
One of the major problems in the study of religions in Africa is the interpretation of classical religious texts. In fact, this issue has posed a serious challenge to scholars of religions in Africa compared with their counterparts in other parts of the globe. The case of Africa is distinctive because it has to interpret written and oral religious texts. The book *Interpreting Classical Religious Texts in Contemporary Africa* provides a springboard for Africanization of the Bible as well as other scriptures in the continent. Further, it is intended to provide latitude for interpretation of texts (religious texts) by creating an appropriate encounter between the interpreters and the texts. The editor exposes the role of interpreters, the interpreting communities, and the interpretative context (p. 3), thereby engaging in critical aspects of interpretation.

The book is composed of a collection of articles on hermeneutics of classical religious texts in Africa. The articles negotiate analysis of some exemplary classical texts from the various religious traditions that permeate the continent. In the book the word ‘texts’ is used to include both written and unwritten texts. The former are predominant in Christianity and Islam, and the latter is common in African Traditional Religion (ATR). The term ‘classical’ is employed to discuss texts that are documented but still have more oral value than would otherwise be expected. Such is the case of the Kairos Document in South Africa. Like other classical texts, this text was allowed to interact with others from various religious backgrounds. The book aims at ‘Giving back some of what we have received from others and even more, we want to continue interacting with other researchers struggling with what it means to interpret classical religious texts in contemporary Africa’ (p. 8). In pursuance of the above objective, the book is divided into three sections with various articles in each section. The first section focuses on hermeneutical contexts of religious texts and contains four articles. The subject of classical religious texts in contemporary Africa comprises eight articles in the second section. Classical religious texts in dialogue is the subject of the third section, with four articles.

J. N. K. Mygambi conceptualizes African hermeneutics in a global context. It is a reflective essay on the content and value of the conference that forms the bedrock for the production of the book. The focus of the writer seems to be a justification of the term ‘African hermeneutics’. Should African hermeneutics be taken as a geographical expression, or would it be better to take it ideologically? The social and cultural context from which the scholar engages in the enterprise needs to be appraised since it will determine the adjective (Africa) attached to the term ‘hermeneutics’. The writer presents a historical expose on the history of hermeneutics in Africa. With regard to classical texts, he attempts to separate classical from modern and posits criteria needed for such classification. He alludes to Manus’s *Intercultural Hermeneutics* (2003), in which Manus submits that text presupposes the culture within which it originates and should be so interpreted, although complications may arise if cross-cultural interpretations are adopted for this enterprise. This is often the case with interpretation of written scriptures by scholars from different cultural backgrounds. In spite of this difficulty, the writer still prescribes a cross-cultural approach to interpretation of text without losing sight of hermeneutic training and our identity as scholars.
Chapter 2 of the first section attempts a comparative study of African and Western hermeneutics. The writer D. R. K. Nkurunziza posits that Western hermeneutics focuses on finding meaning for written words. It analyses and interprets within a social-cultural as well as historical context of the European worldviews. This has led to the appropriation of scientific methods in the study of Western hermeneutics. In contrast, African hermeneutics goes beyond the written text and probes into oral texts’ expression in thought and words through oral traditions such as myths, proverbs, rituals, music, dance, culture, language, and stories. Seeking to understand African discourse in the social, cultural, historical, and political context is a dynamic process. In fact, African hermeneutics provide a platform for the understanding of African identity through a process that spans from idea (thought), to spoken words (oral texts), to written texts. In my opinion, the process could lead to conflict since not all spoken words will become written texts. The writer also identifies implications of African hermeneutics. These include hermeneutics of injustice, which has undermined African value and identity, hermeneutics of violence, hermeneutics of transformation, and hermeneutics of sustainable livelihood. By its nature and derivable form, African cosmology, African hermeneutics does not distinguish between the secular and religious, the past and the present; it is a living process. However, the process of African hermeneutics has been hijacked by a foreign agenda, therefore it needs to internalize itself to avoid the conflicts experienced in Africa today.

In chapter 3 the writer focuses on interpreting strange texts. This is a concern for all scholars of hermeneutics. The author goes beyond written texts to include symbolic issues, such as persons, cultures, and religious traditions in the discourse. In this effort the interpreter may face the challenge of strangeness of texts as well as the interpreter being strange to the world of the text. These may lead to a breakdown in the relations between the interpreter and the text in either of the two ways mentioned above (p. 35). To solve the problems the writer posits that there must be a symbolic relation between the text and the interpreter even if the texts are strange. This condition applies to theories as well as religious studies, even in classical texts or religious texts since they continue to ‘talk to us and demand a response’. The writer also brings the term ‘classical’ into contemporary context, defining it as suggesting a living and present matter since the texts speak and still transform our worldview and realities. This chapter connects with the previous one in establishing a relationship between the text and the readers in spite of relativity of time, culture, and realities. Therefore the term ‘classical texts’ does not connote the humanists’ definition of time and standard of style but rather a continuous relevance of what is classical to human existence (Jean Round, 1986). The same could be said of religious texts, even though they provide a normative of the totality of human reality and history (p. 40).

Three types of strangeness are discussed: temporal and cultural, traditional, and religious strangeness. Thus academics who operate within the hermeneutical praxis need to articulate these classes of strangeness and respond to them in order to effectively engage in the enterprise. They may participate in the ‘realities’ of the host community, since Gadamer suggests that one can engage in strange texts even if one does not belong to that tradition. However, I believe the need for time of participation cannot be overemphasized. It should not be just a short period of fieldwork, but a significant period that will involve learning the language, religion, and cosmology of the people.

The last part of the first section emphasizes the fact that interpretation from the theological and religious studies perspective may also vary for religious traditions in Africa. It