leach. "Miscasting History: Language and Ideology in the Forest-Savanna Debate." *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 235-268.
- Falola, Toyin. *The History of Africa: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

- Farmer, Kathleen A. *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021.
- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.
- Feldman, Kenneth. "The Hermeneutics of Responsibility: Trust and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40, no. 1 (2012)
- Freedman, David Noel. *The Nine Commandments and Why They Matter: An Archaeological and Historical Approach*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.
- Freedman, David N. *The Biblical Canon: Three Perspectives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Gathercole, Simon. *The Present Evil Age: The Origin and Persistence of Evil in Galatians*. Marquette University, 2016.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul, and Paul M. Thompson, eds. *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Doctrine of God*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Gerrard, J. *A Woman of Legend: The Ethiopian Queen Sheba*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1996.
- Goldingay, John. "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Implications and Assumptions." *Theology Today* 66, no. 3 (2009): 293-304.
- Gooren, Holger. 2022. "Christianization and Indigeneity in the Americas: Negotiating Religious Pluralities." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 54, no. 03 (August): 523-544.
- Gyekye, Kwame. *African Theological Ethics*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.
- Hammond, Isolde. *The Spirited Gospel: Pentecostalism and Possession in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Hays, D. M. *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.
- Hayes, Zachary J. *The Problem of Evil: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2021.
- Heiser, Michael S. *Demonic Divine Presence: The Powers of Darkness in the Biblical World*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2018.

- Heiser, Michael S. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Cosmic Drama of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015.
- Hernandez, Jill Graper, ed. "Theodicy." *Religions* 14, no. 1 (2023).
https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/Theodicy.
- Hick, John. *Evil and the God of Love*. 3rd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Hume, Kathryn. "Witchcraft, Healing, and the Problem of Evil in Ghana." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 38 (3): 335-357, 2008.
- Hughes, David. "A Curse or a Blessing? Mining and Development in Ghana." *African Affairs* 118, no. 473 (2019): 563-586.
- Hurley, Kameron. "The Limits of Ancestral Protection: Rethinking Power and Divinity in West African Slave Narratives." *Journal of Religious History* 42, no. 4 (December 2023): 582-605.
- Ilesanmi, S. O. "The Yoruba Concept of the Supreme Deity." *Religion* 16.2 (1986): 143-164.
- Isenberg, Christine. "From Roman North Africa to Christian Nubia: The Evidence of Archaeology." In *The Cambridge History of Christianity in Africa*, edited by John Iliffe, 82-113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Ishola, Ayo. "The Concept of God in Traditional Yoruba Religion." *Studia Africana: Uppsala Journal of African Studies* 29 (2): 47-60, 2020.
- Isichei, Elizabeth. *A History of African Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Juang, Richard. 2010. "The Persistence of Tradition and the Negotiation of Modernity: A Re-examination of Pentecostal Growth in Rural Ghana." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 4 (December): 431-457.
- Kalu, Ogbu. *African Christianity: An African Story*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Kalu, Ogbu, ed. *African Christianity: An African Story*. Pretoria, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2005.
- Kato, Byang H. "A Theological Problem in Missions: The God of the African Traditional Believer." *International Review of Mission* 58, no. 231, 1969: 5-16.

- Karegeye, Jean-Pierre. "Religious Freedom and the Regulation of Religious Institutions in Rwanda: Navigating a Complex Landscape." *African Journal of Law and Religion* 10, no. 1 (2023): 123-142.
- Katongole, Emmanuel. *The Sacrifice of Praise: Singing the Biblical Psalms in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Kennedy, Brian D. "The Messiah's Inheritance and the Judging of the Nations in Psalm 82." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 4 (2014): 793-812.
- Kister, Meir Jacob. *King David in Jewish Liturgical Tradition*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1979.
- Klein, Ralph W. *1 Samuel*, vol. 10. 2nd ed. Word Biblical Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2012.
- Kobie, Kristin. *Belonging on Foreign Soil: A History of Catholic Missions in Africa*. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2020.
- Kostenberger, Andreas J. *Acts*. Baker Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Kurewa, John Wesley. "The Challenge of an African Hermeneutic of the Bible: A Zimbabwean Perspective." *Scriptura*, 1998. 66(3), 325-340.
- Kyomya, J. *Reading the Bible in Africa: Postcolonial Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Kyomya, Wilson Mutebi. *The Challenge of African Biblical Hermeneutics: A Case Study of the Baganda of Uganda*. Pretoria, South Africa: University of Pretoria, 1998.
- Laude, Jean. *The Arts of the Black World*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973.
- Lawal, Ishau. *Yoruba Religion in the Diaspora: Continuity and Transformation*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.
- Lawson, Rowena. "Memories of the Slave Trade: Rituals of Commemoration at Elmina Castle, Ghana." *History in Africa* 33, no. 2 (2006): 361-384.
- Levine, L. I. *The Ancient Near East in Pictures from the Collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000.
- Levtzion, Nehemia. *Ancient Ghana and Mali*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1973.
- Lucas, Maryinez. "The Persistence of Hereditary Service in Contemporary Benin." *Africa* 83, no. 4 (2013): 521-543.

- Mantle, David. 2022. "The Trinity and Social Relations: Rethinking Relational Models of God." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24, no. 1 (January): 98-119.
- Manala, Monica. *An African Womanist Reading of the Books of Ruth and Esther*. University of Pretoria, 2013.
- Mapangdol, Gloria D. "African Hermeneutics and Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation: New Challenges." *Scriptura*, 2012. 109, 321-331.
- Martey, Emmanuel. *African Religion in the Age of Globalization: Inculturation and the Quest for Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.
- Matory, J. Lorand. "The Trouble with the Word 'Religion': Reflections on Power, Pluralism, and the Study of Africa." *American Anthropologist* 102, no. 2 (2000): 286-305.
- Mbillah, Bernard. *African Theology in Dialogue*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969.
- McKenzie, J. L. *Amos: A Commentary*. Salem, OR: Westar Institute for Ancient Biblical Studies, 2000.
- McClain, Lisa. *The Paradox of Desire: Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Victorian Literature*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2019.
- Meyer, Birgit. *Missionaries, Morality, and Modernity in Africa*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Meyer, Birgit. "The Bible and African Traditional Religions: A Study of Reciprocal Influences." *The Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 3 (2002): 321-346.
- Meyer, Birgit. *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999.
- Miller, Joseph C. "The Significance of West Africa in the Transatlantic Slave Trade." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2020): 102-139.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018.
- Murray, Michael J., and Michael Rea, eds. *Philosophy and Christian Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Mwaura, Paul N. "Interpreting the Bible in Africa: Bridging the Gap between Historical Insights and Contemporary Hermeneutics." *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 29, no. 2 (2010): 139-153.

- Nkrumah, Kwame. *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. New York: International Publishers, 1965.
- Nthamburi, Zablon. *African Hermeneutics*. Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2006.
- Noll, Mark A. *The History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002.
- Ogbu Kalu. "The Hermeneutical Potential of African Christianity." *International Journal of Public Theology*, 2008, 2(2), 220-238.
- Ogundiran, Akinwumi. "Yoruba Cosmology and the Practice of Burying Kings with Their Retainers." *African Arts* 24, no. 2 (1991):52-57.
- Olupona, Jacob K. *African Traditional Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Olson, Dennis T. *The Message of the Old Testament: Narrative Writings*. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005.
- Olson, Dennis T. "Jubilee and Debt-Slavery in the Old Testament." *Vetus Testamentum (Leiden)* 64, no. 1 (2014): 104-124.
- Olupona, Jacob K. "Concepts of the Divine in African Traditional Religions." In *The Routledge Handbook of African Religions*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona, 11-28. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Opadele, Isaac Omo. "The Centrality of Asa: Reconceptualizing Harmony, Social Order, and Moral Personhood in Yoruba Ethics." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 1 (2014): 127-150.
- Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Oyebade, Adebayo. "African Traditional Religion and Christianity in the 21st Century: The Case of Nigeria." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39, no. 4 (2009): 465-479.
- Onyinah, Opoku. *African Charismatic Theology: The Impact of Charismatic Renewal on the Theology of the Church of Pentecost*. Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 2005.
- Oxfam. *Extreme Inequality in West Africa: Why It Matters and What Can Be Done*. Oxford: Oxfam, 2022.
- Pathfinders Justice Initiative. *Nigeria: Human Trafficking Factsheet*. Lagos: Pathfinders Justice Initiative, 2022.

- Paracka, Felicia E. 2018. "The Bible and Daily Life in Contemporary Africa." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 48, no. 4 (December): 486-512.
- Peek, Philip M. "Hermeneutics and the Re-Emergence of African Traditional Religions: A Critical Analysis." *Journal of Africana Religions* 8 (2): 123-148, 2023.
- Peek, Philip M. 2018. "Finding Religion in Everything: Towards a Phenomenology of Religious Multiplicity in Contemporary Africa." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 48, no. 4 (December 2018): 488-512.
- Peek, Philip M. H. 2020. "Missiologial Praxis in a Time of Religious Change: Engaging West African Traditional Religions in Interfaith Dialogue." *Missionalia* 48, no. 1 (March 2020): 132-149.
- Peek, Philip M. "The Ontology of Divination in West African Traditional Religions." *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 2 (2015): 193-220.
- Peel, John D. Y. "Religious Encounters: An Anthropology of Dynamics in Yoruba and Black Atlantic Traditions." London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- Porter, Stanley E. "Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (2005): 366-368.
- Provan, Iain. 1 Kings. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Porter, Andrew. *Christian Missions in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. *Christus Mediator*. Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018.
- Reeves, Michael. *The Unseen King: Reality Reigns in a World Obsessed with Images*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009.
- Reeves, Michael. *The Bible and Reality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021.
- Rifel, Felix. "The Hermeneutics of Conquest: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in West Africa." *Journal of African History* 64, no. 1 (2023): 1-22.
- Rogerson, John William. *The Book of Genesis*. London: Continuum, 2015.
- Sanneh, Lamin. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

- Sanneh, Lamin. *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012.
- Sanneh, Lamin. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
- Shaw, Rosalind. 2020. "Female Genital Mutilation in Africa: Debating Culture and Rights." *African Studies Review* 63, no. 3 (December): 127-149.
- Smith-Christopher, Daniel L., ed. *The Bible and the Politics of Exclusion: Essays in Religion, Power, and Domination*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021.
- Smith, Patricia R. "Reimagining Hermeneutics: The Role of Implication in Biblical Interpretation." *Theological Studies Online* 71, no. 3 (2010): 548-561.
- Stoller, Paul. *Healing Performances: The Anthropology of Indigenous Medicine in Amazonia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Stump, Eleonore. *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017.
- Sugirtharajah, R.S. *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.
- Taiwo, Olufemi. *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Tandy, D. *Bantu Migrations: Language, History and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Tate, Marvin E. *Psalms 51-100*, Volume 20. Word Biblical Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2011.
- Transparency International. *Corruption Perception Index 2021*. Berlin: Transparency International, 2021.
- Thompson, Jeffrey S. "Implication in Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Review." *Bible Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (2014): 112-124.
- Thornton, John K. *A History of West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Tuttle, Gary A. *The Book of Joel: An Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2018.
- Turner, David L. "Hermeneutical Implications of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: With Special Reference to Galatians 3:10-14." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009.

- Ukpong, Justin S. "African Christian Presence." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to African Christianity*, edited by Paul F. Knitter. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley Blackwell Publishing, 2019, 1-17.
- Ukpong, John S. "African Indigenous Churches and the Biblical Hermeneutics." *Journal of African Christian Thought* 11, no. 1, 2008: 45-57.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022*. Vienna: United Nations, 2022.
- Vaughan, M. *The Story of an African Independence: Nigeria, France and de Gaulle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Waltke, Bruce K. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-11*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.
- Wariboko, Nimi. "African Traditional Religions and the Problem of Evil." *Philosophia Christi* 5, no. 2, 2003: 369-382.
- West, Gerald O., ed. *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with Their Local Communities*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.
- World Bank. *Poverty and Equity in West Africa: Pathways to Inclusive Growth*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *Old Testament Theology*. Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Wright, Christopher J. *The Message of Redemption: Communicating the Gospel in the Twenty-First Century*. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.
- Wright, N.T. *Paul: A Biography*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018. Pages 123-127.
- Wright, N.T. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Meaning of Christian Life*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Wright, N.T. *The Kingdom of God in Human History*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Young, Brad H. "The Love of Enemies in the Sayings of Jesus." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 4 (2020): 785-807.
- Young, Brad H. "The Love of Enemies in the Sayings of Jesus." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 4 (2020): 785-807.
- Zenger, Erich, et al. "Psalm 82." In *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, edited by Klaus Baltzer, 328–37. Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2005.