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# The New Testament and Intercultural Exegesis in Africa

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## Introduction

**T**his article documents and reviews the rise and development of intercultural biblical exegesis in Africa, especially with regard to New Testament interpretation. It argues that this new exegetical tool was decisively launched by Justin S. Ukpong (1996), in an article introducing and applying the method of inculturation biblical hermeneutic. Jean-Bosco Matand (1998) embraced this method, with no reference to Ukpong. The method evolved into intercultural biblical exegesis/hermeneutic through the books by Antoine C.N. Cilumba (2001) and Chris U. Manus (2003). The present author has previously contributed to intercultural biblical exegesis, also viewing it as intercultural mediations (Loba-Mkole 2005a, 2005b). The first section of this article briefly presents different trends of biblical exegesis in Africa, while the second one deals with different phases of intercultural exegesis.

## Trends of Biblical Exegesis in Africa

The publication of *The Bible in Africa* (West and Dube 2000), which was a culmination of a project that started in 1995, seems to have marked a major turning point for biblical exegesis in Africa. This collective book with its 39 essays has shown not only the vitality of African biblical scholarship, but

also its particularity as 'a variety of ways that link the biblical text to the African context' (Ukpong 2000a: 11). On one hand, African biblical scholarship emphasizes the 'inclusiveness' in regard to interpretative communities (scholars and non-scholars, male and female, rich and poor, clergy and lay people, Christian and non-Christian). On the other hand, this 'inclusiveness' involves an extensive range of interpretative methods (historical critical studies, literary approaches, and new hermeneutics including bible translation theories and practices). In this variety of methods, inculturation or 'theologies of being' and liberation or 'theologies of bread' emerge as the main trends, and constitute the 'most persuasive paradigms' of African biblical scholarship (West 2000: 34–35). In fact, the ultimate goal of African biblical scholarship has been perceived as the willingness to be 'related to life' (LeMarquand 2000: 86) for the purpose of spiritual upliftment/deification (Loubser 2000: 117) and social-transformation/justice (Wafawanaka 2000: 496; Ukpong 2000b: 589; Dube 2000: 629). From these interrelated perspectives and depending on a particular vision, Africans approach the Bible as an 'unsafe book' (Carroll 2000: 198), 'a book of spiritual matters, not political or economic ones' (McEntire 2000: 253–54), a book of 'secret power' (Adamo 2000: 339), a 'political book' and a 'supreme guide in Christian life' (Dibeela 2000: 385), a 'powerful' book of the 'Word of God', or/and a 'book of devotion and norm of morality' (Ukpong 2000b: 588–89). Besides, through a research survey conducted in Port Harcourt (Nigeria), Africans pointed out central messages of the Bible as 'love and salvation, followed by obedience, humility and peace' (Ukpong 2000b: 589).

In the field of New Testament interpretations, biblical exegesis in Africa has taken a significant step forward with the publication of *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa* (Getui *et al.* 2001), a first outcome of the Hammanskraal Conference,<sup>1</sup> which took place as a post-conference to the 54th General Meeting of *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (SNTS), held at the University of Pretoria in August 1999. Peder Borgen, a former President of SNTS, described this conference as a 'necessary and important step', which 'set in sharp focus the basic question of the relationship between the Gospel and culture'. He underscored that the gospel must be rooted in the culture of a people, which, theologically speaking, refers to an incarnational aspect of the Christian message: 'At the Hammanskraal Conference', he argues, 'there was an awareness not only of this encounter between the Gospel and a particular culture, but also a realisation of the universal perspective of the Gospel: There is a basic aspect of "givenness" of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its interplay with culture and context' (Borgen 2001:1). As a matter of fact, the majority of Hammanskraal Conference papers focused on New Testament texts and African contexts. The latter rightly imply the promotion of an inclusive approach, open to all involved in the interpretation, translation and application of the gospel (Lategan 2001: 295).

A further development from the Hammanskraal Conference was the publication of *Text and Context* (Mugambi and Smit 2004). At this point, African contextual hermeneutics was enhanced by some specific methodological

approaches such as reconstruction hermeneutics,<sup>2</sup> rainbow hermeneutics,<sup>3</sup> and hermeneutics of *ubuntu*.<sup>4</sup> Beyond this particular book, different African biblical hermeneutics are also being investigated in terms of hermeneutics of liberation,<sup>5</sup> hermeneutics of engagement,<sup>6</sup> Afro-centric hermeneutics,<sup>7</sup> *Semoya* hermeneutics,<sup>8</sup> womanist hermeneutics,<sup>9</sup> developmental hermeneutics,<sup>10</sup> post-colonial hermeneutics,<sup>11</sup> storytelling hermeneutics,<sup>12</sup> and many more. These hermeneutics still need more practical handling, using specific portions of the New Testament texts or topics, though some have already started this long journey. The following section attempts to show how this challenge is being taken up in the field of inculturation biblical hermeneutics and intercultural exegesis or mediation.

## Inculturation Biblical Hermeneutics

### Ukpong and the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16.1–13)

Justin S. Ukpong (1996: 189–210) claims to have coined the term ‘inculturation biblical hermeneutic[s]’ to designate an interpretation derived from the methodology of inculturation theology. For him, the term ‘inculturation theology’ does not refer to a specific theological discipline; it rather indicates a hermeneutical process in theologizing that cuts across all theological disciplines including biblical exegesis. In other words, ‘inculturation biblical hermeneutics’ is about the application of the inculturation paradigm to biblical interpretation. There have been other works attempting to relate biblical religious cultures to African ones (cf. Ellingworth 1969; Dickson 1973; Naré 1986; Pungumbu 1992). The newness of inculturation biblical hermeneutics might reside in the fact that it explicitly seeks to interpret the biblical text from the present socio-cultural perspectives and make them the subjects of interpretation. Inculturation biblical hermeneutics acknowledges the sacred status of the Bible and its normative value for Christian life. Nevertheless, taking into account the status of the Bible as an ancient literary text, this method uses insights from historical analysis, and re-reads the text dynamically against the contextual background of the present reader. As a matter of illustration, the section here below will expose different steps of Ukpong’s inculturation hermeneutics of the parable of the shrewd manager (Lk. 16.1–13). He is willing to show how inculturation biblical hermeneutics does interpret a Scripture text. His interpretative process of Lk. 16.1–13 includes an analysis of the socio-cultural context of the reader, a brief overview of previous interpretations, the text and the historical context of the parable.

*Socio-cultural Context of the Reader.* Most West Africans, whose background has been chosen as the subject of interpretation of this parable, are palm producers and cocoa farmers. They continue living the world-view provided by their traditional cultures, whereby material wealth is regarded as

God's gift to the whole community, whereas the exploitation of others is seen as abnormal. However, with the influence of money-oriented economy taking over the barter one, farmers have become the prey of the middle-class traders who buy farming products at low costs and sell them at very high prices. At harvest time oil prices might go up and farmers cannot adjust the prices of their products accordingly. Yet, if oil prices go down, the farmers have to reduce the prices of their harvest. The West African farmer constantly lives in this context of exploitation, which is exacerbated by the weight of debts contracted with the international community.

*Some Interpretations of the Parable.* T.W. Manson (1971) has interpreted the manager of the parable as fraudulent but clever. It is not the manager's fraudulent behaviour that is held up for emulation but his genuine prudence to ensure his future security. Based on Near Eastern customs, where a salesperson's salary was included in the price of the merchandise, Joseph Fitzmyer (1974; 1985) understood that the manager's prudence consisted of cancelling his due remuneration. L.J. Topel (1975), in turn, argued that, like the father who, in the previous scene (Lk. 15.11–32), had forgiven his prodigal son beyond human standards, the manager has also forgiven his debtors beyond all expectations. K.E. Bailey (2000: 94) attributes a business setting to this parable, asserting that 'the most probable cultural setting for the parable is that of a landed estate with a manager who had authority to carry out the business of the estate'.<sup>13</sup>

*Reading the Text of the Parable.* The parable of the shrewd manager is found in the section about Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (9.51–19.27). In this section, Luke develops three important themes of discipleship, God's mercy and forgiveness, as he highlights that the kingdom of God is for the poor. The phrase *ἄνθρωπός τις ἦν πλούσιος* ('there was a rich man') in 16.1 connects this parable with other Lukan episodes where material wealth and riches are the object of Jesus' critiques (9.57–62; 10.25–37; 12.13–21; 15.11–32; 16.1–13; 19–31; 18.18–30; 19.1–10; 11–27). In its immediate context, this parable is sandwiched between two other parables, which explicitly mention the term 'rich man'. One of these parables criticizes the folly of hoarding material goods (12.13–21), while the other one exposes the eschatological punishment for the lack of generosity towards the poor (16.19–31). According to Ukpong, the *marshal* or the body of the story of this parable is made of vv. 1–8a while vv. 8b–13 form the *nimshalim* or moral comments. Rather than commending the prudence of a clever manager, this parable conveys severe critique of rich and unjust people, which include the rich man (16.1, 8a) and his shrewd manager.

*Historical Context of the Parable.* The parable of the shrewd manager depicts a situation where a rich man, probably the owner of a Galilean *latifundium*, entrusted his estate business to a manager. In the Greco-Roman world of the first century CE, such a manager had the power to give land loans repayable against harvest and with interest. He also had the power to liquidate debts and give reduction. From the text under consideration, it is clear that at the

time the manager was dismissed, the loans had not matured, since he had to call in the borrowers, not to pay what they had agreed upon earlier, but to get fresh bonds for payment at maturity. After being dismissed, he knew that he would no longer have the authority or be in a position to collect his transaction fees. He therefore simply cancelled them, acting within his legitimate duties. This was not a matter of the manager losing his fees or defrauding his master. Nevertheless, the master found his employee being 'unjust'. This reflects an understanding of justice within an exploitative economic system whereby whatever was to be paid by the poor was viewed as a due of the beneficiary. The same exploitative system accounts for the accusation formulated against the manager in terms of 'wasting' goods of his master, meaning he was not making enough profit for the boss. In the eyes of the farmers, the reduction of their debts by the manager might have been regarded as an act of justice and solidarity commended by the authentic world-view of Israel, where rich people were to share their wealth with the poor.

*Findings.* According to Ukpong, the lessons of the parable of the shrewd manager can be relevant not only for the farmer peasants of first-century Palestine, but also for the those of contemporary West Africa. In both cases, the farmers are the victims of the exploitative economic system. Farmers in the parable were exploited both by the manager and the rich man. Likewise, the middlemen traders and the economic organizations of rich countries impoverish the West African farmers today. After his dismissal, the manager acted as a hero of justice on behalf of the exploited farmers; likewise Christians of West Africa are challenged to reverse the oppressive structures imposed on the poor by the middlemen traders and the International Monetary Fund's Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP).

### Matand and the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15.1–35)

Jean-Bosco Matand (1998) wrote about inculturation in Acts 15.1–35 and Gal. 2.11–14, using inculturation hermeneutics as well.<sup>14</sup> On one hand, he distinguishes between exegetical reading and inculturation hermeneutics, the latter being regarded as a contextualized application of the former. On the other hand, he seems to be concerned about what Scripture can tell us with regard to inculturation hermeneutics.

*Exegetical Reading of Acts 15.1–35.* The episode of the council of Jerusalem is intercalated between the literary unit on the first mission of Barnabas and Paul in West Antioch (13.1–14.28) and that on the departure of Paul and Silas for further mission (15.36–20.38). It clearly belongs to a narrative literary genre and, accordingly, its interpretation requires a narrative analysis. Applying a narrative analysis, Matand divides this episode into three units: the starting point of the narrative (15.1–5), the development of the narrative (15.6–29) and the epilogue (15.30–35). The beginning of this narrative contrasts with the little rest that Paul and Barnabas have started enjoying in the company of other disciples in Antioch (14.27–28). Soon after, they were disturbed by the

teaching of some Judaizing evangelists who insisted on the circumcision of all proselytes. This caused a doctrinal dispute (στάσις), appealed for research of the truth (ζήτησις), and compelled Paul, Barnabas and others to take the matter (ζήτημα) back to the apostles in Jerusalem. Here, the argument grew tense, as some Pharisees defended the integrity of Mosaic Law. The deliberations of the Jerusalem meeting, which constitute the second and central part of the narrative, include the speech of Peter (15.7–11), the account of Paul and Barnabas (15.12), the speech of James (15.13–21) and the ‘turning point’ (15.22–29).

Based on his own experience of God’s wonders among the Gentiles, Peter concludes his speech by an open question as to why God should be tested and the Gentiles subjugated to an unbearable yoke, given that both Jews and Gentiles are saved through the grace of Jesus. Thereafter, Paul and Barnabas give full details (ἐξηγέομαι) about the signs and wonders (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα) that God had accomplished through them among Gentiles. The Greek σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα translates the Hebrew *אוֹתָו וּמוֹפְתָיו* (Deut. 6.22; 28.46; Neh. 9.10; Ps. 135.9; Isa. 20.3, etc.) and evokes the idea of God’s mighty deeds in favour of Israel, particularly the liberation from Egypt. The point here is to underscore that God has also done similar wonders for the Gentiles, just as Peter has argued. James’s intervention again reinforces Peter’s argument, using a scripture quotation (Amos 9.11–12) and putting forward a concrete proposal. The universalistic perspective of God’s salvation in Amos 9.11–12 goes one step further through the Lukan addition of ἀναστρέψω (return), bringing up the idea of God’s ‘conversion’ to rebuild the house of David to accommodate both Israelites and Gentiles. James finally proposes that the converted Gentiles should only abstain from idolatry and blood, because of the holiness of God, which is a core message of the Sabbath readings of Mosaic Law and does not allow worshipping false gods and eating what is reserved for God. As a result, the assembly of Jerusalem come to a consensus and a turning point: with the Holy Spirit the council decide not to impose a literal observance of Mosaic Law on the Gentiles as far as circumcision is concerned. However, the Gentiles are to abide by the code of holiness, which excludes idolatry and profanation. This message was communicated in a letter to the church of Antioch and taken to them by an authorized delegation, which included Paul, Barnabas and Judas called Barsabbas, leading men among the brethren.

In the epilogue (15.30–35), the intransigence of the Pharisees about circumcision no longer appears. They had been successively silenced by the arguments from Peter, Paul and Barnabas, and James, as well as from the decision of the whole assembly together with the Holy Spirit. When the letter containing this news was delivered to the church of Antioch, which was victim of some unauthorized teaching with Pharisaic bias, the Gentile brethren rejoiced. Judas and Silas strengthened this position through their exhortation in Antioch. After the latter had gone back to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas remained

in Antioch teaching and preaching the Word, having been comforted by the Council of Jerusalem after their early doctrinal dispute and research.

*Inculturation Hermeneutics.* Following the preceding exegetical analysis, Matand points out some issues relevant to inculturation, namely the unity of human genre in Christ and the value of Moses and the Prophets (Old Testament) in inculturation. The latter needs to be tackled from a universalistic perspective as the quotation of Amos 9.11–12 in Acts 15.16–17 has shown. In that sense, one of the main inculturation goals is to unite all peoples and cultures under the same leader, the Christ, and in the same Spirit, as children of the same Father. Inculturation discourse would then imply preaching unity in faith and diversity in cultures, rather than schism and uniformity.

*Findings.* For Matand, the Old Testament has always been a privileged *topos* for interpreting the will of God in New Testament writings, though the apostles were also heeding the voice of the Holy Spirit in their decision-making process. Inculturation discourse should never minimize a revelation enshrined in the Old Testament and authenticated by the Holy Spirit.

## Intercultural Exegesis

### Cilumba and the Nicodemus Narrative (John 2.23–3.36)

Antoine C.N. Cilumba (2001) uses and applies the concept of *interkulturelle Exegese* (intercultural exegesis). He develops this method as a ‘logical consequence’ of his involvement in a ‘school’ of intercultural exegesis at the University of Bonn and his training in inculturation theology at the Catholic faculties of Kinshasa. On the epistemological side, he grounds his intercultural exegesis on the philosophical hermeneutics of H.-G. Gadamer and P Ricoeur. In the process of understanding a text, both philosophers include three steps: pre-comprehension of the reader, fusion of the horizon of the reader and that of the text, and appropriation of the text by the reader (Cilumba 2001: 13–16). Besides, the Bible itself is a living example of an intercultural hermeneutic between the Word of God and human cultures. Cilumba’s model of intercultural exegesis combines the study of literary structure, tradition and redaction, interpretation of the text and the analysis of the target context.

*Literary Structure.* The narrative of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus is found in a literary block built up with antithetic and parallel features: an introduction (2.23–25 // 3.22–24), a direct speech or a dialogue (3.1–12 // 3.25–30) and an indirect speech or monologue (3.13–21 // 3.31–36). Antithetic and parallel constructions appear not only at the level of the literary units, but also inside each section. For example, vv. 3 and 4 in the section of 3.1–12 are antithetic in the use of the verb γεννηθῆναι (be born), as well as the shift from ‘I-you’ style in 3.1–12 (/3.25–30) to ‘he’ style in 3.13–21 (/3.31–36). In the macro literary structure, Jn 3.1–21 is part of the section



on Jesus' deeds (1.19–12.50), which comes after the prologue (1.1–18), but is followed by the section of the signs (13.1–17.26) and that of the Passion (18.1–20.31; 21.1–25). At least three main theories have been proposed to solve problems pertaining to the subdivision and incoherence of the Fourth Gospel. The triple-source theory, attributed to R. Bultmann, distinguishes the sign/miracle source, Passion source and the discourse source in the Gospel of John. The evolution theory of J. Wellhausen assumes that the Gospel of John was written in different phases consisting of extending and altering the first document whose author remained anonymous. The theory of literary unity of the Fourth Gospel, initiated by E. Ruckstuhl, is based on discernable stylistic features of a single author, who integrated materials from both Johannine circles and Synoptic Gospels.

*Tradition and Redaction.* Some literal materials in Jn 3.1–36 seem to have been taken from existing traditions, which included Old Testament theology, Christology of the early church and some oriental mentalities. An Old Testament element is found in 3.14, re-actualizing the elevation of the serpent by Moses in the desert (Num. 21.4–9), while early church Christology is embedded in 3.3,5 and focuses on the baptism and kingdom of God motives. The text of Jn 3.29 uses an Eastern wisdom about the joy felt by a friend in the presence of the bridegroom to appreciate the excitement of John the Baptist in the surroundings of Jesus. As a matter of fact, the motives of sign, faith, Son of man, judgment, baptism, and the use of Old Testament and oriental wisdom confirm that Jn 3 depends on other traditions. For the history of the redaction, the units of Jn 2.23–25, 3.5, 19–21,31–36 have been identified as author's additions. John 2.23–25 was composed in order to introduce the narrative about Nicodemus (3.1–18), whereas Jn 3.5 was inserted to emphasize how baptism is a constitutive part of faith. John 3.19–21 was written as anti-docetic interpolation. John 3.31–36 fits in as a concluding redactional comment on the Nicodemus narrative.

*Interpreting the Text.* The interpretation of Jn 2.23–3.36 points out the central importance of sign, faith and life in this section. Sign and faith are particularly emphasized in 2.23–3.21, while life becomes a key element in 3.22–36. John 2.23 introduces Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem and announces the link between sign and faith, which will be more elaborated in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. This dialogue comprises three sections, namely 3.1–3,4–8 and 9–21. In 3.1–3, the author opposes a Jewish teacher (Nicodemus) and a teacher from God (Jesus). In 3.4–8, natural birth is contrasted with the birth from above, which is received through a combination of water (natural sign) and the Spirit (divine reality). John 3.9–21 develops how the person who 'understands' the sign that leads to Christ will have eternal life. The last section (Jn 3.22–36) uses a testimony setting of John the Baptist to hint at the importance of the trilogy sign-faith-life.

*Life, Faith and Sign in a Congolese Context.* In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), life has a dynamic and holistic meaning. It originates from God the creator and it does not end with death. It needs to be wholly experienced in

harmony with God, ancestors, cosmos and people. The concept of life already includes faith, since the former is seen as a gift from God the creator. The first missionaries corroborated this idea, except that they stressed the salvation of the souls more than the upliftment of the whole person. In the present Congolese context, Christianity is significantly marked by the integration of cultural dimensions in the light of a better understanding of the implications of Christ's incarnation. Sign is also related to God. Though some traditional healers (*Nganga* in the Linguala language) can perform some miraculous gestures, the ultimate cause of miracles is attributed to God as the only person who can perform things that are impossible to human beings.

*Findings.* According to Cilumba, the Johannine Gospel and Congolese Christians understand human life as participation in the eternal life of God through the person and paradigm of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John and in Congolese churches, faith is theo-Christocentric and it involves individual and communal dimensions. In John, the miracle serves as a springboard for the Christological revelation, and it is often accompanied with a reprimand and human satisfaction. In the DRC, the aspect of reprimand is almost absent, as more emphasis is put on human satisfaction even at the expense of faith in Christ. The link between Christological and anthropological dimensions needs to be reinforced in the DRC.

### Manus and the Healing of the Leper (Mark 1.40–45)

The model of Chris U. Manus (2003)<sup>15</sup> closely follows the procedure proposed by Ukpong (compare Manus 2003: 40–41 and Ukpong 1996: 190–91). Manus (2003: 139) starts the interpretation of Mk 1.40–45 with the question: 'What can an intercultural exposition of the miracle story of the leper offer the African Church and her people?' He answers:

If we agree with Justin Ukpong and other African scholars that intercultural hermeneutics is an 'academic reading of the Bible that is informed by the perspectives and concerns of ordinary readers and ordinary readings', then the ordinary African peoples' socio-cultural contexts where the HIV/AIDS pandemic unabatedly prevails as a killer-disease is apt to be made the subject of a sympathetic interpretation of the healing of the Leper in Mk 1.40–45.

Intercultural hermeneutics by Manus comprises the following steps: analysis of a current context, study of the socio-historical context and a synoptic analysis of the text.

*Current Context.* It has been reported by agencies like UNAIDS that out of 36 million people infected with HIV/AIDS in the world, 27 million live in Africa. In some African countries, more than 10% of the population suffer from HIV/AIDS:

	%		%
Botswana	35.8	Kenya	13.95
Swaziland	25.25	Central African Republic	13.84
Zimbabwe	25.6	Mozambique	13.22
Lesotho	23.57	Burundi	11.32
Zambia	19.95	Djibouti	11.75
South Africa	19.94	Rwanda	11.21
Namibia	19.54	Côte d'Ivoire	10.76
Malawi	15.96	Ethiopia	10.63

(Manus 2003: 141; Malle 2004: 84)

African churches are not unaffected by the challenges of HIV/AIDS. For Manus (2003: 142), a reading of Mk 1.40–45 can equip Christians with a theology that can recondition the faithful to engage in intensive prayer and ‘appeal’ to the Lord Jesus, as healer of all evils and terminal illness, to intervene decisively in our diseased world.

*Socio-historical Context.* In Jewish Palestine, contagious diseases like leprosy were quite rampant, and most physical ailments were seen as God’s punishment for one’s sins or those of one’s parents. It was the prerogative of a priest to declare someone leprosy, and therefore ‘impure’ and ‘outcast’, or to rehabilitate the person after his/her healing and purification (Mulholland 1999: 30). In the Markan story, the leper would have broken the stigma of the day when he appeared in public and interacted with Jesus, contrary to the social rule in force: ‘Infected persons were required by the Mosaic Law to live in seclusion and to shout “unclean, unclean” (Lev. 13.45–46) as a warning to anyone who approached them’ (Mulholland 1999: 30). On the contrary, this leper is the one who dares to approach Jesus and implores him to intervene in a desperate situation. Besides, the leper pops out from nowhere! This episode, which seems historically improbable in some respects, might fit into Markan redactional skills to paint a powerful feature of Jesus and his popularity, in view of his next confrontations with religious authorities (2.1–3.6).

*Synoptic Analysis.* Mark 1.40–45 and Lk. 5.12–16 have no geographical placement, but report that Jesus retired to a quiet place, while Mt. 8.1–4 indicates that this scenario took place when Jesus came down from the mountain. In Mark and Luke, the healed man became an unauthorized herald who, by irony and in spite of a formal prohibition, attracted many people to seek Jesus. Matthew kept silence on the publicity of the event. While Mark humanizes Jesus in his emotions (‘moved with pity’), Matthew and Luke spiritualize him and his actions. However, for all the three synoptic evangelists, Jesus is the compassionate healer and the Son of God who brings down divine mercy in order to reintegrate the outcast into the community of the living.

*Findings.* In Manus’s view, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is devastating for many families and communities in Africa, to the extent that a great number of Africans are either infected or affected. In the narrative about the encounter between Jesus and the leper, Mark shows how Jesus, full of compassion, touched the

leper and healed him. The willingness and action of Jesus to cure the leper instantly impels us to hope for a quick healing from HIV/AIDS. This hope can be actualized through intensive prayers and moral support for the sick.

### Loba-Mkole and Jesus' Exaltation Narrative (Luke 22.69 and Acts 7.56)

I understand intercultural exegesis as a constructive dialogue between an original biblical culture and the culture of a receptive audience, taking into account cultures of Christian traditions as well (cf. Loba-Mkole 2005a, 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2006d). Here, the epistemological privilege is not given only to the receptive audience (*contra* Ukpong 2002: 62; Tamez 2002b: 10; 2002a: 58), but equally shared by the three sets of cultures involved in this dialogue. A unique epistemological privilege is granted to original biblical cultures because of their canonicity, the cultures of Christian traditions benefit from a particular epistemological privilege due to their elderliness, and the current target cultures are entitled to a peculiar epistemological privilege because of their present livingness in blood and flesh. It also seems to me that this concept of intercultural exegesis is better conveyed by the expression 'intercultural mediation', since the dialogical process under consideration involves not only literary works, but also artistic symbols and human heroes (Loba-Mkole 2005b: 2) who insure the transmission of the gospel from one culture to the other. In Africa, the epistemological value of intercultural mediation needs to be measured against African world-views that value the promotion of life, as well as against authentic messages of Jesus and those of church traditions. This particular intercultural exegesis will first deal with some current understanding of the text, before proceeding to its linguistic analysis and the study of its historical context.

*Luke 22.69 and Acts 7.56 in a Current Culture.* The results of research about the relationship between Lk. 22.69 and Acts 7.56 have been well summarized by R.J. Dillon (1990: 742):

Remarkable for both this 'standing' posture and for being the very rare Son-of-Man saying on other than Jesus' lips, this word of the martyr is likely Luke's variation on Luke 22.69 in further elaboration of v 55 (so Conzelmann, Schneider, Weiser, Sabbe, Mussner). 'Standing' may bespeak the Lord's welcome to his martyr in an individualized parousia (Barrett), or his intercession for the confessor true to Luke 12.8 (Schneider), or his exercise of judgment against recusant Jewry (Pesch); or, least plausibly, it could be a 'meaningless' variation upon the risen One's sitting at God's right hand (2.33–35; Mussner, Sabbe).

However, the semantic content of 'Son of Man' remains problematic, as the majority of New Testament scholars interpret it as a messianic title, which is

appropriate to Jesus because he is the Messiah, the Son of God. In Congolese oral literature, as outspread by musician artists, the Lingala expression *mwana ya moto* (son of man/daughter of man) stands for a human being, mainly with generic and circumlocutional connotations. In some songs by Koffi Olomide, Madilu Système and others, the phrase *ngai mwana ya moto* (I, the son of man) or *mwana ya moto* (son of man) refers to the singer himself, as he points out his human nature, dignity or weakness. In the song *La beauté d'une femme* (the beauty of a woman), the female singer (Mbilia Bel) treats her rival as *mwana ya moto lokola ngai* (daughter of man like me) in contrast with *mwana ya Nzambe* (daughter of God), who would rightly have been proud of her extraordinary nature and beauty. In some African contexts, 'son of man' functions as a nickname. This applies to the Lingala *mwana ya mama* (son of mother) or the 'son of woman' in a Kenyan novel. In this novel, the main character calls himself 'son of woman' to underline his solidarity with humankind, and especially his connections with women (Mungua 2000: 1, 9). Generally speaking, all human beings and especially the males can be referred to as 'sons of men'. For an ordinary Christian in Africa, 'Son of Man' in Lk. 22.69 and Acts 7.56 would refer to Jesus because of his human nature or for his solidarity with human beings. Furthermore, the majority of sons of men in Africa are subjugated to an abject poverty, generating a lot of moral vices and psychophysical diseases. Can the Son of Man in Luke–Acts and the sons of men in Africa have anything in common?

*A Contrastive Linguistic Analysis of Luke 22.69 and Acts 7.56.* These texts are found in the literary contexts of a trial, especially the trial of a protagonist. The most striking similarity between Lk. 22.69 and Acts 7.56 relates to the lexical use of the phrase 'Son of Man'. In both cases, 'Son of Man' is used by the protagonist of the scene, namely Jesus in Lk. 22.69 and Stephen in Acts 7.56. At a grammatical level, there is some dissimilarity, since 'Son of Man' in Lk. 22.69 is the subject of the verb ἔσται καθήμενος (will be seated), while in Acts 7.56 it appears as a second complement of the object of the verb θεωρῶ (I see). While shifting from Lk. 22.69, Acts 7.56 echoes Mk 14.62 // Mt. 26.64 in terms of grammatical construction, as in these cases 'Son of Man' is the object of a verb of sight (cf. ὄψεσθε in Mk 14.62 and Mt. 26.64; and θεωρῶ in Acts 7.56). In terms of content, 'Son of Man' in Mk 14.62 // Mt. 26.64 and Lk. 22.69 is used in a circumlocutional sense, indicating a self-reference to the speaker Jesus, which is not the case in Acts 7.56. The non-circumlocutional use of 'Son of Man' in Acts 7.56 seems to liaise with Rev. 1.13 and 14.14. The announcement about seeing the Son of Man sharing God's lordship in Mk 14.62 is fulfilled in the visions of Acts 7.56, Rev. 1.13 and 14.14–16. It is interesting to notice that these two occurrences of 'Son of Man' in Revelation (cf. Dan. 7.13) are not affected by the double determinative (definite article ὁ = 'the' and the genitive τοῦ = 'of the', like in Jn 5.27). Yet, in spite of this anarthrous use of 'Son of Man',<sup>16</sup> which may suggest its non-messianic understanding,

it still refers to Jesus who nevertheless was confessed as Messiah and Son of God through these last two titles. In a nutshell, a contrastive analysis shows that Lk. 22.69 emphasizes the exaltation of the Son of Man in heaven, while Acts 7.56 brings this exaltation down to a concrete disciple, who had had the vision of the Son of Man's exaltation (see also Rev. 1.13; 14.14). The contrast between the seating posture of the Son of Man (Lk. 22.29, cf. Rev. 14.14) and the standing one (Acts 7.56) may not make a big difference with regard to his heavenly exaltation. What matters more is the impact of the visions on earth. Stephen and John, the beneficiaries of these visions, would surely have been equally respected and honoured in their communities, irrespective of the position in which one has seen the Son of Man in heaven. These visions also increased the trust put in Stephen and John as mediators between the gospel of Jesus and the other disciples. Similarly, some leaders in African churches gain more esteem as result of their visions and gospel mediations.

*Historical Context.* The literary contexts of trials in which Lk. 22.69 and Acts 7.56 are recorded may be seen as a genuine effort to document some events pertaining to the death of Jesus and the persecution of his disciples. Jesus seems to have been killed as a prophet of God, but not as a 'divine Son of Man', while Stephen underwent a similar fate for bearing witness to the name of Jesus during a Christian persecution. Moreover, Jesus in the context of Lk. 22.69 and Stephen in Acts 7.56 have experienced a similar 'status degradation ritual', in which the honour of a person is fatally undermined (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992: 271). Ironically, Jesus was honoured in the eyes of God and Christians in terms of his eschatological exaltation, but also for expressing his solidarity with humankind through the phrase 'Son of Man'. Stephen, in turn, was certainly honoured not only for his vision, but also for his courage to confess Jesus before men at the expense of his life (cf. Lk. 12.8–9 // Mt. 10.32 and Mk 8.38).

*Findings.* By the phrase 'Son of Man' the author of Lk. 22.69 and Acts 7.56 has underlined not only Jesus' human nature, but also his solidarity with human-kind, especially in a context of suffering and humiliation. This very humiliation has been turned into a motive of honour not only for Jesus, but also for the disciples who were persecuted because of him. In Lk. 22.69, Jesus can be seen as the intercultural mediator between God's realm and the world, while in Acts 7.56 Stephen plays the same role between Jesus and an early Christian community. Luke 22.69 and Acts 7.56 also show how Jesus and his first disciples have already experienced in their times the sufferings and persecutions that are affecting the sons and daughters of men/sons and daughters of women in Africa today. By virtue of solidarity, they are also entitled to share the honour of the Son of God, who associated himself with all human beings by his self-given nickname 'Son of Man' or his 'subjective identity'. They are also invited to become intercultural mediators between Jesus' gospel and their respective communities.

## Conclusion

Intercultural biblical exegesis has become a reality in Africa since the introduction of inculturation biblical hermeneutics by Ukpong (1996). From this perspective, African context and people are not used just as a field of applying 'exegetical' conclusions, but they stand as the subject of interpretation, equipped with genuine epistemological privilege. Though Matand (1998) and Cilumba (2001) still maintain a distance between the 'exegesis' of the text and its contextualization (or hermeneutic), studies from Manus (2003) and Loba-Mkole (2005b; 2006a; 2006b) support Ukpong's view in integrating African context/people as one of the active components of intercultural hermeneutics/exegesis/mediation. However, this diversity of opinion can be regarded as a healthy tension between the practitioners of intercultural biblical dialogue. All the case studies presented in this article prove the vitality of this approach, where a 'classical exegesis' and a 'cultural analysis of a present situation' constitute integral parts of the entire process of interpreting Scripture.

## Notes

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1. Other papers of the Hammanskraal Conference, especially those presented by New Testament scholars working as Translation Consultants with the United Bible Societies were co-edited by Yorke and Renju (2004).
2. **Reconstruction hermeneutics** or theology is the 'specifically theological articulation of the ideals of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance . . . The aim of this theology is to address the socio-economic, political, religious, cultural and moral crises facing Africa today . . . Mugambi identifies the several components of his reconstruction theology as personal, cultural, ecclesiastical and socio-political reconstructions' (Farisani 2004: 63–64).
3. **Rainbow hermeneutics** involves articulating 'the encounter between modernity and contextuality, between Western cultural imperialism and African renaissance', as 'the time has come to move away from the theology of resistance to a theology of renaissance' (Cloete 2004: 170, 175).
4. **Ubuntu hermeneutics** originates from the Bantu word *ubuntu* which means humanness. The central concern of *ubuntu* in Africa and in the biblical world can be described as communality. This hermeneutics presents 'the Bible in a way which underlines its relevancy to ecclesial and other dimensions of life in Africa while taking Scripture textually and contextually serious' (Punt 2004: 90, 101).
5. **Liberation hermeneutics** pertains to its 'relationship of accountability to and solidarity with the poor and oppressed' (West 1995: 18).
6. **Hermeneutics of engagement** promotes 'a responsible way to do relevant theology in the postmodern world' and it 'implies an adaptation of the dispositions, methodologies and teleologies in theological inquiry from both traditional theology and contextual theology' (Van Aarde 1994: 577).

7. **Afro-centric Hermeneutics** 'approaches the whole question of biblical history, theology, hermeneutics and translation from a distinctly Afrocentric perspective' (Yorke 2000: 131; cf. Adamo 2005: 10–11).
8. **Semoya hermeneutics** derives from the Setswana word *Semoya*, which means 'of the Spirit'. This mode of reading is that which 'resists discrimination and articulates a reading of healing: healing of race and gender relations; of individuals, classes, and nations' (Dube 1996: 124; 1998: 118–35; 2001: 40–45).
9. **Womanist hermeneutics** embraces issues of sex, race and class, while adding culture in a search for wholeness for the woman herself and for humanity (Okure 2001: 48–49).
10. **Development hermeneutics** assumes that 'when read contextually, some biblical texts show a potential to empower individuals and small groups in a transforming manner' (Speckman 2001: 281).
11. **Postcolonial hermeneutics** 'seeks to examine how the colonizer constructs and justifies domination of the other in various places and periods of history; how the colonized collaborate, resist, and assert their rights to be free in various places and periods of history; and how both parties travel and cross boundaries. Postcolonialism examines the role of narratives in colonizing, decolonizing and nation-building. It is concerned about economic, political, cultural and social justice in the world. But above all, postcolonialism proposes many different ways to co-exist on earth without having to suppress and exploit the other' (Dube and Staley 2002: 3). Cf. Punt (2002: 125–49; 2003: 60): 'Postcolonial biblical criticism is about a different focus and purpose, rather than a different hermeneutical method, and it reserves special attention for ideology criticism and suspicion hermeneutics.'
12. **Storytelling hermeneutics** considers the art of storytelling as 'an integral part of who we are as African . . . important functions of storytelling' include 'remembrance, warning, teaching and lending meaning' (Phiri 2002: 10).
13. In Bailey's view, 'the debtors were most likely renters, *hakirin*, who had agreed to pay a fixed amount of produce for the yearly rent. The steward was no doubt making extras "under the table", but these amounts were not reflected in the signed bills. He was a salaried official who, in addition, was paid a specific fee by the renter for each contract. The master in the community was a man of noble character respected in the community who cared enough about his own wealth to fire a wasteful manager' (2000: 94). I have elsewhere analysed the business language of this parable (Loba-Mkole 2006b).
14. Because of limited space, this article will not include the treatment of Gal. 2.11–14, as provided by Matand (1998).
15. Interestingly, Manus uses inculturation, liberation and reconstruction approaches as variants of intercultural hermeneutics. Manus also applies an inculturation approach to Paul's speech at the Areopagus (Acts 17.22–34) in analysing the text and the context of the speech on one hand and exposing an Igbo version of that speech on the other hand. He displays a liberation approach to examine the issue of scriptures and women, comparing Yoruba sacred narratives to some New Testament texts (1 Tim. 2.11–14; 1 Pet. 3.7). Finally, he proceeds by a reconstructive re-reading of the cleansing of the temple (Mk 11.15–19), providing the analysis of the text and the socio-historical context of the story before interpreting it through the paradigm of Jesus the Reconstructor'.
16. If the double anarthrousness of Χριστοῦ ('of Christ') in Mk 1.1 and 9.41, as well as that of Son of God in 15.39, stresses the quality of Jesus' divine sonship (Gundry 1995: 951), an analogous argument can be used to affirm that the anarthrous use of Son of Man in Jn 5.27, Rev. 1.13 and 14.14 underscores the humanness of Jesus, without denying his divinity. Similar ideas are developed by Wink (2001).



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