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**African Traditional Ritual Expressions of Salvation:
Contextualised Biblical Hermeneutic(s) as an
Ecclesiological Praxis**

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is threefold: First, to present the African traditional ritual concept of salvation. Second, to demonstrate that this concept subconsciously forms the worldview through which African Christians interpret biblical narratives and salvation. Third, to access if certain ecclesiastical practices are influenced by the African salvific expressions.

Methodology: The methodology used is exploratory, where aspects of African salvific rituals and selected ecclesiastical practices are explored. Part one of this article deals with African expressions of salvation. Three aspects of salvation in the African Traditional Religion (ATR) are; one-traditional rituals that ward-off evil, two- continuity of life through genealogies and three-consciousness of ancestral spiritual world/living dead.

Findings: The findings are that these three are the hallmarks of African worldview as expression of salvation. Part two of the article deals with ecclesiastical interventions, specifically on contextual biblical hermeneutic(s) expounded in worship praxis paved by African worldview. The typological and allegorical hermeneutical theories of biblical interpretation are enriched by traditional African concept of salvation in African Christianity.

Contribution to Theory and Practice: In practice the African Church ought to spread the salvation of Jesus Christ through contextually interpreted biblical rituals.

Keywords: *African Traditional Religion, salvation, evil, rituals, genealogy, living dead, hermeneutics*

Introduction

The essence of Christian rituals ought to fundamentally enhance salvation. The term salvation is basically a Christian term. It generally refers to the release of the soul from sin and its penalties and often times points to humanity's final destiny. However, the concept of salvation is a universally religious phenomenon. African traditional religion is engulfed in rituals that have a salvific dimension indexed by a component of humanity's dealing with evil and eventual destiny. Conceptualising salvation in ATR broadens beyond a simple soul-sin-destiny correlation, endearing ritual symbolism that deals with evil and transition into ancestral cult. This happens for two reasons; first, in ATR human person is immersed in rituals that lead to complete whole of "body, spirit, soul and head" (Adedeji, 2012 p 52). Second, salvation includes release from evil that does not necessarily occur as a result of misdeeds. ATR, which is the religion of Africans is highly ritualistic, most of which are salvationist. This arises due to the fact that most of the rituals are geared toward diminishing evil, fulfilling cultural imperatives, enhancing interconnects with the spiritual world and ancestral cult, and communal enhancement that is a trademark of ATR viewpoint.

Therefore, African ecclesiological praxis, meaning a missional church conscious of cultural realities in its worship, needs contextualised biblical hermeneutics cognisant of African worldview. African Christianity or Christianity as practiced by Africans is influenced and expressed in the two distinguishing marks of ritual symbolism that is functionalism and experiential dictum. Ray (1976), adds utilitarianism as a core ingredient of ritual symbolism. Distinguishing characteristics of functionalism, experiential and utilitarianism maxims, African Christianity is deeply rooted in ritual symbolism, tangibility and practices that gets meaning and interpretation from cultural realities of the moment. The dictum is unlike the systematized and rationalized western or Eurocentric Christianity. The conceptualisation of African Christianity is more sensory than cognitive. This partly explains why African Christians result to traditional rituals when faced with life crisis. This line of thought leads to the observation that in African Christianity, expression of salvation gives prominence to ritual dimension when considering Ninian Smart's seven dimensions of religion (Smart, 1973a).

The African traditional ritual expression of salvation that ought to be considered for church mission has to deal with the following three aspects; rituals that diminish the forces of evil and threats to life, ritual aspect of the preservation of life through genealogies and lastly rituals that point to the consciousness of the relationship between the living and the dead. The ultimate goal is to develop an ecclesiological praxis, with an African contextualised hermeneutic that is Christocentric. The interpreted scripture ought to speak to the church in Africa that gives meaning to the people of God in all their endeavours as they seek salvation in Jesus Christ.

Part One: African Traditional Expressions of Salvation

The concept of evil as threat to life

The simplest understanding of evil is any threat to life. In ATR, evil is seen as a disruption of the holistic life and it is jointly condemned. Evil creates barriers between the people and God, and between the living and the ancestral world. Evil, in short, is anything disordered morally, socially, politically and religiously in the community (Adedeji, 2012 p 55).

There are basically two concepts of evil that exist in ATR. The first is evil that happen as a consequence of violations of societal norms. Africans have an intrinsic concept of wickedness and its penalties. This is particularly understood when we consider that the African worldview associates evil and misfortunes as occurrences that occur as a result of ‘sin’. When the above occurs, crises and threats to life are elevated in a person’s life. When a breach occurs and ‘sin’ is introduced there are consequences. By virtue of man’s dependence on the Supreme Being and his agencies, the human behaviour is constantly under watch, for the purpose of reward or punishment as applicable (Mbiti, 1969). In other words, the concepts of morality, ethics, ‘sin’ and its significance are entrenched in the Africans worldview.

The forms of transgressions include breaking of taboos, failure to appease ancestors, desecrations of suitable ethical standards of the societal order, ritual offences in antagonism to divinities and the breach of Deity’s orders. Rectifying the above is the cardinal preoccupation of the African thus resulting to traditional rituals commonly referred to as divination and revelation (Grillo, 2012). For example, among the people of Meru, Chuka, Tharaka and Mbeere, there exists a traditional ritual action referred to as *kuroga* openly carried out in glare of people in market place. The ritual is carried out by a traditional specialist called *Murogi* who deals with such crimes as stealing and transgressions where the transgressor is unknown. There are consequences that befall the transgressor. These include calamities such as death, madness and other bizarre behaviours that manifest themselves physically and mentally.

The second form of evil comes to people by virtue of being part of the cosmos and relates to forces that human beings contend with in their everyday life. These include evil spirits, evil eye, manifestation of witchcraft, among others. These are described using African expressions as unconsciously “jumping over” treated object and paraphernalia on pathways and people’s farms, bad omens, “bad eye”, “heavy tongue”, forces that “stalk” people in the night, etc. This form of evil appears to juxtapose both the material and spiritual African world. Either way, evil may result from human activity through traditional rituals.

Closely related to the second classification is the phenomenon of diseases in ATR. Diseases to the African can be summarized as below; sickness depicts an unhealthy relationship between the living and the ancestors (Nyamiti, 1984) and violations of societal norms. Again, sickness does not just occur but it is generated (Mbiti, 1986). Causes include attacks by evil spirits, punishments when ancestors are not happy, witchcraft and people with evil intent and powers as well as curses (White, 2015). Treatment and healing are salvationist and includes consulting diviners and herbalists, animal sacrifices, spiritual cleansing and exorcism. This explains the prominence in rituals of divination and revelation as well as actions around traditional shrines.

Rituals that deal with threats to life or crisis

African traditional rituals have expressions that are salvationist. If rituals have a causal dimension to evil, they too have an evil eradication component in ATR. Ritual actions that provide recognition of elders as custodians of moral insight in the community form the bulk of ritual symbolism in African spirituality. The symbolism, mostly demonstrated in ritual articles and actions is a clear parade of ATR salvation resulting from the datum that African spirituality is highly ritualistic. Ritual symbolism in African spirituality is largely given meaning in their sensory involvement as contrasted to cognitive engrossment. One practice depicting ritual symbolism is warding off evil by putting on charms around the waist, neck and wrists. Hanging of traditional paraphernalia

around home compounds, burying them at the main entrance demonstrates a tangible ritual symbolism that demonstrates a utilitarianism that is deeply rooted in ATR practices. For example, within the Igbo community in Nigeria, candidates for initiation wear *Omu* to ward off evil spirit (Ejizu, 1986).

There is the issue of ritual actions as symbolism. These include all observable actions including verbal and non-verbal actions. The symbolism of depicted action demonstrates an ATR significant concept that addresses a solution in rituals described as dealing with life-crisis, evil-prevention, religious identity, an ancestral appeasement among others. The total sum of the observable action is given meaning to the people practicing them. There are also objects (charms) given to people by traditional healers /medicine men to get good fortunes and also bring success in politics, business, love portions and these also have an element of providing quality of live which is also salvationist.

The Africans by tradition experience their spirituality through their commitment to the regular involvement in community ceremonies. The experience was meant to be an intensely subjective awareness of the Supreme Being/Deity and also to inspire an alternate state of spiritual consciousness (Karanja, 1998). The rituals have a strong affinity towards preservation of life with observable component of warding away evil and action that indicate salvific tendencies. The traditional rituals played the role of demonstrating the Gikuyu ethno-religious identity, resilience and continuity of the centres of socializing. The traditional rituals and ceremonies demonstrate a salvation component that is more communal than individual.

Striving to achieve peace, *shalom*, is salvific to the Africans. Among the approaches towards realization of shalom is liberation that is allied and linked with forgiveness (Adedeji, 2012). Interpersonal relationships, living in harmony with one another, admission of guilt by offenders towards others and readiness to symbolically make reparation where applicable is salvific in ATR (Idowu, 1962). Within certain communities in Africa, this is communal. For example, among the Chuka and Tharaka communities, there exist a collectively shared traditional cohort referred to as *athi*, loosely translated as “hunters”. The cohort, collectively but secretly carry our rituals of divination and revelation referred to as *urogi wa athi*, carried out in the forest. The rituals seek to pacify offenders who admit guilt as well as chastise those who violate interpersonal relationships within the community in order to achieve peace.

African Salvationist Mind-set through Genealogies

African traditional practices are reproduced and transmitted to the next generation through the collective sense of who their identity is and what it means to be part of the community. For example, the Gikuyu are socially related according to the principals of *mbari* (Agnatic Kinship) and *rika* (age set) (Njoroge, 2011). The two hallmarks of Gikuyu traditional religious identity are salvific as the agnatic kingship metamorphizes generational perpetuity within clans and family genealogies simply referred to as *nyumba* for the patriarchal system and *githaku* for the matriarchal identity. In naming of children when they are born, they are named after their grandparents, uncles and aunts, whether alive or dead to ensure the continuity of the generations. The consciousness in generational continuity is a salvationist concept. To this end the unborn, whether conceived or yet to be conceived are treated as part of the salvific milieu. Africans consider salvation of the whole community but not salvation of the individual.

The *rika* (age set) is a product of a rite of passage ritual of circumcision. There is also a salvationist component of such rituals as rites of passage in most African communities (Karangi, 2008). For example, within the Meru, there is a generational rebirth where the naming of age groups is reincarnated in the subsequent generations as identified by the naming of the age groups that go through rite of passage. Closely related to the family genealogies is the concept of African traditional religious identity.

The entire enterprise of birth in ATR is salvific in four fronts; firstly, birth is a communal celebration, often women taking the lead. Secondly the number of children is seen as salvific, a sign of perpetuity in clan and indicator of survival in case of threats to life. For example, a departed man within the Gikuyu is referred to as *Mutiga-iri*, or *Mwendwo-ni-iri* for a woman, meaning that the person is survived by children. The contrast is *Muimwo-ni-iri* for a man who is not survived by children, considered to have left nothing to the community, and the term is pejorative and derogatory. Thirdly, certain communities have ‘mixed birth’ where a woman is secretly expected to have a child with a ‘mixed blood’ not sired by the husband. The reason for such a practice is that in case of a plague, the foreign blood stands a chance of survival in case the rest of children are wiped out. The ‘mixed birth’ child is part and parcel of the family because fatherhood in ATR is not biological but is a social construct. Fourthly, among the Gikuyu, it is a traditionally avoided practice to place a numerical figure to the number of children in a family when one is asked to enumerate his children.

A close antithesis of African genealogical salvation outlook is the concept of curses and cursing. Wachege, (nd) fronts that “in many African communities, the fear of curses and cursing is real. A curse is a disturbing anguish in life and living” p 1. One phobia associated with curses is its propensity to stop or alter subsequent genealogical reproduction. To this end it has a negative connotation. However, a curse can be positively perceived in that it works for societal order as a deterrent to evil intentions by individuals in the society.

The Consciousness of the Relationship between the Living and the Dead

One of the fundamental beliefs of the Africans is that the much recognized ancestral, divinities and spirits functionalities have laid down expectations and standards of conduct and behaviour as well as guiding values. The above happens for the benefit of the living for maintenance of wellbeing in the society (Awolalu, 1976). For example, within the Gikuyu in Kenya every time there is a traditional ritual, a little local brew is poured as a sign of appeasing the ancestors and the spirits. The symbolism of libation plays a central role in traditional religious aspect of African rituals. Ancestral consciousness is not only depicted at the point of libations but in imbibing as well. When Gikuyu elders imbibe alcohol, they depict a meticulously executed process of handling the horn, that is, the container with local brew. The depiction of rich traditional religious spirituality and ritual process proficiency at the point of imbibing and libation for ancestors brings out the mystical power in the ritual.

John Mbiti’s concept of the living-dead is also an ATR concept of salvation (Mbiti, 1969). It deals with life continuing after death. Firstly, it seeks to explain what humanity transits to upon death. Secondly it strives to develop a relationship between the living and the dead, an association that is salvationist. “The Africans’ overall view of destiny, in connection with salvation, is simple: Everyone wants to live a good life on earth in order to be accepted by the ancestors in the hereafter” (Adedeji, 2012 p 53). The living-dead are particular part of the spirit, have died in the last 2-5

generations, are still known by names by the people alive, respected by the living, believed to be watching over activities of the living.

The interplay of the area of spiritual world and categories in ATR is either interpreted as salvationist or threat to life. This is deep in least and most educated, both Christians and non-Christians, rural and urban are led by the African worldview. The mindset has a contribution towards defining a moral order in the society that a critical mind positively interprets as cross-cutting, whether as a biblical imperative among African Christians or ATR salvific interpretation.

Part Two: Ecclesiastical intervention through biblical contextualised hermeneutics

African Christianity, cultural and biblical rituals and hermeneutics

The following missional approaches are recommended. First, African Christians are attracted by traditional rituals when confronted by evil and life-threatening situations. There needs to be a cultural exegesis that among other things answers to the concern of why confessing Christians get attracted to these rituals. One such approach is to provide a contextualised African biblical hermeneutic that contributes towards interpretation of the written word of God (Mburu, 2019). Mission studies need to continue developing biblical hermetical categories that bring forth the African concept of salvation to the ecclesiological mandate towards interpretation of biblical rituals. This is particularly important because majority of scholars of African hermeneutics study biblical narratives, different genre, poetry, among others, using classical interpretive guidelines that are directed by “presupposition interpretational approach”. This article recommends a spontaneity emanating from mindset of African salvific concept in interpreting biblical ritual symbolism especially for scripture narratives perceived to be dealing with evil.

Distinctiveness of African Christian ritual symbolism for biblical hermeneutics

There exists distinctiveness that distinguishes African biblical hermeneutics. The distinctiveness brings out actual life awareness and context into Christian rituals in the biblical text that need interpretation through the African cultural lens (Adamo, 2015). The message of salvation as expounded in the scripture has to resonate with the African as far as Christian rituals are concerned. The bible as the written word of God, has to be spoken to Africans in a language that people “hear”. God speaks to them in their mother tongue because Africans think in vernacular. To the Church in Africa the “salvation ritual” as a hermeneutical verbal symbolism of confession by word of mouth (Romans 10:9a) becomes the starting point. This is important because until Christians place the salvation event on particularity of time and space, fellow believers will doubt that a person is ‘saved’. Closely associated with this is the expectation that the “salvation event” and victory over evil is clearly articulated in giving testimony, a classical example of African orality symbolism for Christians confessing Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Another distinctive in hermeneutics is the keenness of scripture that deals with evil. The various African experiences and worldviews on contexts dealing with forces of evil are hermeneutical in themselves as well as informing Christianity in Africa (Pobee, 1986). Certain passages in the bible use concepts that are firm basis for African contextualized hermeneutic that have ritual symbolism of actions, articles and perceptions. To cite a few; Jesus and the ‘cursed’ dried fig tree depicts a verbal ritual symbolism (Matt 21:19). The smearing of mud on eyes of the blind man for sight restoration by Jesus portrays a ritual symbolism that resonates with sensory overtures to African Christianity (John 9:6). Jesus and driving out evil spirits that find their way to the pigs (Matt 8:32)

is a hermeneutical connectedness that certain animals in African cosmology are associated with salvific disposition of evil powers. Other examples include Psalms 91 concept of diseases that stalk in darkness resonate with certain African mindset that people with evil intentions are active at night. Hebrews 12:1 'surrounded by a cloud of witnesses' spirits of the living dead are actively concerned with moral decadency of the living. Ephesians 6:12 'fighting against powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil' as well as the book of Proverbs as a communicative paradigm in Africans orality.

Ecclesiastical praxis influenced by African salvific mindset

One notable feature during worship service in certain churches in Africa suffices. Whenever the person leading intercessory prayers invokes Jesus name in "coming against forces of darkness or defeating diseases", the congregation answers "Amen!" in unison even when this is not liturgical. This observable practice brings to focus the need to continue developing an African Christology where Jesus, who is the Saviour, the alfa and omega of the Church mandate needs to be Immanuel to the African (Mugambi, 1989). This is important in two fronts. First, the contextualized Jesus, incarnated to the African, touched by the African like Thomas (John 20:27) will be Saviour from forces of evil in African Christianity. Secondly, an "Immanuel" and incarnated Jesus to the African becomes "the only Way to the Father" when the way is paved with African worldview that complements and is appreciated by of other non-African worldviews. For example, most of the names of Jesus among African people are concretely attributive titles (Mbiti, 1986), that ward off evil, are salvationist in nature, devoid of sophistication of Eurocentric worldviews that sound abstractive. The other notable point is that African Christology brings forth a functional and experiential Jesus who is not just ontological. The concern of the African people is Jesus as a Saviour, who walks with them as they address evil and other forms of threats to life. There are Christians who feel that they have been 'blessed' only when they come forward to be prayed for by the pastor during worship service. The Christocentric pursuance of ecclesiastical praxis, that forms the basis of a tangible Christ appeals more when Christians invoke the 'in the name of Jesus!' in prayers as pastors 'come against forces of darkness, evil spirits and diseases!' as people are prayed for. Below are three examples of church practice that enrich the findings.

Breaking generational curses, dedication of first-borns and unveiling of the cross

Two areas of biblical hermeneutical and ecclesiastical missional praxis that is attractive to the African church are sermons on breaking the generational curses and the Old Testament concept of dedicating first-born children. The two practices are gaining traction in mainline churches where previously they were rejected. The two are informed by the African worldview of the concept of salvation through preservation of life through genealogies.

The first one, that is the concept of generational curses, brings obscurities and misperception to African Christians who want to be 'orthodox, classical, avoid false teachings and theologically right', especially in the mainline churches. They relegate such to charismatic movement of the 1980's and accuse them of eisegesis of sentimentalism into the bible. Gondwe (2008 p3), from a biblical perspective defines a curse as "any undesirable matter that emerges from an utterance, statement, pronouncement, invocation, oral or written vocabulary that expresses ill will or misfortune to an individual, animal or object". In the same vein, "generational curses are curses assigned to an individual(s) based on the sins of his/her parents. The person's parents, not himself, are the cause of curses assigned to him/her. A person gets punished for the wrongs of the parents"

Gondwe (2008 p97). The hermeneutics of breaking generational curses begs the hermeneutical question: why does it happen when spiritual deliverance is available to everyone who sincerely calls upon the name of the Lord (Roman 10:3)? For African Christianity influenced by salvific worldview through genealogies, Exodus 34:7 provides a hermeneutical resolution that is dependent on interpretation held by certain presuppositions that such generational curses may exist from yester generations and the Mbiti's living dead.

The second one, that is the ritual of dedication of first-born children, is an African salvific typological hermeneutic for an Old Testament text when the New Testament has an exegetical backing that gives credence to the African church. This is demonstrated by Christians who believe in dedication of first-born children according to Exodus 13:2 as read alongside Luke 2:27. However to the subconscious mind of the African Christians the ritual symbolism can be understood in two fronts; first is the prevention of calamities to first-borns. The second one is to ensure a path of blessing, functionalism munificence in African rituals. In this sense, when African Christians show inclination towards dedication of first-born children in the church, they are subconsciously giving a Christ centred typological biblical hermeneutic steered by the genealogical salvific mind-set.

Another subliminal existence of African hermeneutics in ecclesiastical praxis is the ritual referred to as the "unveiling of the cross" as practiced by some mainline churches. For example, in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), the ritual is carried out by the Parish Minister with elders about a year after burial of a church member at the request of the family of the deceased (PCEA Church service book, 2000, p 156). The practice is in addition to the often taken for granted placing of the cross at the grave. The ritual depicts an "allegory of the cross" archetype often times by the church not exclusively for Africa at certain sites (Jensen, 2017). In a deeper analysis when practiced by the African church, it may have a contextualised hermeneutical dimension informed by the sub consciousness of African salvific worldview of preservation of life through genealogies as well as consciousness of the Mbiti's living dead attitude. Though classified as one of the 'remembrance' rituals of the church, the family in real and concrete terms places a family obligatory essence towards the departed kin. The critical hermeneutical questions to ask are; firstly, whose task is the 'remembrance'? Secondly, what assumptions and presuppositions does the family bring into the text of Genesis 50:25 when they request for the ritual of "unveiling of the cross" by the church? The ritual is a strong indicator of an African worldview that is carried out by the church to bring forth salvation in Jesus Christ through the symbolism of the cross.

Theoretical and social implication of the findings

The worldview motivated by the African concept of salvation cross-cuts the identifiable theories of biblical hermeneutics. In studying the common ones like literal, moral, allegorical and typological biblical hermeneutics (Fiorenza, 1988; Decock, 2008), the African salvific conception provides manipulatable data that provide the interpreter component in the interpretation process (Clines, 1982). This is helpful, especially where the process makes use of the hermeneutical circle as a process of interpretation. In terms of developing interpretation discourse, it acts as an additional hermeneutical tool due to its richness in African ritual symbolism. The literal interpretation is enriched by the African idiomatic and orality that depicts spontaneity in grasping messages in sermons, especially when preachers and expositionists use African proverbs from the pulpit. However, its shortcoming becomes apparent when applied to such theories like traditional

literary criticism (Renaud, 1998) in that not much “author centredness” gives equivalents in African traditions.

The social implication is that the African biblical scholarship is enriched by the traditional salvific mindset that plays the critical role of functionally relevant exegesis. The discourse brings the import of the biblical text into people’s life (Biggs, 2006) as they wrestle with what they consider as forces of evil. The social location and biblical criticism are decisive on how one sees the world and constructs reality in contextualised hermeneutics (Fiorenza, 1988). The concept enhances the context of biblical text by putting beckons that helps in constructing realities when the context is as important as the text. As a missiological tool, the concept presents a Christological motif of Jesus, who is felt and touched by the Africans as they commune in fighting threats to life.

Developing African Contextual Hermeneutics

Two things to note about contextualized hermeneutics for evangelical theologians and reformation scholars for African Christianity; the first thing realised is the judgemental attitude about right or wrong hermeneutics by Church leadership. There exists thoughts of inspired subjectivity and hermeneutical objectivity driven by science of interpretation, theories, confessions, exegetical guidelines and the Christocentric typology and allegory (Walton, 2002). These approaches are mostly fronted and passionately defended by western scholarship. The defense is adapted by churches started by early western missionary enterprise to Africa. Recent African hermeneutical contextualists have fronted the claim that there cannot be prerogative of objectivity in biblical hermeneutics (Adamo, 2015). While this is not a defence of absolute subjectivity in hermeneutics, there are concepts that are distinctive to Africans, especially in dealing with forces of evil as perceived through the prism of African spirituality.

The second thing to note is the application of these contextual hermeneutics in individual denominations. The mainline churches in Africa are overly sensitive to any apparent contravention to their faith especially on matters cultural and traditions dealing with evil. Often times, this leads to outright denial of existence of African traditional salvific approaches discussed above. On one hand this has led to scholars within the reformed mainline churches displaying reluctance to engagement in research in this area of enquiry. On the other hand, certain strands of Pentecostals have exploited these African contextual hermeneutics in their worship, without meaningful research, and are reaping big in terms of wining following. An observable trend is that at times Christians from mainline churches will covertly go to these Pentecostal churches to be prayed for and continue to be ardent followers of their churches.

There needs to be innovative and creative ways of developing a contextualised hermeneutic using African spirituality, worldviews and philosophy (Mburu, 2019). Three approaches are suggested. Firstly, most of the African salvific variables/concepts are in verbal ritual symbolism of orality and hearing. For this reason, a process of validation of oral literature ought to be developed as a basis/source of African contextualised biblical hermeneutics. Just like there are oral literature of specific African nations/ethnic groups, likewise we ought to specify African expressions of hermeneutical thought. To this end African idioms, proverbs, riddles, are key (Pobee, 1979). This is because majority of African scholars engage arguments about concepts of God in Africa using expressions used by non-African writers.

Secondly, there is what is referred to as African philosophies. Again, there are certain defined philosophies that form the basis of Christian biblical thoughts as we know them today. For the Africans, their philosophy gets meaning in ritual symbolism that is propelled by theology that endears functionalism, experiential and utilitarianism. Further, in developing an ecclesiastical hermeneutical and philosophical dictum for African church, we can borrow from Adedeji (2012); “The Africans do not conceive God with abstract philosophical mindedness and they do not approach Him from a systematic theological framework. They are simple, tender-hearted believers. They believe what they worship and live what they believe” p 48. The stated belief is lived, not proved. Therefore, African hermeneutics is propelled by the trajectory that runs from abstraction to construction. Apart from Eurocentric hermeneutical models, building blocks of African hermeneutical theories ought to be actuated by social construction because African worldview to a great extent is socially constructed. Africans, by their very nature are social constructors.

Thirdly, Africans see, interpret and derive their thought system through the prism of the community. Evil and the rest of threats to life are perceived communally. In that case, salvation is communal not individual since dealing with threats to life is communal. A mission paradigm that is communal based is evaluated in an individual as part of African cosmology (Nwuzor, 1977). African church can ‘export’ to the universal church hermeneutical paradigm driven by Mbiti (1969) “I am because we are” and Mveng (1990) “community in communion”. Anthropological component within the ecclesiological praxis is a rich resource for the African church because evil is not just a reserve for the Africans. To that end salvation resonating around African contextualised biblical hermeneutics encompasses not only the human soul but Gods entire creation.

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