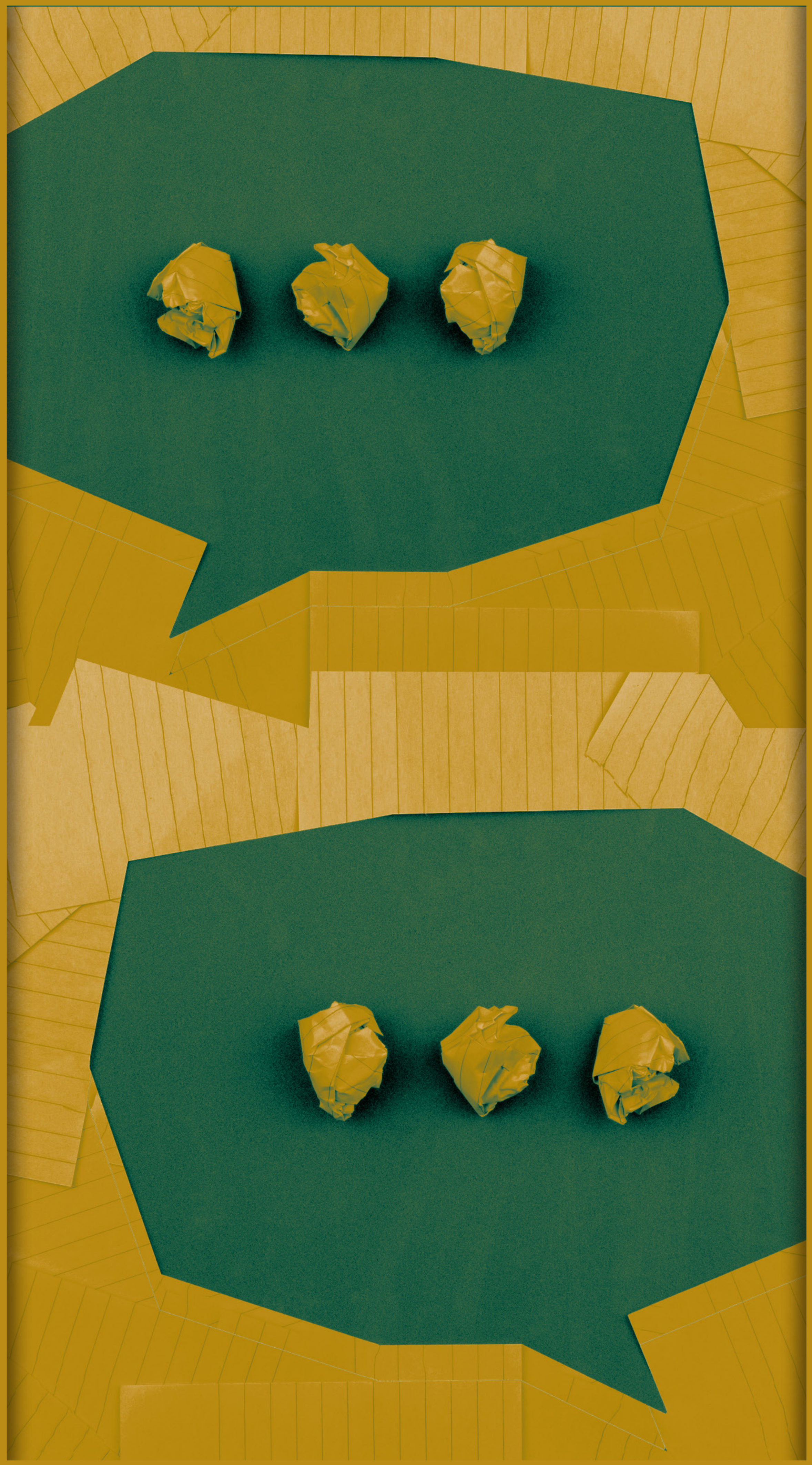

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Editorial

"If demography is destiny, then Christianity's future lies in Africa."[1] This was the headline of a report by the Pew Research Centre on the shift of the center of Christianity from Europe and North America to sub-Saharan Africa. Recent research also shows that the Global South is the world's new source of Christian missionaries. Through reverse evangelism, or the reverse-mission agenda, Africans are taking the gospel to Europe and the United States, the former centers of global evangelism. Today, some African-founded churches in the Global North are even reaching out with new missions to the African homelands of their members' parents, in what we might term *double reverse* mission.

"If demography is destiny, then Christianity's future lies in Africa." The question we must ask ourselves is this: What kind of Christianity? What kind of church do we want to leave as a legacy to future generations? If indeed Christianity's future lies in Africa, how do we ensure that we remain connected to the global church? This is a question that the editors of this special edition have asked themselves repeatedly as they wrestle with the challenges of this evolving phenomenon.

Fast forward to November 2021 when we attended the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) meeting that was held in Fort Worth, Texas. In addition to our increasing concerns about the health of the church in Africa, it had become evident to us that majority world voices were not well represented in the membership of this society. This was confirmed at a luncheon that was held (ironically) for minorities. We felt that this did not bode well for the health of the global church, whose center, as research had shown, had moved to the Global South. At the luncheon, we realized that we were faced with a unique opportunity to bring African voices into the global theological conversation that was already going on. The motivation for the African Biblical Studies (ABS) session was threefold. First, we wanted to promote evangelical African biblical scholars on the global platform. Second, we realized there was a need to encourage African biblical scholars to engage scholars from other parts of the world and become involved in the theological discourse already taking place. And third, we realized that we could contribute uniquely Africentric methods and perspectives on Scripture. After discussions with the ETS leadership, the African Biblical Studies consultation was "born." The aim of the consultation is "to promote Africentric biblical scholarship that highlights the voices of African Old Testament and New Testament scholars who are sensitive to the African context and faithful to the Scriptures."[2] We are grateful to the leadership of ETS for giving us this opportunity to share our thoughts with brothers and sisters from other parts of the world. We hope that what we started will provide a forum for scholars to impact the global church positively, as we use our scholarship for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his church.

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[1] McClendon, David. 2017. "Sub-Saharan Africa will be home to growing shares of the world's Christians and Muslims." *Pew Research Centre*, April 19, 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/04/19/sub-saharan-africa-will-be-home-to-growing-shares-of-the-worlds-christians-and-muslims/.

[2] Evangelical Theological Society. n.d. "African Biblical Studies." https://www.etsjets.org/puc/african_studies.

This *Conspectus* special edition is dedicated to papers presented at the launch of the ABS session. It presents four book reviews and the responses from the authors. The papers are as follows:

- Misheck Nyirenda (United Bible Societies, Zambia) reviews the book *Kony as Moses: Old Testament Texts and Motifs in the Early Years of the Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda* by Helen Nambalirwa Nkabala (Makerere University, Uganda).
- Batanayi Manyika (South African Theological Seminary [SATS], South Africa) reviews *Against Principalities and Powers: Spiritual Beings in Relation to Communal Identity and the Moral Discourse of Ephesians* by Daniel Darko (Taylor University, IN).
- Yacouba Sanon (Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne [FATEAC], Cote d'Ivoire) reviews *Reading Jeremiah in Africa: Biblical Essays in Sociopolitical Imagination* by Bungishabaku Katho (Shalom University of Bunia, DRC).
- Sofanit Abebe (Oak Hill College, UK) reviews *Favor and Gratitude: Reading Galatians in Its Greco-Roman Context* by Ferdinand Okorie (Catholic Theological Union, Chicago).

We thank the *Conspectus* Editor, Dr. Cornelia van Deventer, the Editorial Team, the Review Board, the Editorial Board, and the Seminary for inviting us to publish in this special edition. We also thank the reviewers and the authors for their insightful contributions.

It is the hope of the editors of this special edition that this showcasing of some African scholars will be a motivation for others to engage in the local and global theological conversation, enhance academia in Africa, and encourage Africentric ways of re-reading the biblical text.

In Christ,
Elizabeth Mburu[3] and Abeneazer G. Urga[4]
Guest Editors

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Book Review: *Kony as Moses: Old Testament Texts and Motifs in the Early Years of the Lord’s Resistance Army, Uganda.*

Nkabala, Helen Nambalirwa. 2021. *Kony as Moses: Old Testament Texts and Motifs in the Early Years of the Lord’s Resistance Army, Uganda*. New York: Peter Lang. x, 203 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4331-8429-1. Approx. 915 ZAR (49.95 USD). Hardback.

Helen Nambalirwa Nkabala is an Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and Peace Studies, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, at Makerere University, Uganda. She holds a Ph.D. (VID, Stavanger), an M.Phil. in Theology (Bergen), a Master of Arts in Peace and Reconciliation Studies (Coventry), a PGDE/ME in Educational Technologies (University of Cape Town), and a B.A. (Makerere).

P. Eichstaedt (2009, 5) characterizes Northern Uganda as a “world without control, where right is wrong and wrong is right, where carnage and chaos are the normal state of affairs,” (p. 2) and Nkabala acknowledges the complexity of causes that lead to the existence and activities of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). She proposes to explore their religious basis. In particular, she aims to investigate “how the LRA uses the biblical texts in their rhetoric” in order to get a “fuller understanding of this armed group and their ways of thinking and acting” (p. 22).

Through an interdisciplinary approach, she sets out to examine the texts Kony uses to see whether they support his application. Specifically, she aims to use exegetical and hermeneutical methods of analysis from biblical studies and rhetorical and narrative approaches to interpret the biblical texts. She also uses qualitative methods of social science research, particularly participatory action research.

Questions guiding her analysis include: How does the LRA use Old Testament texts and motifs to support their actions? How does their interpretation of the Old Testament compare to standard biblical hermeneutics/interpretation? What are the implications for LRA members who have reintegrated into society? What does this mean for Old Testament studies in Africa? The essence of her thesis is presented below.

She notes (p. 22), citing Mugambi (2001, 14), that several persons in Africa, including politicians and movements, have made use of Moses and the Exodus narratives to motivate their agendas. This mirrors such use of these narratives elsewhere in the world, including in Liberation Theologies.[1]

She notes that this “creates a theology that seems to have no control over the way it is used” (p. 78). She adds that Spohn (1995, 58–59) “rightly observes, when a particular perspective controls the reading of the biblical text, it mostly does not allow scripture to challenge its own presuppositions, and most of the time the Bible is simply reduced to providing rhetorical

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[1] Spohn (1995), quoted on p. 77, correctly notes that there is no singly unified theology of liberation. Rather, different versions emerge from specific social and economic contexts. They “integrate theology with the sociopolitical concerns emerging from a historical context of injustice, oppression and massive human suffering” (p. 288). They “begin from a contemporary historical context … and move to the biblical text to discover the attitudes that will inspire and sustain solidarity with the oppressed” (p. 56).

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support for political agendas that have been derived on purely secular grounds."

After inspecting the LRA's use of Old Testament texts, she concludes that "understanding the Decalogue cannot be done in isolation. The Ten Commandments should be read alongside the other commandments as they appear in the Pentateuch" (p. 124). She also concludes (p. 139), citing Bryan (1975, xvi), that "prophetic movements in Africa are fond of using Christianity as a repertoire of magical devices. They tend to pick up themes from the Old Testament scriptures that seem parallel to their own contemporary circumstances and rework them as legitimations for their own society."

At their insurgence in 1987, and into the early 1990s, the LRA presented the restoration of the Ten Commandments in society as its expressed desire. The origin of the insurgency against the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government was rooted in the perceived loss of political power by the Acholi. However, with Alice Lakwena's claim that God had sent her to rescue the people of Acholi-land, it soon took on spiritual connotations (p. 17). The religious foil was a powerful glue for the community and provided the rationale for all her activities and practices. Kony took over where Lakwena left off and inherited her spiritual credentials as well (p. 16).

The Acholi are a microcosm of several African communities today. They are highly religious and spiritual; in the missionary sense but without distancing themselves from their traditional ritual beliefs and practices (p. 16). In these communities, the role of engaging the spiritual authorities is typically the task of mediums. A human being is typically chosen and possessed by spirits and functions as a charismatic leader. They will offer spiritual direction to the community and differing from them on their interpretation of scripture or other claims they make is met with severe resistance.

The parallels between Kony and Moses that Dona[2] sees, for example, are remote associations with no historical-critical basis. They include beliefs and practices from Kony's Christian background (his father was Roman Catholic and his mother Anglican), the powers of a witch doctor (he apparently inherited his witch doctor brother's powers), and the Old Testament. There is no historical-critical reading of the biblical texts cited to inform the practice of the LRA. There are only loose associations with texts leading to arbitrary applications. For instance, because God killed (e.g., the Great Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah), Kony too, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, killed as God's work. There were rituals preceding and following battles. Losing a battle was attributed to sin (perhaps somebody secretly slept with his wife before going to war) and special ritual sacrifices were offered for the survivors, to cleanse themselves. Fasting was part of these rituals. The link between Moses and Kony is as tenuous as the idea of both liberating their respective communities from suffering.

According to Nkabala, those who emphasize Kony's twisted interpretations of the Old Testament and use them to discredit his ideology and practices fail to understand what is going on in the LRA. A movement grounded in religious ideology can only be counteracted by a more powerful religious ideology, not by dismissing the movement's religious ideology out of hand.

Her contribution to biblical hermeneutics in *Africa* purports to emphasize contextual reading (as the LRA does) but also to set "indicators for preventing possible and potential negative consequences which are likely to emerge as a result of such readings and interpretations" (p. 156). Her point of departure (p. 159), following Taylor (1998), is to ignore authorial intent and pay attention to the text instead. Next, she draws attention to the interpretative community as important players in biblical hermeneutics. Citing Schüssler Fiorenza (1988, 115), she advocates for the "elucidation of the ethical consequences and political functions of biblical texts in their historical as well as in their contemporary sociopolitical contexts" (p. 159). With Schüssler Fiorenza, she argues that "in the light of reader-response approaches … the question about a 'correct' interpretation of the Bible is insignificant" (p. 159). Rather, what one should promote is "an accountable good and responsible reading of the Bible" that promotes "well-being for all" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1988, 17, on p. 160). Nkabala agrees (p. 160) with Schüssler Fiorenza (1988, 15; 1999, 67,) that the yardstick for any interpretation of the Bible is "its effects on society." Under that measure, the interpretations of the LRA are unacceptable as they have negatively impacted the lives of the people in Northern Uganda.

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[2] A former follower of Kony whom Nkabala interviewed.

She notes that "African readers of the Old Testament are facing the same difficulties as everyone who reads the Old Testament." She adds, "Africa also faces the problem of a rampant increase of new religious movements where members normally claim that they get their knowledge of the Bible and interpretation directly from God" (p. 161). Finally, she notes, citing Masenya (2004), that "Africans make up a society of people who attach much of their respect to the scriptures and the Bible is treated as a sacred book which cannot be questioned, and when scripture is quoted, many tend not to question the texts they are reading and quoting" (p. 161). There is evidence from elsewhere that this characterization of African readers extends even to those who have studied in Western theological institutions (see Nyirenda 2021).

Appropriations of the Old Testament, like Kony's, are dangerous if it does not submit itself to the contextual, historical, and theological restrictions inherent in the texts. That is what Fee and Douglas (2003, 21) call "historical particularity." This is likely the reason Nkabala considers some texts dangerous (pp. 23–24). Any text read out of context is likely to lead to misinterpretations. This claim extends to the so-called *texts of terror* highlighted by Trible (1984, 1) (p. 24). The theological integrity of the Scriptures as God's Word is inseparably linked to interpreting them within their context.

Nkabala has correctly put her finger on the challenge of actual contextual interpretations of the Bible in Africa, many of which are harmful. I agree that "many Africans now produce contextual interpretations of the Bible—in ways which have proved to be detrimental to African society" and that "it is because of this practice that there are many self-proclaimed prophets in Africa" (p. 162). I also agree that "interaction between today's readers and the biblical text is inevitable" (p. 162).

On the one hand, one would argue that this plethora of reading positions bears witness to the successful deconstruction of the *objective* exegesis of the Enlightenment and Enlightenment-inspired scholarship. Several readers and reading contexts have since emerged. These include Dube's work *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (2000); Masenya's (2004) Bosadi Perspective; Storytelling Methods, promoted by Masenya, Dube, and Teteki; Kanyoro's Cultural Hermeneutics (2001); Kahilwe's Post-apartheid Black Feminist Reading; and Dube's use of The Divination Method of Interpretation, which are mentioned in this book (p. 166).

It is at the level of *how* one ought to mitigate against harmful readings that I differ from Nkabala. She aligns herself with those who do not accept "divine violence" in the texts and who look for "diverse ways of dealing with the violent Old Testament texts" (p. 162).

She agrees with Barr (1993, 218) that "biblical scholars must admit that texts with a violent tone are in all aspects morally offensive and must be faced as such" (p. 166). She adds that her "book is a contribution in this respect. It pays attention not merely to the historical, rhetorical and narrative meanings of the biblical texts, but also considers how these texts are used today" (p. 166).

However, in her attempts at exegesis, she affirms only rhetorical and narrative meanings as part of her methodology and leans on these when engaging the texts. The historical dimension, which is the one that provides the other critical data to the exegesis of any text, is hardly engaged.

Her contextual, *ethic of life* hermeneutic is meant to promote "an ethical non-violent reading and interpretation of the Bible with an ethically conscious mind and in a non-violent manner" (pp. 166–167). It is *contextual* in that it is meant to address "the challenges of a particular context and requires an interpretative community which provides checks and balances" (p. 167). Presumably, this is the way you make any context the basis for engagement "by the Bible scholars who should be asking questions about the role of the text in the contemporary society rather than concentrate on its historical basis alone" (p. 167).

I argue, however, that questions about contemporary society must engage with the historical meanings of biblical texts for the dialogue between the two to be a legitimate dialogue. Even the ethical dimension she advocates for must be drawn from the texts, not that which is found in the contemporary community. Privileging context and contemporary meanings over historical contexts and meanings is not a dialogue but a *de facto* monologue, with the texts as a mere springboard for such a monologue.

I would argue that a faithful historical-critical reading of the biblical texts, with all its challenges, complexities, and knowledge gaps, will show that the Scriptures are inherently bringers of *shalom* to mankind at all sorts of levels. They promote the life, well-being, and human dignity that she aspires to, but on their own terms, not those imposed from outside. An example is Isaiah 53:5 "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (ESV). The texts are transformative already. Contextual readings become dangerous when they ignore historical-critical and linguistic data. They replace God's שָׁלוֹם (well-being) with human חָמָס (violence).

I disagree with the claim that "even though the biblical text itself has remained fundamentally the same for many years, our approaches and perspectives have to expand and change," (p. 168) if by *expand* and *change* she means violate their inherent meanings. She accuses Dona of not having a "critical biblical culture" (p. 171). However, it is difficult to find any evidence of such a culture in her own prescriptions to Dona.

How can one use Exodus 1–3 to "emphasize that Yahweh is God of all the Israelites and the Egyptians" (p. 173) when the text distinguishes between the two and identifies Yahweh as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Israel's ancestors? To interpret Exodus 2:12 as characterizing Moses as a killer (p. 87) is to ignore the way prior texts have built up this character and his mission up to that point. It was, ill-advised though it was, the emancipatory killing of the oppressor, by someone who identified with the oppressed. Moses is not chosen as the deliverer of the Hebrews in that text; it is already implied by his birth and preservation narratives. The so-called parallel between Moses shepherding the sheep of his father-in-law and God presenting himself to Moses as "God of your father" is rather tenuous. Only by interpreting the text from an epistemologically pedantic and cultural bias perspective can one see a distinction between God saying he will liberate the Israelites and God sending Moses (p. 92).

The parallels drawn between Moses and Kony (Exod 3:1–22) are fleeting and do not hold up to critical scrutiny. For instance, aside from Kony's claims, there is no evidence of divine preparation, commissioning, and direction in his story.

Nkabala also made some errors in analysing the Hebrew text. She mistakenly claims that Exodus 20:13 has "five consonants," while the Masoretic text clearly has six consonants. According to the biblical texts (Deut 34:1–12), Moses was not barred from entering the promised land "because of his mistrust in God" like she argues (p. 127), but because he did not sanctify God's name in the presence of the people. In her chiastic analysis of Deuteronomy 34:1–12 (p. 128), her perceived linkage of A and A' (Moses sees the whole land with his eyes [vv. 1–4]/ Moses did great wonders in the eyes of Israel [vv. 11–12]) is very tenuous. Further, to seemingly dismiss, with Von Rad, the prophetic stature of Moses as "simply Deuteronomistic" (p. 132) highlights the danger of making form-criticism a key tool in interpreting the Scriptures, the very issue that the shift to emphasize rhetorical criticism sought to address. To reread Exodus 3:19 and "emphasize the need to co-exist by forgiving those perceived oppressors" (p. 174) is a blatant misrepresentation of the text. All this is in aid of her agenda of "sanitizing" so-called *violent* texts:

> Finally, the present book reveals that the new task ahead for African biblical hermeneutics is to begin rereading Old Testament texts (regardless of an inherent violent message or not) in a non-violent way and with an ethical consciousness, using the model I have proposed. (p. 183)

In the end, her *ethical* reading of the texts is nothing more than the exchanging of the historical-critical meanings of texts, including their ethics, to communicate what the reader wants them to say. Such a reading of the Old Testament texts is even more unrestrained than the allegorical method of Alexandria, which at least had the grace of God in Christ as its interpretative framework. For example, Origen (AD 185–254) could happily reread Abraham's ascent to the mountain in Genesis 22 as the spiritual journey of the soul in "abandoning earthly things and human affections in order to obtain things above" (Song 2015, 89).

Nkabala is denying herself the witnesses of the author/redactor and original readers/hearers when she says she is "not interested in uncovering the author's intention as a basis of [her] interpretation, nor [is she] interested in reconstructing the original readers" (p. 35). If rhetorical criticism is intended, as she has noted, to reveal the composition and persuasion elements of the Scriptures, it begs the question, "who are they trying to persuade?" For, although the text can be studied as an independent entity yielding all kinds of meanings, including those "beyond what the author intended" (quoting Trible 1994, 96–97, on p. 35), texts are not independent entities as they originate from concrete historical, socio-political, and ideological contexts that must be considered when they are interpreted if faithful hermeneutics is the goal.

This is the essence of considering the Old Testament texts as sacred, God-breathed entities. It is helpful, in this vein, to remember that when the apostle Paul was characterizing the Scripture in this manner (2 Tim 3:16), it was the Old Testament he had in mind. Therefore, although I agree that the intention of rhetorical criticism is "to understand the effect of the text" (see Thurén 1990, quoted on p. 35), this should not be different from that understood by the first audience of the texts. This work delves deep into the contextual circumstances and experiences of the LRA in order to understand their use of the Old Testament and other beliefs. However, it ironically denies the same level of qualitative analysis to the audiences in the texts themselves, replacing them with the contextual, *ethic of life* hermeneutic of the author.

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Author's Response: *Kony as Moses: Old Testament Texts and Motifs in the Early Years of the Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda*.

To a large extent, Nyirenda understood my work, and identified the challenges I raise and respond to in my book. However, we diverge on the kind of solution suggested. Like many in the past, I am very uncomfortable with his emphasis on the need to dwell on the historical-critical approach, especially because the community I present in my book is not that of trained biblical scholars or theologians but of the laity at the grassroots level, who interpret the biblical text literally.

The reviewer acknowledges that,

> Nkabala has correctly put her finger on the challenge of actual contextual interpretations of the Bible in Africa, many of which are harmful. I agree that 'many Africans now produce contextual interpretations of the Bible—in ways which have proved to be detrimental to African society' and that 'it is because of this practice that there are many self-imposed prophets in Africa.' I also agree that 'interaction between today's readers and the biblical text is inevitable' (p. 162).

He faults my book, stating that "she affirms only rhetorical and narrative meanings as part of her methodology and leans on these when engaging the texts." Upon this basis, Nyirenda argues that "questions about contemporary society must engage with the historical meanings of biblical texts for the dialogue between the two to be a legitimate dialogue.... Privileging context and contemporary meanings over historical contexts and meanings is not dialogue but a *de facto* monologue, with the texts as a mere springboard for such a monologue." The reviewer believes that "a faithful historical-critical reading of the biblical texts, with all its challenges, complexities and knowledge gaps, will show that the Scriptures are inherently bringers of *shalom* to mankind at all sorts of levels."

From the review and evaluation, the reviewer seems to agree with but again also misses the very point that this book seeks to address—the challenge of biblical interpretation in Africa. While the reviewer argues that the Scriptures are inherently "bringers of *shalom* to mankind at all sorts of levels," experience and practice have shown the contrary. It must be understood that the author in this book does not in any way intend to "violate their inherent meanings," neither does the book accuse "Dona of not having a 'critical biblical culture.'" Instead, I agree with Fetalsana-Apura (2019, 12–13) when she argues, "A reading of a text uses the symbols and thought categories that are familiar and meaningful to a person. These are products of one's culture and personal experiences.... To make the Bible relevant to a different context, translation must take the language and worldview of the receptor community."

In this book, I acknowledge the importance of historical analysis, but I am also aware that in interpretation, concrete reality must be given as much attention as the text. The interpreter's social location, ideological commitments, and religious assumptions also influence reading (Fetalsana-Apura 2019, 14–15). In this case, Dona's life experiences and those of other

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Lord's Resistance Army members shaped their reading of the Bible, and to use the words of Paul Tillich (1951, 14), this is my "Ultimate Concern" in this book. It is upon that basis that I seek to echo the clarion call by Schüssler Fiorenza (1988, 16) that "academic biblical studies should move beyond the limits of educational or pastoral training towards opening up to the public/society so as to foster the opportunity of a critical biblical culture and a pluralistic historical consciousness." In my book, I prefer to lay more emphasis on the critical challenge that faces biblical use today and, in agreement with Schüssler Fiorenza (1988, 17), make suggestions for an accountable good, and responsible reading of the Bible—which is to promote well-being for all.

I differ from the reviewer when he presents Scriptures as bringers of *shalom*. This is because texts can only make meaning within a specific context. Scholars have argued, and I agree with them, that it is only an assumption for one to think that the meaning of a text can be established in an objective manner and the meaning of an author can only be reconstructed tentatively so a text may take new meaning in changing circumstances (Collins 2005, 4). In the same line, Fetalsana-Apura (2019, 7) explains that "the context of the text, the text, and contextual interpretation are frameworks that cannot be disregarded in the hermeneutics of resistance." Therefore, presenting a text as a bringer of *shalom* as done by the reviewer is akin to finding simplistic answers in a way that only endorses the Bible as authoritative and infallible in all matters related to truth (Frampton 2006, 4). Moreover, it is again my considered opinion that to approach a text as something static would also be incorrect.

To argue that an interpretation would only have meaning if understood from its historical context is, in my view, simply an amplification of what Collins (2005, 4) calls the construction of a hierarchy of meanings. It is also such views that promote a colonial mentality and influence that advantages Western interpretation as the more objective and more reliable basis in constructing biblical meaning and the reason why contextual hermeneutics has not flourished (Fetalsana-Apura 2019, 7). Musa Dube (2012, 5) has figuratively likened the continued reliance on "theories of interpretation of the Bible ... generated by the former colonial 'mother countries' [that] formerly colonized Christian countries [to] children, [who] continue to eat from their mother's hand."

Misheck Nyirenda argues that "questions about contemporary society must engage with the historical meanings of biblical texts for the dialogue between the two to be a legitimate dialogue." Nyirenda's argument is a reflection of a historical challenge to biblical scholarship. For many years, biblical scholars preferred to preserve the historical meaning of the text. This in the long run separated the biblical meaning of the text from contemporary challenges (Scholz 2005, 53). The changes we have today leave the Bible in the hands of many untrained interpreters who are trusted by many followers because of the respect they hold. To ask such a community to base their contemporary understanding on the historical meaning is to ask for the impossible.

So with the current changes, biblical scholars should try to understand communities as they face them rather than ask them to base their understanding on historical meanings when they do not have the tools to retrieve these meanings. Scholz (2005, 67) argues, and I agree, that "Biblical Scholars cannot remain disconnected from the changes in the world." Like other scholars, I hold the view that keeping the historical meaning of the text as the yardstick for meaningful dialogue concerning questions in contemporary society rather than laying emphasis on the impact of the text and interpretation in society today denies the very problems for which this book was written. Such an approach leaves exclusive historical critics/interpreters in a position of dominance and power (Jonker 2010, 55). This makes it difficult for one to expose the challenge of literalistic biblical interpretation in Africa today. In turn, it creates a bigger problem for biblical scholars. I would rather argue that biblical scholars must adopt the "multidimensional approach to biblical interpretation [that] can help us escape the looming dangers of exclusivity in our global exegetical endeavors … advocating the adoption of another attitude in biblical interpretation, [one] of communality" (Jonker 2010, 54).

It should be understood that this book does not break but transcends the conventional methods of doing biblical studies and I do not claim that the book answers the whole paradox of the literalistic use of the Bible in contemporary Africa. However, in the book, I bring the readers to the scene of the LRA members who, without any biblical training, find and use the text in ways that enable them to commit violence. I have noted that while their interpretation makes sense, it is detrimental to society. It should be noted that these, like many other literalistic readers, are not bothered by the historical meaning of the text. Yet the way they read and interpret the text has consequences for the communities within which they do this. To echo the words of Musa Dube (2012, 25), biblical studies should also utilize social science-based fieldwork methods, given that it is a text that is read in the social contexts and informs the attitudes and practices of individuals and communities. Therefore, "when contextual authenticity is the norm, it is inevitable that interpretive contextuality (i.e., who I am) and didactic contextuality (i.e., for whom I am interpreting) should coincide" (Jonker 2010, 54; see also Mugambi 2003, 9–12).

Therefore, the ethical model presented in the book (pp. 166–170), puts into consideration contextual authenticity as a critical aspect of biblical interpretation in Africa. It should be understood as one that springs from field studies as just one of the many other proposed solutions to several hermeneutical quandaries apposite to theology (Frampton 2006, 4).

As a student of the Bible, I do acknowledge the place and need for the historical-critical approach; however, I also remain concerned when one decides to present it as the only yardstick for authentic biblical interpretation. We are faced with many literalistic interpretations on the continent of Africa by mostly laity. These interpretations have the potential to cause violence, such as is seen with the Lord's Resistance Army, presented in the book. It is my considered opinion that there is a need to offer alternative accessible tools by which any interpreter can measure the viability of their interpretation. It is on this basis and belief that I propose the gender-sensitive ethical model for biblical interpretation.

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Book Review: *Against Principalities and Powers: Spiritual Beings in Relation to Communal Identity and the Moral Discourse of Ephesians*.

Darko, Daniel K. 2020. *Against Principalities and Powers: Spiritual Beings in Relation to Communal Identity and the Moral Discourse of Ephesians.* Carlisle: HippoBooks. xvii, 279 pp. ISBN: 9781783687671. Approx. 380 ZAR (17,99 GBP). Paperback.

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In *Against Principalities and Powers*, Daniel Darko spotlights spiritual beings, which is a neglected subject in the interpretation of Ephesians. Three agendas characterize his central thesis: 1) using cosmology as a heuristic tool of interpretation, 2) underscoring the *function* of spiritual beings instead of *describing* their ontology, and 3) underlining believers' ethical formation while being cognizant of the role played by spirit beings. Overall, this is a timely text offering a new reading of Ephesians—one characterized by respect for ancient cosmological worldviews, their role in hermeneutics, and their critical appropriation into contemporary contexts.

Far from the recycled arguments around authorship and provenance, Darko charts a new course in which he contests the Enlightenment's negative appraisal of the supernatural. Various Western interpretations are categorized as "cynical about the notion of transcendent realities and ambivalent to the idea of personal evil spirits" (p. 1). Essentially, Darko uses a trident-shaped argument, complementing his primary claim with two statements: 1) "the letter would espouse no cogent message, and its readers would find it incomprehensible if its spirit cosmology was fashioned in the framework of post-enlightenment artisans" (p. 2), and 2) "we should acknowledge post-enlightenment anachronism and endeavor to bring spirit cosmology to where it belongs in the study of Ephesians" (p. 5). While the philosophical and naturalistic distinctives of the *Aufklärung* are given some attention, Darko traces the traditions of interpretation that emanated from the Enlightenment project from its onset.

The introduction foregrounds a central argument sustained across the monograph's breadth. Key to this chapter is the identification of the state of scholarship on Ephesians as it relates to powers, spiritual beings, and cosmology. Here, readers like Berkhof (1962), Carr (1981), Forbes (2002), and Wink (1984) are identified as proponents of the demythologization agenda, wherein ambiguity, *vis-à-vis* powers and spiritual beings, is arbitrarily interpolated into their hermeneutical premise (pp. 7–10). Others like Arnold (1989) are given a favorable review as those who acknowledge the socio-ethical influence of reading *powers* from the personal plane and

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their subsequent impression on the interpretation of the Pauline text (pp. 11–13). In mapping these two poles, Darko also identifies a nuanced position as propagated by Gombis (2010), who sees warfare language as a marker of Yahweh's *divine warrior* taxonomy. Furthermore, the author underlines Gombis's socio-political reading of powers in the cosmic realm—in contrast to the personal—deeming it inadequate in the believer's ethical formation (pp. 10–11). In all, this chapter identifies a gap in Ephesians research, one that signals the indispensable contribution of Greek, Roman, and Jewish cosmologies in excavating the author-intended meaning.

In chapter 2, entitled "Towards Greco-Roman Spirit Cosmology," Darko frames the nexus between Greco-Roman cosmology, the collective moral tapestry, and human behavior. In contrast to post-enlightenment interpretive tendencies, the continuum between spiritual beings' activities and human behavior is accented, delimiting a different worldview than the naturalistic ideology that dominates the modern world. On this, he writes,

> The decline of Christianity in the western hemisphere where members possess, produce, and control most of its resources and the growth of Christianity in the non-western world, where most of the worldviews of its adherents seem rather closer to those of the early Christians, begs answers to the legitimacy of post-enlightenment assumptions in biblical interpretation. (p. 20)

A curated survey of philosophy in antiquity follows where moral philosophy is neither relegated to a branch of a discipline nor treated piecemeal to prooftext narrow proclivities on the researcher's part—absent broad and nuanced engagement with the ancient texts. Instead, he proffers a robust description of the function of a cosmology tied to philosophy in antiquity.

Citing Epictetus, who considers philosophy and religious piety inextricable (p. 21), Darko supports the philosopher by engaging Plato, Xenocrates, Middle Platonism, Socrates, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, and Seneca (pp. 21–30). This section cascades into a depiction of cultic expressions in the broader context. In this depiction, overlapping matrices of politics, magic, and astrology etch a polytheistic image that affirms a universal assumption of spirit beings in all domains of existence. The chapter culminates in a discussion about Ephesus, Mediterranean deities, and clients of magical machinery. Darko's treatment of the *Ephesia Grammata*—a magic formula that individuals frequently invoked in Asia Minor—is pertinent to the central argument. Concerning the supplication of spirit beings for protection and malicious motivations, the author writes: "The notion that spiritual powers could be deployed to cause harm and/or alter fate by a second party's look of envy made sense within the prevailing worldview. The need to protect oneself from such malevolent acts was not tantamount to naïveté" (p. 51). Owing to the author's thick description, the reader anticipates fluid continuity between Asia Minor in Paul's day and the present African context(s)—on the continent and in the diaspora—allowing the text to be appropriately applied in contexts with a similar cosmology.

In chapter 3, entitled "Spiritual Beings in Judaism and Early Christianity," the author surveys Judaism and Christianity's respective cosmologies. Beginning with monotheism as depicted in the Pentateuch, Darko reaches to Genesis 12 to demonstrate how "Hebrew identity has always been linked to the divine initiative and covenant relationship with Yahweh" (p. 56). Linked to this mode of divine initiative, the author surveys spirit cosmology across the Hebrew Bible, appealing to passages such as Job 1; 1 Samuel 16:14–23; 22:21–23, 28; 2 Kings 21:6; and Daniel 1.

Darko then focuses on the Second Temple period, tracing spiritual cosmology in post-exilic literature such as *the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and Josephus. The author explains how Jewish mysticism thrived during the exile and the post-exilic period. He cites *Sefer HaRazim* and *Sefer Yetzira*, two mystic texts that capture the diasporic cultic *mélange*, dispelling any monolithic and reductionistic view of Judaism during this period. He writes, "This does not, however, suggest that all Jews dabbled in magic, but it points to shared spirit cosmology and fear of evil spiritual forces in the milieu" (p. 60).

Since early Christianity could be categorized as a subset of Judaism, Darko presents Christ and the church as stakeholders of a cosmology that coursed every crevice of the context from Jesus to Josephus and from Paul to Philo. The author presents a worldview predicated on the existence and influence of spirit beings. It is this worldview that he deems a crucial key to unlocking the meaning of Ephesians.

In chapter 4, Darko tackles the theme "Spirit Cosmology of Ephesians 1–3." Where classic biblical commentary is governed by set questions that follow a familiar sequence, Darko's commentary is a refrain that harkens back to his three-pronged central thesis of cosmology, the function of spirit beings, and the socio-ethical formation of believers through a cosmologically sensitive analysis. Although social identity inquiry has become a staple in biblical studies, the author underscores how most Ephesians scholars have neglected "the role of spiritual beings in the identity construction of Christ-followers in Ephesians." Regarding the categories of cosmological studies, Darko provides three dimensions, "physical, social, and spatial," and limits this chapter to the last element. In treating the *berakah* of Ephesians 1:3–14, emphasis is placed on the locative and spatial themes flowing from a shared understanding of how the world was envisioned. Terms such as *ἐπουράνιος*[1] (heavenly places; 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12), *ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ* (in the heavenly places in Christ; 1:3, AT) and *ἐν Χριστῷ* (in Christ) are foregrounded to underline the letter's cosmology. The author further underscores this point in his treatment of 1:21a, which reads, *ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος* (far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name). From this, one notes how Darko underlines the universality of Christ's triumph within a paradigm of ancient cosmology.

Writing about Ephesians 2:1–10, Darko says, "It takes divine intervention to deal with the spiritual entanglements, liberate and accord believers a new life in Christ" (p. 93). This premise makes plain the synonymity between sin and death within a locative frame. Here, moral deviancy and evil are presented as outflows of a malevolent reservoir located in *τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος* (the ruler of the power of the air; 2:2). Furthermore, the pre-conversion state is universalized for Jews and Gentiles before their inclusion in God's family and is emphasized through a discussion of 2:5.

Arguing for structural continuity between 2:1–10 and 2:11–22, the author underlines the phrase *ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* (without God in the world; 2:12), distinguishing it from modern forms of atheism by citing a particularized aversion to specific deities—a point that must be set against the polytheistic context from whence Paul wrote. Darko argues that the apostle's words are not a question of belief or non-belief but rather a qualitative interrogation of the very deities worshipped in context. For him, "the cause of social divisions is a lack of relationship with the true God"

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1 For this review, the Greek text is taken from the NA^{28}. Unless otherwise stated, English translations come from the NRSV. At times the designation AT (author's translation) is provided to foreground my preferred English rendering of the Greek text.

(p. 103). Thus, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile and the existence of the Christian community "heralds to the powers God's power to overcome their efforts to engineer interethic [*sic*] divisions" (p. 108).

The sovereignty of God captured in the prayer in 3:14–21 is framed in cosmic dimensions, demonstrating the necessity of a compatible worldview to accurately apprehend authorial intent. The chapter closes on a note of honor to explicate who God is in the Graeco-Roman context, in the ecclesial community, and in the cosmos.

In chapter 5, "Spiritual Beings in the Moral Discourse of Ephesians 4–6," the author presents believers as products of "divine initiative and agenda of the cosmos" (p. 115). In keeping with his tripartite thesis, he blunts the goads of established interpretation by saying, "the notion of theology as a distinct category from ethics is anachronistic and informed by post-enlightenment categories of reasoning" (p. 116). Furthermore, he contests the puritanical tendency to separate 1–3 from 4–6 and advocates for "the interwoven nature of doctrine and praxis" in the two halves of Ephesians (p. 116). The author enumerates three views related to Christ's actions in 4:7–16 and its appropriation of Psalm 68:18 (pp. 119–121). Despite one's preferred interpretation, he resolves that the meaning can only be illumined by a premise that embraces a cosmology in which a divine actor "breaks into the realm of humanity to empower devotees for productive service" (p. 120). Darko anchors a Christocentric argument whereby identity and identification with Christ are products of *μανθάνω* (to learn) and *διδάσκω* (to teach). Here, both the substance and instruments of pedagogy are ascribed to the divine actor who is Christ. Because of Christ, the believer is empowered to shed vice and be clothed in godly virtue that is fashioned after the "likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:24b).

Darko then treats anger and falsehood from Greek and Jewish frames (pp. 124–128). He highlights the limits placed on emotion in the new society and how a lapse in checks can open a gangway to diabolic activity—one that is detrimental to the integrity of the individual and community. The focus then shifts to another member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, whom he observes through a pneumatocentric appraisal of moral decency (pp. 129–130). He also mentions the *virtue-vice* antithesis in 4:28–30, highlighting the shift to the first person singular. This he considers a grammatical marker that stresses deterrence in the discourse. Darko discusses the meaning and implications of belonging to the new community and what *ὡς τέκνα ἀγαπητὰ* (as beloved children; 5:1b) entails—a theme he links back to the paraenetic injunction in 4:1–3 (pp. 130–140). The author writes,

> Ethical living is a natural outcome in a community whose members submit to the filling by/with the Spirit (5:18–21).... The Spirit's empowerment should not be equated with ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues or prophecy, but an infilling that ultimately engenders suitable demeanor and good conduct. (p. 140)

Darko details the Ephesian *Haustafel* and Spiritual Warfare, respectively (pp. 140–159). Regarding the former, Darko appeals to Christology to ground the validity and coherence of 5:22–6:9. In discussing the term *κύριος* (lord) and the phrase *ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ* (as to the Lord; 5:22b), Darko says it "may be read as urging wives to submit to their husbands 'as lords' or referring to the lordship of Jesus Christ" (p. 142). He submits that his leanings are to the latter, owing to the universality of Christ's authority in the new society's worldview. Discussing the peroratio (6:10–20), Darko notes how the military metaphor "encapsulates the current standing of the readership with God relative to cosmic powers from whose dominion they are saved"

(p. 147). The armor rebuffs the agency and influence of διάβολος (the devil), and it proceeds from God. Paul calls it τὴν πανοπλίαν τοῦ θεοῦ (the whole armor of God, 6:11), underlining God's invested posture in believers' spiritual formation. Darko considers prayer in the Spirit a vehicle that transmits cosmic influence into the material, even to the point of protecting believers from malevolent spiritual forces, forming believers after the image of God, and establishing believers in the new society. In this mode, believers are to function by continuing in Spirit-empowered prayer that causes them to stand faithfully while simultaneously broadcasting the efficacy and effect of the gospel in all domains.

In chapter 6, the author pushes against "Western intellectual prowess … the yardstick for deciphering NT texts or determining what qualifies as good scholarship" (pp. 163–164). This he does by drawing parallels between Asia Minor in Paul's day and the contemporary African context. Darko profiles the indissoluble link between religion and culture in Sub-Saharan Africa. He then ventures to elucidate how Africa's cosmological lucidity assumes the nomenclature for Supreme Divine Beings in the various beliefs south of the Sahara. Common to all cultures is the interpolation of terminology from traditional African belief systems into a Christian paradigm. This evinces itself in Bible translation, hymnody, and liturgy. The plurality of deities, the mediators that marshal exchange between the spiritual beings, and the identification of the Supreme Being as the ultimate paternal figure are discussed—underlining the continuity between cosmology in Asia Minor in Paul's day and contemporary Africa (pp. 169–172). Sections 6.4 and 6.5 imitate the thick descriptive work of the second and third chapters. The sole difference is the centrality of African cosmology. Darko treats conversion to Christ, ethical transformation, and paradigm shifts in the conceptualization of worldviews for believers in Africa (pp. 189–200). From the discussion of "Jesus Christ as Ancestor" to "Christ as Priest" to "The Holy Spirit and the 'spirits' of Africa," it is apparent that Darko identifies Christology and Pneumatology as salient themes in current scholarly discourse from Africa. The chapter ends with a statistical analysis of Spirit cosmology among Christians in Ghana, grounding the thesis of continuity between Asia Minor and Accra.

The concluding chapter ties together themes covered in the preceding sections. Here, Darko reiterates the imbalanced readings of Ephesians flowing from Occidental scholarship, the inextricable link between cosmology and religious belief, and Ephesians's moral injunctions born of "the moral qualities of God/Christ in kinship framework." So, what shall we say about this monograph? I put it to the reader that Daniel Darko's *Against Principalities and Powers* is a monumental triumph; a herald to a new frontier in Ephesians research that invites the Global North and South to gaze into the sacred text tempered by frames that hail from an ancient world.

A critique of such an exceptional study may seem anticlimactic. Nevertheless, it is the nature of the academic enterprise to engender mutual advancement through dialectical engagement. So, one ventures gingerly into the next phase of the review to make minor observations of otherwise exceptional scholarship.

First, the framing of the monograph—beginning with the Greco-Roman and Second Temple periods—could be considered ill-disposed to the culmination and appropriation of the central argument in the African context. If sub-Saharan cosmology is positioned on a hermeneutical continuum with Asia Minor, then perhaps an epistemological reflection of African cosmology should meaningfully course the breadth of the monograph—albeit in a suspended state to allow the biblical text to speak on its own terms. While some may argue that this distorts the hermeneutical principle, it is undeniable that an exegete comes to the text with questions. It is the weighting of these questions *vis-à-vis* the hermeneutical principle that should be evaluated if such an approach were to be adopted.

Second, the primary consideration of this work inevitably opens new reflections on methodologies from the Global South. In a context that is grappling with the biblical text—asking it various questions about historical injustices—the modes of reading are ever prone to competing and dissonant agendas that may or may not accord with authorial intent. A cosmologically attentive inquiry may afford exegetes the ability to treat and connect the worlds behind the text, the world of the text, and the contemporary world in a responsible way. Put plainly, Darko's monograph could lay the foundations for methodological formulations that connect the Global South with the first century, even in the hermeneutical premise.

Third, the use of honor and shame in chapters 3 and 5 was somewhat disconnected from the work done by the Context Group (e.g., Barton 1993, Elliot 1993, Malina 1993, Steinberg 1998, Crook 2009) and proponents of social history. It goes without question that honor and shame are not monolithic across time and context, and qualifying the mode of their use delimits boundaries of meaning and form. This is particularly crucial to Darko's appropriation point. Ghanaian honor conceptualization does not wholly translate into the Mediterranean context, and vice versa. Thus, to safeguard the reader from uncritical parallels, a nuanced articulation could have been motivated.

Finally, the uncritical use of *Jews* while referencing the pre-exilic period in chapter 3 may mildly taint the reconstruction of cosmology in antiquity. It may also blur the taxonomy of Israel's identity before and after the exile.

While the observations proffered are worthy of consideration, the reader should by no means shift their attention from the quality of Darko's book. This is a *tour de force*—a harbinger of African biblical scholarship in the wings. I salute the author and heartily recommend the monograph.

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Author's Response: *Against Principalities and Powers: Spiritual Beings in Relation to Communal Identity and the Moral Discourse of Ephesians*.

Against Principalities and Powers endeavors to fill a lacuna in modern scholarship and augment modern contributions in the study of Ephesians by drawing attention to a prominent but neglected feature in the letter, namely spirit cosmology. It critiques 1) negative posturing towards spirit beings in the European post-enlightenment framework and 2) isolating (a) theological constructs about God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ on the one hand, and (b) discourses on principalities and powers, on the other, from one another. Apart from treating God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ as separate theological categories, prevailing scholarship on the *powers* usually utilizes lexical and source-critical approaches in a quest to understand their origins, usage, and nature in Greek, Roman, and Jewish antiquity as the backdrop for studies on Ephesians. It becomes apparent that post-enlightenment sensibilities and post-World War II existentialist pursuits underlie portraits of the powers as socio-political structures, religious institutions/structures, hypostasized or personified abstractions, angels, even as institutions inhabited and steered by evil spirits. The author argues in favor of and concurs with, *inter alia*, Clint E. Arnold (1989) that in Ephesians the *powers* refers to personal evil spiritual beings and builds on that.

Against Principalities and Powers sets the agenda to move from isolated treatments of spirit cosmology to explore the wider function of spirit beings (God, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and the powers) in the identity constructs and moral framework of Ephesians. The book surveys and reconstructs Greco-Roman and Second Temple Jewish spirit cosmology with particular attention to Asia Minor and sheds light on how certain parlance or argot in Ephesians may have been understood in its *milieu*. Two chapters demonstrate how the spirit cosmology in Asia Minor may aid our understanding of the division between the so-called (a) doctrinal/theological (chs. 1–3) and (b) paraenetic (chs. 4–6) sections of the letter. The findings lead to a better grasp and deeper appreciation of God's salvific work through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. The essence of salvation—deliverance from the powers and their influence—becomes apparent. It is established that spiritual activity in human affairs was assumed in the cosmological and epistemological framework of Ephesians. Believers are blessed to have God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ on their side, even as the devil and his cohort employ various stratagems to oppose God's work in and through them. Christ's followers are not portrayed as victims, defenseless, or powerless against principalities and powers. Conversely, they are delivered, divinely enabled, and secure in an exalted position with Christ—as victors.

The book makes no claim to being an exact description of the reconstruction of the conceptualization of the world in antiquity but provides a proximate account that enables readers to imagine the worldview of Christ's followers as portrayed in Ephesians and in Asia Minor. Moreover, no claim is made to the effect that sub-Saharan African

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worldviews, religious traditions, or cultures today are the same as that of the ancient world. Conversely, the chapter entitled "Parallels and Particulars" endeavors to concretize the Greco-Roman worldview with parallel concepts in Africa in the quest to make that which is otherwise abstract more relatable. The chapter also teases out features that need to be acknowledged to mitigate anachronistic assumptions or projections. As noted, the modern reader, African or Euro-American, "can only surmise, imagine and assume" how the early Christians received or implemented the contents of the letter since all we have is the letter (p. 208). Moreover, it is indicated that "the post-colonial quest to reimagine Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit analogously as ancestors and fetish priests is absent in early Christianity" (p. 211). In other words, African beliefs in spirit beings such as ancestors were known in the ancient world, but early Christ-followers did not equate their perceived presence to the work of the Holy Spirit or left traces of anything resembling what is designated as *ancestral Christology* in some quarters in our time.

African philosophy and religious traditions are intertwined. Chapter six presents the African epistemological framework in which spirit beings are perceived to be active in every sphere of life. If the reviewer finds the treatment insufficient, then the author concedes and regrets any additional evidence that was not accessible to him or adduced in the discussion. However, it is doubtful that such material on African philosophy (realizing regional differences) would contradict any of the findings in chapter six. Moreover, the work appeals to Mediterranean honor and shame sensibilities only where relative lexemes are employed in Ephesians, specifically in the kinship framework. It should come as a surprise if the Context Group on honor and shame have gathered any evidence to belie the findings and usage in this book—literal, material, numismatic, or archaeological evidence.

Finally, an African hermeneutical approach that attends to the historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds (looking behind the text) is likely to lead to an appreciation of what we *find* in the sacred text of the early Christians. As shown in this book, such a methodology would enrich the African church today and allow for reasonable collaboration with non-African interlocutors. This author does not, however, object to post-colonial readings (looking in front of the text) in academic discourse. Such methods often remind scholars about deliberate assumptions and inadvertent presuppositions that scholars bring into the interpretative task, though their shortfalls cannot be overlooked. Sometimes, the distance between the popular quest to study the Bible from one's social location and apply the Bible to Christian living—at least in West Africa—and what some post-colonial readers claim to be doing subjectively to aid Africans as the grassroots, is rather wide. A new form of colonialism ensues where African scholars evoke grassroots sentiments, generate unrelatable ideologies to Africans in the mainstream and cloth them in reader-response oppositional and nationalistic frames to align with certain ideological readers in the interpretive discourse. Post-colonial hermeneutics in Africa may still read from *in front of* the text to identify, highlight, and address Africa's ecclesial and socio-political needs for the edification of Africans. The book under review does not however employ a post-colonial ideological framework.

In sum, "the study aims to augment prevailing scholarship by arguing that we should acknowledge post-enlightenment anachronism and endeavor to bring spirit cosmology to where it belongs in the study of Ephesians" (p. 5). That was the aim—hopefully the book met its goal.

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Book Review: *Reading Jeremiah in Africa: Biblical Essays in Sociopolitical Imagination.*

Katho, Bungishabaku. 2021. *Reading Jeremiah in Africa: Biblical Essays in Sociopolitical Imagination.* Carlisle: HippoBooks. xiii, 217 pp. ISBN: 978-1-83973-213-3. Approx. 355 ZAR (15.99 GBP). Paperback.

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Katho's *Reading Jeremiah in Africa* is an uninhibited study of the book of Jeremiah from the perspective of one who witnesses the struggles and suffering of his contemporaries. Katho's main concern in these essays is to show how the book of Jeremiah is relevant to the African people. To accomplish his goal, he advocates a reading of the text that takes into account the "experiences and struggles" (p. 2) of the African peoples.

Using ten selected passages from the book of Jeremiah, he draws parallels between the predicaments of the people of Judah and the complex political and economic situation of contemporary Africa. Thus, reading Jeremiah through the prism of African realities proves to be a constructive approach that not only sets this book apart from Western interpretations but also departs from a merely spiritual understanding of it. Katho succeeds in doing this without falling into the trap of theological *ghetoism*. His interpretive task is not only informed by the socio-political realities of Africa but it is based on an honest and robust analysis of the text. Although Katho does not clearly state this in the book, the discerning reader understands that his contextual approach is based on traditional evangelical exegesis, i.e., the historical-grammatical method. This shows his respect for the meaning intended by the biblical author, which he seeks to establish before drawing his own conclusions.

Each one of the ten chapters highlights specific issues faced by Africans, "including poverty, war, injustice, corruption, idolatry, abuse of power, and the crisis of refugees and exile [sic]" (p. 2). While chapters 1–7 paint a bleak picture of the situation in Africa, chapters 8–10 offer hope for an Africa that is rising from the ashes by God's mercy and sovereignty.

In the opening chapter, Katho reflects on Jeremiah's call as a prophet (Jer 1:1–19). The background of that call is the poor leadership of Judah and the imminent judgment of God on his rebellious people. It is under such circumstances that God raised Jeremiah. He warned his servant that his mission would be unpleasant and perilous. However, God reassures him that he will protect him. In light of the African situation, Katho hopes for a prophetic ministry based on the model of Jeremiah when he observes that "each nation needs its own Jeremiah, someone called by God to remain faithful despite all the hardships arising from living under bad leadership, someone who can shine in the darkness as a reminder to the establishment

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that there is an ultimate judge of the universe" (p. 12). The questions he asks at the end of the chapter show that the rampant prophetic ministries in Africa today are set on another course. Unfortunately, Katho does not provide any answers to those questions. African cities are filled with entertainers, charlatans, and magicians who call themselves prophets. These false prophets are causing serious damage to the church in Africa (p. 17). They outnumber true prophets such as those mentioned by Katho (pp. 20–21). True prophets are not those who wield the title but those who demonstrate through their character, lifestyle, and message that they are true prophets of Yahweh. Africa needs more of those.

Chapter 2 deals with the apostasy of Judah (Jer 2:4–8). The people of Judah have failed to connect with their history. Their spiritual amnesia and the failure of their leaders (religious, political, and intellectual) to address the spiritual bankruptcy of the nation had caused them to abandon the Lord their God. As a result, disaster befell them. According to Katho, Africans must learn from the mistakes of the people of Judah. Our leaders too have the responsibility to diagnose and address the roots of Africa's evils, some of which lie in our colonial past, and others in our current spiritual confusion. There is no gain in turning away from God. When Africans and their leaders get involved in occultism and other satanic practices, they end up bringing destruction to themselves.

The situation evoked in chapter 2 is further analyzed in chapter 3 (Jer 4:19–22). The people of Judah have turned away from God, and the result is chaos and anarchy. Jeremiah is appalled by the lack of concern of the people and their leaders. His warnings and efforts to draw attention to the looming disaster are to no avail. His heart is broken by this metastatic apathy. As a true prophet, he carries the burden of his compatriots and suffers in their place. In this respect, the prophet Jeremiah is a model for the church in Africa. Our continent is languishing and crumbling under the weight of, *inter alia*, corruption, social injustice, and bad governance which lead to wars, poverty, and massive displacement of populations. Like him, "we must not keep silent in the face of injustice" (p. 63). Some had the courage of Jeremiah and paid for it with their lives, while others went into exile in order to save their lives. Africa needs more "groaning prophets" to stir the minds and hearts of her sons and daughters. For Katho, the detachment of many pastors and church leaders from political and social issues is antithetical to their call to serve God. There is no room for neutrality.

The people's economic poverty is the subject of chapter 4 (Jer 5:1–6). The main argument developed by Katho in this chapter is that material poverty begets spiritual poverty. The main concern of the poor of Judah was survival, and that concern overshadowed their desire to please God. Just as Jeremiah had compassion for the poor of his time, the church in Africa must take action in favor of poor people. We must learn to develop empathy for the poor. Through first-hand testimonies, Katho encourages the reader to engage with people and know their stories. In reflecting on the connection between poverty, spirituality, and the knowledge of God, Katho seems to admit, at least at first, that what is going on in Judah is quite different from the situation in Africa. Whereas poverty is an obstacle to spiritual growth in Judah, he opines that in Africa poverty seems to be an opportunity for many to draw near to God. However, for Katho, the number of Christians does not necessarily indicate their quality. Despite the growing number of Christians in Africa, the impact of Christianity on the continent remains very minimal. The reason, Katho argues, is that the church has more often than not been content to preach the Word and has not been concerned with economic and social issues. Katho then concludes by stating that "poverty and severe suffering are indeed hindrances to faith and proper knowledge of Yahweh" (p. 79). Poverty and oppression do indeed have the potential of distorting people's view of God and impeding true worship. Following

Jean-Marc Éla (2005, 134), Katho suggests a reform in the structure of the church in Africa to reflect the realities of African communities. In other words, the church must become a place for reflection, sharing experiences, productive debate, and solidarity.

Chapter 5 paints a picture of a disintegrated society (Jer 9:2–9). The ingredients of the collapsing Judean community are identified as disloyalty toward God and toward one another, hypocrisy, falsehood, wicked and violent rhetoric, and the oppression of the poor and weak by the rich and powerful. These same evils are found in most African countries as they are in other parts of the world. However, the tragedy is when we can no longer identify the difference between Christians and non-Christians. For Katho, the church in Africa has failed to instill godly virtues in its members and to prepare them to take up their responsibility within the communities they belong to.

Chapters 6 and 7 are a critique of Judah's leadership (Jer 9:23–24 and 22:13–19). In the two passages, the prophet Jeremiah criticizes the Judean leaders for their misuse and abuse of three divine blessings, namely, wisdom, power, and wealth. When leaders rely on these to govern, the result is bankruptcy. Good governance in Africa is not a matter of democracy, let alone the holding of regular elections. "Our problem," argues Katho, "is the wickedness of our leadership, a leadership that neither fears God nor understands its duty as that of leading citizens under a higher and greater authority" (p. 135).

Examples of abuse of power, manipulation, embezzlement, mismanagement, clientelism, and similar evils, abound in Africa. Those who engage in these practices end up miserable, as demonstrated by the recent history of our continent. Thankfully Africa has produced a few good leaders whose examples can inspire others. Katho proceeds to encourage leaders to use their influence and their God-given resources for the good of their people. The joke that "in a political speech, only the grammar is right," must be disproved by the practice of justice, truth, and compassion. In other words, the search for the improvement of the living conditions of populations must be the main concern of our leaders.

The last three chapters of the book focus on the rebuilding of Judah after the crises. Chapter 8 marks the beginning of a new era after the political demise of Judah and its leaders (Jer 24:4–7). Yahweh's direct intervention makes it possible to activate a new life. This is a message of hope for Africa, for despite the multi-layered social, political, and economic crises, and the endemic corruption that our continent faces, there is hope beyond the present state of despair. It is the task of the church to articulate that message of hope.

In chapter 9, the prophet Jeremiah calls for a salutary change of attitude (Jer 29:4–9). The people in exile are called to thrive in Babylon, their place of servitude. In other words, they were to transform a land of oppression into a land of opportunity. For Katho, the implications of this for Africa are that new beginnings are always possible. We need to reconsider our history, make peace with our traumatic past, and refuse to listen to the merchants of illusion, be they religious or political. Thus, this passage speaks to the many Africans who are living as exiles in their own countries, prisoners of political and economic systems designed to exclude them from progress and prosperity. The key word for them is to seek the *shalom* of the place where God has placed them.

The last chapter of the book also speaks of God's unilateral decision to create a new community under a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). The chapter speaks of the democratization of the knowledge of God and the inscription of the divine law in people's hearts. For Katho, the essential trait of this new community is forgiveness. The church must therefore model forgiveness as a way of life and thus illustrate the principles and values laid out in the Bible. When the church in Africa lives according to the terms of God's word, she becomes an agent of transformation of society. On a continent where negative ethnicity and tribalism are exploited by unscrupulous politicians and religious leaders, the church is called to become a safe haven as she demonstrates that the restoration of our land stems from people's reconciliation with God and with one another. We long for the day when the words of the psalmist will reflect the experience of the peoples of Africa, a day where "love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Ps 85:10 NIV).

Turning to the evaluation now, it is hard not to agree with Katho's analysis of the social, political, and economic situation on the African continent. His criticisms of the clergy and the church, of the political establishment, and of the social *status quo* are well-founded, and the passages selected to support his arguments are used with accuracy and honesty. Despite this positive assessment, a few critical remarks are in order. First, the form, second, the methodology, and third, the content.

There are two observations that relate to the form and structure of the book. The first has to do with the introduction. In the introduction to the book, Katho provides summaries of each of the ten chapters. These summaries are very helpful as they give glimpses of what to expect in each chapter. Unfortunately, these summaries are merely copy and paste of parts of the conclusion of each chapter. It would have been more effective to present the summaries in such a way as to avoid such repetition. The second observation regarding the form and structure is the absence of a conclusion to the book. It is unfortunate that Katho did not provide the reader with the gist of his message nor encourage young scholars towards new research in the area of socio-political interpretation of the Scriptures.

In relation to the methodology, a few comments are needed. According to the subtitle, the author wants the essays contained in his book to be understood from the perspective of "Socio-political Imagination." In his view, "biblical interpretation in Africa must embrace public political responsibility and seek justice and well-being for all in a continent that is facing challenges on many levels" (p. 1). Following this affirmation, Katho outlines his method which consists in using proverbs and considering the struggles of the African peoples. Consequently, according to the author's statement of purpose, one assumes that the book is meant to offer a critical evaluation of the realities of Africa in light of the book of Jeremiah, sustained by a pragmatic and liberationist perspective. Such a process would involve: 1) identifying and criticizing a behavior or practice, 2) examining a biblical text and highlighting biblical principles based on exegesis, and 3) calling for the application of the discovered principles.

Unfortunately, as one reads the chapters, it is difficult to follow the coherence of the approach advocated at the beginning of the book. While Katho follows these steps in some chapters, in others he does not. So, if one is expecting to find an identical structure running through the ten chapters, one would be disappointed. It would have been helpful if Katho clearly outlined his approach in the introduction and showed how to apply it. Katho's focus on the praxis is well taken. However, should Africans' worldview(s) and belief systems not constitute a major element in interpreting Jeremiah? In other words, would we not run the risk of treating only the symptoms without getting to the root of the problem?

While I agree with Katho's overall analysis of Jeremiah in connection with Africa, I beg to disagree with him on the issue of poverty and the knowledge of God. In his comments on the fifth chapter of Jeremiah (see chapter 4), Katho writes: "Poverty and severe suffering are indeed hindrances to faith and proper knowledge of Yahweh" (p. 79). Is this so? Does poverty necessarily lead to a deficient knowledge of God? Does suffering veil God's ways to humankind and obscure people's attempts to know God?

If these questions are answered in the affirmative, then, those who preach the health and wealth gospel are absolutely right, for they preach that poverty and suffering are not the portion of God's children; that is, believers in Christ. The underpinning of this prosperity theology is that financial and material blessings and physical well-being belong to those who have faith in God, and that it is God's will to prosper those who trust him. Thus, the link between faith (knowledge of God) and well-being and wealth is strongly emphasized by the champions of the prosperity gospel in such a way that those who suffer or lack resources are considered to be spiritually unfit or to be imperfect in their knowledge of God. As we ask ourselves if poverty and suffering are indeed "hindrances to faith and proper knowledge of Yahweh" (p. 79), we must also ask: Is financial, material, and physical wealth a driving force to a proper knowledge of God?

We learn from the prophetic literature, Jeremiah included, that the prosperity of Israel and Judah in most parts of the eighth-century BC did not draw them closer to Yahweh. The richer they grew, the greedier they became. They indulged themselves in evil practices, injustice, and corruption, and betrayed Yahweh, the source of their prosperity (Isa 1:10–23; 5:8–25; Amos 4:1; 5:7–15, 24; see Deut 8:1–20).

In the book of Psalms, we meet the faithful crying out to Yahweh for help. Their cries for help are recorded in prayers known as Psalms of Lament. In those psalms, the *hasidim* (faithful) and the *tsadiqim* (righteous) are portrayed as people who trust Yahweh, love and fear him, and keep his commandments (Pss 3–5, 10, 12–13, 17, 22, 25, 35, 44, 54–57, 60, 74, 79–80, 88–89, 109).

They struggled at the sight of the prosperity of the wicked and the ungodly (Pss 37, 73) but persisted in their faith often without the certainty that Yahweh would deliver them and change their conditions. Their prayers bear the marks of hardship, betrayal, sickness, lack of resources, humiliation, and defeat. Nevertheless, their laments are the strongest testimony to their faith in a God who shattered their expectations but in whom they continued to trust.

Job was a man who experienced both sides of the issue at hand. He was a wealthy man and enjoyed personal well-being until the day everything was gone, and he became poor and sick (Job 1–3). His friends blamed his new situation on his sins and his misunderstanding of God's ways. Job fought back tooth and nail and appealed to the highest court. However, when God finally appeared and confronted him, Job acknowledged his foolishness: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted." When the Lord asked him: "Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?" Job replied: "Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:1–3 NIV). In his days of wealth and health, as well as during the ordeal of poverty and sickness that struck him, Job remained faithful to God. He denied the lies of Satan that Job only served God for his own benefit and therefore would deny him if his wealth and health were taken away from him. In light of the end of Job's story, it can be said with confidence that Job's knowledge of God grew deeper and stronger through his ordeal.

From a biblical theological perspective, I am compelled to disagree with Katho's statement that "poverty and severe suffering are indeed hindrances to faith and proper knowledge of Yahweh" (p. 79). As the cases of the psalmists and Job demonstrate, poverty or suffering can be ways to encounter God and know him in ways that would be otherwise improbable. On the other hand, success and wealth are not proof of a proper knowledge of God as the example of the Israelites of the eighth-century BC attests.

Overall, *Reading Jeremiah in Africa* is an innovation in African evangelical interpretation of the Bible. From that perspective, this book is a significant step away from the spiritual-only interpretation of Scriptures we are accustomed to. In an environment that is often resistant to new ideas, the author has the merit of clearing a field that was previously left to scholars from other traditions. Africa is facing multiple challenges and the time for imposing a unidirectional reading of the Scriptures is over. New and different approaches to reading the Scriptures must be welcomed as we strive to uphold the authority of God's word. Katho has managed to remain faithful to the Scriptures and to preserve the authority of the biblical text so dear to Evangelicals. For that, he deserves my praise.

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Author’s Response: *Reading Jeremiah in Africa: Biblical Essays in Sociopolitical Imagination.*

The best way to begin my response to Yacouba Sanon’s review of my book, *Reading Jeremiah in Africa: Biblical Essays in Sociopolitical Imagination*, is to thank him for his careful critique. He pointed out the need to address certain issues with greater care, particularly the importance of the African worldview and belief systems in biblical interpretation. The review also affords me an opportunity to clarify the hermeneutical logic behind my reading of the Bible, and in this way, to respond to Michael Blythe’s (2022, 98–100) review published in *Transform Journal*, which says that I fell short of providing a uniquely African hermeneutic.

In 2002, I was finishing my Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Natal, (now KwaZulu-Natal), after having studied for almost five years at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), now Africa International University (AIU). At one point during my studies in South Africa, NEGST invited me to spend time with the faculty, to explain how my years of study at NEGST were helping me now in my Ph.D. program, and the differences that I perceived between the two schools. I explained that at NEGST I learned to do sound exegesis but with very little consideration for the African context, despite the motto of the school: “A school in the heart of Africa with Africa on its heart.” However, in the School of Theology at the University of Natal, I was facing the challenge of too much context and too little exegesis in biblical interpretation. I was trying to draw from these two very different academic experiences to create my own hermeneutic. My aim was to address these two contrasting weaknesses by setting up an ongoing conversation between the sacred text and my African context. The keywords here are *ongoing conversation*, which I aim to be a part of throughout my reading of the Bible. This is what I tried to do in my book. How to interpret the Bible better, for the sake of the academy, the church, and the larger audience, is a constant challenge, not only for me but for all those who see the need for a fresh alternative to the dominant Western hermeneutic, which we have embraced as the only way to read the Bible.

Generally, most Western biblical studies pay scant attention to the socioeconomic, ethical, and spiritual challenges of the reader. For the Book of Jeremiah, for example, most scholarly attention during the last fifty years has been on the composition of the book, the relation of the Masoretic Text to the Septuagint, the Deuteronomic edition, the feminist imagery, and similar matters. The primary audience of such scholars is their colleagues and students in the academy, who are comfortable with this complex language and highly academic focus. Given these priorities, their interpretations fail to confront the crises of their age and ignore the voices from the church, other parts of the world, and ordinary readers.

The first time I experienced this challenge was in November 2014, during my first participation in a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), in San Diego, California. I found myself in a very interesting group with three well-known North American scholars, Walter Brueggemann, Ellen Davis, and Luke Timothy Johnson. As the date for the meeting drew near, I realized that some of the friends who had invited me grew increasingly apprehensive about how my paper would be received by the audience. One of them kept warning me that SBL scholars are not friendly and that I must therefore take great care when preparing and

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presenting my paper. At first, I did not understand exactly what that meant, since I had already presented more than ten papers at international conferences and published several articles on the Book of Jeremiah. I finally concluded that she meant it as a warning that a presenter from Africa might not meet the high standards of an American audience with its Jeremiah specialists. The fear was probably that I might present a paper that would be unacceptable to those who had come to listen to some of the most accomplished scholars in the field. Like the draw for the football teams going to the final tournament, I had unfortunately been consigned to a tough group. Yet, my paper was trying to demonstrate that many of those Western scholars, who were going to listen to me in that conference, do sometimes miss the mark in what I call the first-world reading of the Bible, which has unfortunately become a universal way of reading the Bible.

My paper was very well received, and a friend who was on the conference organizing committee told me later that evening that my presentation was beyond his expectation. That kind of appreciation was another proof to me that most of my friends were not very comfortable with what I was going to present. This is what encouraged me to continue with this reflection, and the revised version of that paper became the fourth chapter of this book. Two of the three scholars in my team that day were happy to provide positive recommendations for my book.

In a forthcoming book, I also hope to continue developing this hermeneutic. The guiding principle of my reading of the Bible remains the fact that the consequence of God's incarnation is that his Word, the Bible, is connected to its environment at all levels. When God reveals himself, he speaks and acts in a way that he makes himself understood; that is, in the language of those to whom he reveals himself. The hermeneutical task, therefore, consists in hearing this Word of Scripture and making it heard in these different contexts, despite its historical distance. As the living Word of God, the biblical text must challenge the believing interpreter and the community to which they belong, in their daily life and in their own reality. From my African perspective, it is clear that the book of Jeremiah is written in the context of the struggle for the liberation of the suffering people, a liberation that is both spiritual and physical, individual and collective. Therefore, I read Jeremiah in the contexts of disempowerment, failed leadership, war, famine, displacement, injustice, and poverty, to name a few. Said differently, I read Jeremiah from below, from the perspective of a continent in need of liberation. As I put it in a recent essay (2021, 566–578), I read Jeremiah in *subaltern* context. I agree with Sanon that in that conversation, there is a need to take into account the contribution of the African worldview and belief systems to point the way to the liberation of the continent through a sound biblical interpretation.

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Book Review: *Favor and Gratitude: Reading Galatians in Its Greco-Roman Context*.

Okorie, Ferdinand. 2021. *Favor and Gratitude: Reading Galatians in Its Greco-Roman Context*. Lanham: Lexington Books. xii, 143 pp. ISBN: 978-1-9787-0702-3. Approx. 1593 ZAR (87.03 USD). Hardcover.

Ferdinand Okorie is a member of the Claretian Missionaries. He is Vice President, Academic Dean, and Assistant Professor of New Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He received an M.Div. and an M.A. in Theology with a concentration in Biblical Languages and Literature from Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. He also obtained a Ph.D. in New Testament and Early Christianity at Loyola University, Chicago. In *Favor and Gratitude: Reading Galatians in Its Greco-Roman Context*, Okorie presents an updated version of his Ph.D. thesis. The book examines the Greco-Roman setting of Paul's message to his gentile audience in the regions of Galatia. Okorie argues that Paul intentionally uses Greco-Roman cultural values associated with benefaction to appeal to the Christian community in Galatia. According to Okorie, Paul does this to dissuade his readers from accepting Jewish Law observance as a necessary condition for Gentile Christ-believers to fulfill.

Okorie presents Galatians as Paul's intentional appeal to Greco-Roman benefaction conventions in order to elucidate how he wants the Galatians to understand their faith and express it toward God and fellow believers. In his letter, Paul thus advocates his message about God's relationship with humanity through faith in Christ which is contrasted with the message of his rivals. Paul's opponents advocate circumcision and the observance of Mosaic Law for Gentile Christ-believers in Galatia. Okorie demonstrates that Paul's appeal follows the contours of divine benefaction and the motif of reciprocity in response to divine favor since "the believer's life of faith in action honors God's gift in Christ" (p. 54).

Favor and Gratitude contains six chapters. In his introductory chapter, Okorie provides an overview of Galatians and defines πίστις terminology within the context of the patron-client relationship of benefaction. He notes that πίστις denotes *loyalty* in the Greco-Roman world while χάρις suggests *favor*. The term χάρις is defined as the goodwill or favor the benefactor freely bestows on the beneficiary. It also identifies whatever the gift recipient does in gratitude to the giver.

In chapter 1, Okorie investigates the benefaction conventions of the Greco-Roman world. He explores the possibility of understanding these conventions as the basis for Paul's message of the gospel which he articulates as the bestowing of favor by God on humankind. Okorie places an emphasis on the ethos of reciprocity as an essential aspect of benefaction in the Greco-Roman setting. Paul's aim in Galatians is then to convince the addressees to reject the teaching of his opponents. As Okorie notes, "unlike Paul, his Jewish-Christian opponents are convinced that the Sinai Covenant does not cease to be relevant with the coming of Christ. They firmly teach that the ministry of Christ is in continuity with the Mosaic Law; Jesus Christ fulfils rather than upends the law" (p. 2). Therefore, Okorie identifies Paul's exhortations as a call to reciprocate the favors Paul's readers have been granted by God and by others in the community of believers. They are to accomplish this through the concrete actions of loyalty to Christ, and love and goodwill to one another.

Chapter 2 parses the language of χάρις within the context of divine-human benefaction. Okorie here draws on similarities between the divine benefaction Paul presents in Galatians and the benefactions deities like Isis and Heracles are said to bestow on humanity. He rightly notes that the death of Christ on the cross is a self-giving love and represents God's favor to humanity in ways that do not parallel the wider Greco-Roman context. He also notes another distinguishing factor in that God's benefaction entails the divine gift of the Spirit to anyone who has faith in the death of Christ. This, Okorie notes, forms Paul's central argument which the Galatians will recognize as "an aspect of the patronage system in their social location" (p. 33). He asserts that Paul begins his list of the "fruit of the Spirit" with love, thus cueing the readers to recognize "the virtue of love" as being crucial in the relationship of benefaction Paul presents in his letter to the Galatians (p. 33).

In chapter 3, Okorie examines in more detail how Paul employs the language of χάρις in his letter. According to Okorie, Paul alludes to divine-human benefaction to describe the intimate friendship between God and believers. He also explores the significance of the notion of χάρις within Paul's persuasive strategy which he argues entails an appeal to the readers' experience of divine χάρις and the motif of reciprocity (pp. 51–57). According to Okorie, Paul does this in light of the cultural understanding of Christians in Galatia which would enable him to ask them to respond appropriately to God's benefaction since they would grasp what he was communicating. In this regard, Okorie identifies Paul's calling as well as that of the readers,' and also Abraham's experience of God's promise, as instances of humans experiencing God's favor. Receiving God's favor in turn necessitates a response of gratitude expressed through πίστις. As Okorie notes, "the Galatians' faith in action is their gratitude to God for the gift of divine favor granted to them through Christ" (p. 57).

Chapter 4 is an analysis of the language of χάρις in the context of human-to-human relationships. Okorie discusses Paul's portrayal of a picture of friendship among the believers in Galatia including his initial encounters with them (4:12–20). He asserts that Paul is again appealing to the Greco-Roman relationship of benefaction, particularly, the mutual giving and receiving of favor in accordance with the conventions of friendship. Such benefaction in human-to-human relationships calls for partnership expressed through mutual goodwill towards one another (5:1–6:10; pp. 71–76). This includes Paul's attempt to encourage "the relationship of giving and receiving benefits" among the believers in Galatia as well as between the Galatians and the church in Jerusalem demonstrated through the Jerusalem collection (2:10). Okorie thus places Paul's arguments within the context of Greco-Roman friendship-based benefaction conventions, which places a premium on reciprocity. So, Paul "presents the friendship relationship of giving and receiving benefits among believers on the principle of love, fellowship and equality." At the same time, he is "subverting" the social hierarchy of Greco-Roman patronage that places a socially inferior client under obligation (p. 61; see also, pp. 82–84).

Chapter 5 explores the contrast between Paul's appeal to the language of χάρις in defining the gospel message on divine-human and human-human relationships (p. 89). The chapter brings together arguments made in the previous three chapters. In this chapter, Okorie identifies Paul's opponents as Jewish Christ-followers who place circumcision and Torah observance along with faith in Christ as the basis on which humanity is to relate to God through Christ. For Paul, when non-Jewish Christ-followers observe the Law and get circumcised, it amounts to engaging in the "non-beneficial experience under the elemental spirits of the world" which marked their former sinful life of cultic devotion (p. 102). It also violates the appropriate response to God's gift of the cross and the "Spirit of the Son of God" and puts in danger “believers’ only sure hope of experiencing eternal reward and life with God” (p. 114). He notes that Paul’s appeal for friendship with one another and faithful living in Christ as a response to divine benefaction stands in sharp contrast to the demands Paul’s opponents are making.

The sixth and final chapter summarizes previous chapters and presents Okorie’s conclusion. After a brief summary of Paul’s presentation of God’s gift in and through Christ’s self-giving, Okorie affirms that God’s favor to humanity is identified in Galatians as “a bond of intimate relationship with the features of a family tie” (p. 121; see Gal 4:5–6; 3:26). His emphasis here is on the human response to divine benefaction which finds expression in a life of faith. Faith in Christ, which is a mark of the relationship between God and those who have experienced his benefaction, entails serving one another (Gal 5:13c) and “harvesting the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in their lives (Gal 5:22–23)” (p. 122). In contrast to the benefaction relationship between Greco-Roman gods and their devotees, Okorie notes that in Paul’s message, divine benefaction through Christ and the giving of the Spirit requires believers in Christ “to reciprocate God’s favor by a worthy way of life appropriate to their relationship with God” (p. 123). Such a life is to be marked by a relationship with one another built on the foundation of love, unity, fellowship, and equality (p. 125).

In his book *Favor and Gratitude*, Okorie presents a clear and interesting reading of the notion of *favor* in Galatians that is well-structured, informative, and engaging. The book also provides a reading of the language of *χάρις* in Galatians which explores the efficacy of grace in transforming and shaping believers, a feature of Galatians Okorie rightly identifies as a prominent aspect of Galatians (pp. 89–118, see Gal 1:11–12; 6:11–18). By providing a commentary on several passages in Galatians, Okorie’s book is equipped to contribute to a better understanding of Galatians in particular, and the shaping of Pauline thought in general.

However, although the book has much to commend, there are a few oversights. For instance, in arguing that the Greco-Roman context of benefaction should be seen as the backdrop of Paul’s use of *χάρις* in Galatians, Okorie bases his reading of benefaction in antiquity that does not engage the Jewish context. Although Paul’s addressees are Gentiles that reside in the region of Galatia and are located within a Greco-Roman cultural context, Paul himself reworks the Jewish notion of divine benefaction in light of the Christ-event as demonstrated by his use of citations and allusions to Scripture.

Moreover, as James Albert Harrill (2012, 76–94) convincingly argues, Paul often uses Roman rhetoric and ideologies to craft his own Jewish and Greco-Roman Christocentric discourse. He cites as an example the discourse on authority Paul invokes in Romans. In Romans 13:1–7, where we find the first instance of a discourse on authority in the New Testament, Paul speaks within his Jewish and Greco-Roman context when appealing to the divine will to exhort believers to obey Roman governing authorities. This shows his embeddedness in the culture of the ancient Roman world while maintaining his identity as a Jewish thinker (Harrill 2012).

Rather than drawing an antithesis between Judaism and Hellenism to depict the cultural and social world of Paul, Harrill (2012, 91–94) depicts the cultural complexity of a Jewish thinker whose cultural world is embedded within the Greco-Roman world. Like many of his contemporaries, Paul, who had a Greco-Roman education in classical rhetoric and allegory, had to negotiate his Jewish identity within the cultural setting of the Greco-Roman world. He did this by appropriating some elements, rejecting others, or reconfiguring certain others. This would have been necessary in order to maintain his identity as a Jew and as a Greco-Roman (Harrill 2012, 75). This means that both contexts need to be engaged to fully comprehend the shaping of his thoughts and the grammar of his gift-theology in the letter to the Galatians. This is despite the fact that the addressees were culturally non-Jews.

Paul, whose words represent a reflection of the world he inhabited and the identities he occupied, will need to be understood in light of his contemporaneous culture. Put differently, his theology of divine benefaction and its outworking in the addressees' life of faith is likely to be shaped by Roman *and* Jewish ideologies. In this regard, an exploration of where Paul stands within Second Temple Judaism and how his understanding of divine favor as a Jew fits within the multifaceted views of divine favor in Second Temple Jewish texts would have enriched Okorie's exploration of the Greco-Roman setting for Paul's interpretation of χάρις in Galatians.

In this regard, the Hodayot, 4 Ezra, Pseudo-Philo, and other texts provide a Jewish perspective on χάρις. Such insight can serve to nuance our understanding of how Paul, with his multicultural setting as a Jew and Greco-Roman, shapes the social world of first-century Christ-followers through his Christocentric configuration of incongruous grace. Paul does this in ways that are similar but also different from his fellow Jews, some of whom, like Paul, had both a Greco-Roman *and* Jewish culture.

In addition, Okorie's reading of Galatians does not engage the plurality of meaning embedded in the conferring of favor within Greco-Roman context of human-human relationship. He argues that Paul's appeal to reciprocity "subverts" Greco-Roman benefaction relationships by placing the experience of giving and receiving of favor on friendship, and not on the "superior/patron, and inferior/client relationship" that characterizes benefaction relationships in Antiquity" (p. 82). However, in antiquity, χάρις is a multivalent word that can be conceived of outside the matrix of hierarchy.

As Jin H. Lee (2021) notes in his *RBL* review of this volume, "Okorie's understanding of Greco-Roman community life seems limited to the patronage system, where hierarchical structure was highly maintained and fostered." Private associations in particular, and the relationships that existed in community life in general, represented a flat hierarchy as Lee rightly notes. As John H. Barclay (2015, 92–113) has demonstrated, many forms of gift exchange existed in the Roman era apart from patronage. In non-hierarchical relationships, the response to χάρις can be expressed in a number of ways, including with gratitude. Thus, "Paul's way of forming Christ groups was not really subverting the Greco-Roman patronage system but rather complying with the existing social system" (Lee 2021). In this regard, Okorie's work would have benefitted from data that are more representative of the notion of benefaction in the ancient world.

I also found the lack of an in-depth engagement with contemporary works on Galatians, and particularly that of Barclay, to be another shortcoming of the book. Okorie cites Barclay's work in his first footnote noting Barclay's suggestion that grace in Galatians is presented as an incongruent gift (p. 3). In the rest of the book, Barclay is sporadically cited without any substantial or sustained interaction. For example, Okorie does not engage Barclay's view that Paul's description of the patterns of salvation in Galatians can be explained by the subversion incongruity brings on the criteria of fit between God's benefaction and the worth of the recipient (see Barclay 2015, 351–446). Also, how his views differ from or affirm Barclay's reading of the notion of *gift* in Galatians is not clearly articulated. As Richard S. Ascough (2022) also notes, Okorie's work would benefit from contemporary thought on the social world of early Christ-followers as well as rhetorical strategies and conventions.

Furthermore, in his analysis of Galatians 6:9–10, Okorie's reading seems to differ, at least in emphasis, from that of Barclay's in that for Okorie, priority lies in human agency in doing good. Doing good and acting appropriately towards others is an appropriate response of believers who have received divine favor through the Christ event. Okorie writes that Paul's exhortation for the Galatians to do good toward one another is an invitation for them to respond to the divine benefaction they received by granting favor, showing gratitude, and doing good to one another (pp. 74–76). This perhaps indicates that Okorie places emphasis on human agency in the motif of believers' reciprocity—that is, their ability to do what is noble and good.

Given Paul's idea of *Christ in me* as a description of the believer's life (Gal 2:20; 4:19), and the injunction to *walk by the Spirit* (5:16, 25b), the notion of agency in Galatians is complex. Indeed, as Okorie notes, "while God acts in the gift of divine favor, the believer who has come to faith in Christ befittingly responds in gratitude. God's favor, namely, 'the Spirit of the Son of God,' is an enabler; it is a force that moves the believer toward intimacy with God and with others" (p. 29). As Okorie also acknowledges, Barclay notes that divine benefaction is transformative in that divine grace energizes and directs doing good for one another (p. 29; Barclay 2015, 374, 441). A more sustained focus on Paul's thoughts on moral selfhood within the context of reciprocity, and perhaps also the interplay between divine and human agency in Galatians, would have benefited Okorie's helpful discussion of the outpouring of the Spirit.

Furthermore, the nuanced understanding of grace Barclay sets out in his reading of Galatians by employing the idea of the incongruity, priority, and efficacy of grace is particularly helpful. Barclay also provides a helpful analysis of Jewish conceptions of benefaction through an in-depth analysis of Second Temple Jewish texts. An exploration of Paul's theology of grace within the Greco-Roman context, which is Okorie's main task, would benefit from such an engagement as well as the extensive interaction with contemporary Pauline scholars and perspectives on Paul that Barclay emulates. The taxonomic categories Barclay uses in his description of the perfections of grace provide helpful means to sharpen and nuance the scholarly analysis of benefaction in Paul's letters. Employing these categories would have made Okorie's analysis more precise.

The reading of Galatians presented in this book will undoubtedly benefit scholars and clergy alike. It is a well-structured book that provides a fascinating look into the Greco-Roman system of benefaction. The sustained focus on Paul's overall flow of thought in Galatians and how the different sections of the letter make sense in light of the motif of benefaction and reciprocity will contribute ideas and thoughts to scholars working on Pauline letters and, more specifically, Paul's letter to the Galatians.

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Author's Response: *Favor and Gratitude: Reading Galatians in Its Greco-Roman Context*.

In the book *Favor and Gratitude: Reading Galatians in its Greco-Roman Context*, I insist that Paul intentionally appealed to the cultural value of benefaction of the ancient world to proclaim the gospel message of Christ to the Galatian Christians. In my reading of Galatians, I discern that the "problem that has arisen in the community since his previous visit requires a detailed presentation and clarification of his gospel message that does not include the demand to be circumcised and observe the law" (p. ix). Therefore, in order to make this gospel message clearer to the community, Paul writes a letter defending his message over and against the one preached by his Jewish-Christian opponents, which demands that the Galatian Christians be circumcised and observe the Law in addition to having faith in Christ. Hence, I maintain that on the basis of my interpretation of the letter, "there is substantial evidence that Paul appeals to the cultural values of the Galatians in presenting and explaining his gospel message about God, Jesus Christ and the faith of the Galatians towards God, Jesus Christ and one another" (p. ix).

I build the argument of this book by examining how Paul uses the Greco-Roman cultural values of χάρις and πίστις, which are the foundations, as my reading of Galatians reveals, upon which he constructs the gospel message he preaches to the Galatians. I argue that the cultural understanding of χάρις and πίστις is the backdrop against which Paul delineates the gospel message he previously preached to the Galatians, before the arrival of his Jewish-Christian opponents in the community. One of the cultural notions of χάρις, which underscores its usage in Galatians, involves, on the one hand, the values of favor, kindness, and goodwill that a benefactor gratuitously granted to the beneficiary. On the other hand, it is equally used in the Greco-Roman world to delineate "the return of favour or thanks by a beneficiary to the benefactor whether divine or human." In other words, the kindness of a benefactor to a beneficiary is known as χάρις, and the actions of a beneficiary to a benefactor that acknowledges the favors that have been granted is known as χάρις (p. 4).

In addition, when I examined the meaning of πίστις in the Greco-Roman context, I noticed that as with χάρις, πίστις involves a relationship between a benefactor and a beneficiary. The Greco-Roman cultural values of loyalty, obedience, and faithfulness between the benefactor and the beneficiary undergird this relationship. To say it differently, the benefactor "needs to be someone, a nation, or a deity that is reliable and faithful 'in providing the assistance' [that has been] promised; also, the [beneficiary] needs πίστις in the sense of showing loyalty and commitment to the benefactor" (p. 5; see deSilva 1999, 46). Whenever a benefactor displays the virtue of reliability in delivering what has been promised to a beneficiary, then in turn, the beneficiary's faithfulness shows that one is indebted and grateful to the benefactor who has delivered on the promise. The evidence shows that in the Roman world, the only cultural value that underscores the relationship between a benefactor and a beneficiary is πίστις (p. 5; see Gruen 1982, 64). An excellent example to keep in mind is Emperor Augustus's description of the relationship between Rome and other nations in Res Gestae Divi Augusti 32.3 (Brunt and Moore 1967, 34–35).

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In the chapters that follow, therefore, I carefully show through a detailed interpretation of the letter how Paul weaved the Greco-Roman terminologies of χάρις and πίστις into the gospel message he proclaimed to the Galatian Christians, which they would recognize. I further explain that God's favor to humanity is manifested in the death of Christ on the cross and also in the gift of the "Spirit of the Son of God" to humanity (pp. 26–27). My interpretation of Galatians reveals that the *locus classicus* of Paul's message to the community is the events of Christ's life: the sending of Christ into the world as a display of divine favor (4:4–5) in order for Christ to die on the cross for humankind (1:6–9) (p. 18–19). Paul identifies the death of Christ on the cross as a sure proof of "God's unbounded and gratuitous gift of divine favor to humanity" (p. 19). Indeed, Christ's death is God's gratuitous gift of divine favor to humankind without the demand to observe the Law and practice circumcision as Paul's Jewish Christian opponents insist.

Paul continues to emphasize in the letter that Christ's death on the cross "leads to the outpouring of the Spirit of the Son of God in the life of the believer." Paul's gospel message on the "Spirit of the Son of God" includes his exposition on the outpouring of the spirit (3:2, 5, 14), and on the effects of the Spirit on the believer (5:22–23) (pp. 26–27). To support the proposition that Galatians is foregrounded with the language of benefaction from the Greco-Roman world, I showed how Paul appeals to his own experience (1:10–15), that of Abraham (3:6–14, 15–18; 4:21–31), and also the Galatian Christians' experience of God's benefaction (1:6–7; 3:1–5; 5:1, 7, 13). By preaching his gospel message from the point of view of the Greco-Roman benefaction conventions, Paul shows that his, Abraham's, and the Galatians' experience of divine benefaction include an obligation to reciprocate the divine favors granted to them (p. 51). Faith (πίστις) is the believer's acts of gratitude to God for the divine favors received through the death of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit.

The relationship of benefaction in Galatians as Paul presents it, is clearly not limited to the divine-human relationship. Paul shows how the relationship with God inexorably prepares believers to enter into a relationship with one another in human-human benefaction. On his own part, Paul couches his relationship with the Galatian Christians in friendship *topoi* by showing how his encounter with them is an exercise in benefaction (4:12–10). One would notice that Paul presents the relationship of benefaction among the Galatians in the exhortatory section of the letter, inviting them to do good and serve one another through love (5:1–6:10). Moreover, the Jerusalem collection is an opportunity for the Galatian Christians to benefit the believers in Jerusalem (2:10; 1 Cor 16:1–4). By inviting the community to serve one another through love, Paul places the ethos of reciprocity on the love of one another. "Love for one another provides the context for a genuine concern for the well-being and goodwill (εὔνοια) among friends" (p. 83).

Sofanit T. Abebe's review of the book presents some critical observations worthy of note. Abebe notices that the book lacks any significant interaction with the understanding of χάρις and πίστις in Second Temple Judaism. More so, Jewish authors of the Diaspora, like Philo, engage the Greco-Roman ethos of benefaction for his Jewish community in the Diaspora. James Harrison has done some excellent research on this and has provided a comprehensive treatment of the notion of grace in Judaism. He proposes that Second Temple Judaism is familiar with the Greco-Roman cultural understanding of benefaction. He examines Second Temple Jewish writings, including the works of Philo and Josephus, to prove that this is the case (Harrison 2003, 97–166). Abebe notes that the lack of interaction with the Second Temple Jewish context makes it impossible for the book to provide a broader view of "our understanding of first-century Christ-followers." In fact, this book is focused on benefaction, and rightly so, its meaning in the social world of the Gentile Christians in the regions of the Galatia, whose membership appears not to have a single person of Jewish descent. To this community of Gentile Christians that Paul preaches and addresses in his letter, I examine his gospel message, proposing that he did so by appealing to their cultural values of benefaction. With no single Jewish Christian in this community, it is hardly convincing that interaction with the Jewish understanding of χάρις and πίστις would have been relevant to the community's Christian identity.

Abebe quotes an early review of the book by Jin Hwan Lee (2021), where Lee suggests that the book lacks a broader interaction with the cultural realities of the relationships common among private associations in the Greco-Roman world. In other words, the experience of benefaction in the Greco-Roman world is not limited to patron-client relationships in human-human benefaction as the book suggests, and it is also not limited to a superior-inferior relationship of benefaction. Rather the benefaction conventions of the Greco-Roman world go further than that. They are, in fact, the undergirding value in the relationship among private associations in the ancient world. Abebe and Lee call attention to this experience of the non-hierarchical relationship of benefaction prevalent in the ancient world. Lee makes it clear that patronage relationships are non-existence in community life among private associations. Therefore, rather than subverting the Greco-Roman patronage system as the book proposes (pp. 61, 124–125), Lee opines that Paul is complying with the social system of benefaction in the Greco-Roman world. As a private association, Lee proposes that the Christ-group, like those in the regions of the Galatia to whom the letter is addressed, are not any "different from other private associations in antiquity."

It is important to keep in mind that the Christ-group fits the description of a private or voluntary association of the ancient world. Yet voluntary associations are organized around a leader who helps members maintain norms, responsibility, and the identity of the group. The Greco-Roman private or voluntary association is not a single or monolithic or uniform category. There are associations where members are encouraged to compete for honor through generous contributions to promote the association's social activities. For instance, an inscription quoted by Richard S. Ascough (2000, 322) lends credence to competition of patronage prevalent among voluntary or private associations. Also, an association of merchants, shippers, and warehousemen on Delos honored a Roman banker, Marcus Minatos, son of Sextus, for funding the construction of the association's headquarters. He would usually invite the members of the association to public dinners he hosted. He was honored as the patron of the association with the erection of a statue, an inscription, and a place of honor at banquets (Ascough 2008, 42–43).

Reviewing the evidence, then, it seems to me that the Christ-group falls within the category of private or voluntary association with a generous patron who provides physical and financial support to the group. Accordingly, only a few first-century Christians would have social and economic resources to benefit the community, which reveals a great deal of patronage relationships among them. For instance, the church in Corinth depends on the patronage of a member with a large enough house to accommodate the group for their gathering (1 Cor 11:17–22). Those who gather in Philemon's home in Colossae experience his benefaction as the generous host of their association (Phlm 5–6, 22; see Rom 15:22–29). No single member of the Christian community in Galatia is mentioned by name in the letter. Yet, it is beyond doubt that this community has benefited from the generosity of some members, who have social and economic power and resources.

The so-called *Magna Carta* of Christian identity in Galatians 3:28 could be interpreted as Paul's message of equality and oneness in the community beyond the social norms prevalent in the society. Therefore, the exhortations to serve one another through love (5:13) and to do good to all (6:10) encourages each member of the community to use their capabilities to do good deeds and to share their resources with others in the spirit of giving and receiving benefaction. Likewise, Paul's suggestion to the community on how to participate in the collection for Jerusalem gives each member an opportunity to engage in benefaction towards the Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:11–14). What this reveals, therefore, is that Paul invites the Galatian Christians to reimagine a different way of giving and receiving benefaction far beyond the social convention of benefaction prevalent in the society. When Paul uses the language of private or voluntary association, Ascough (2000, 322) notes that he does so to encourage a different kind of social relationship among members of the Christ-group.

Finally, Abebe finds a weakness in the book's lack of engagement with the work of John M. G. Barclay on grace (2015). Abebe observes that the book does not engage Barclay on "the patterns of salvation in Galatians," which "can be explained by the subversion incongruity brings on the criteria of fit between God's benefaction and the worth of the recipient." The result of Abebe's observation on how my interpretation is different from Barclay's leads her to conclude that agency in Galatians is more complex than my book presents. She insists that my interpretation would have benefited from interaction with Barclay's "idea of the incongruity, priority, and efficacy of grace." Abebe does not elaborate further on the complexity of agency in Galatians that is supported by Paul's argument in the letter. Nevertheless, to say the least, in his volume: *Paul & the Power of Grace*, Barclay (2020, 42; see pp. 63–74) insists that the gratuitous character of God's gift of divine favor to humankind does not diminish human agency because God's favor or grace "energizes its recipients into action (2:8)."

It is impossible to understand Paul's scheme of thought as it concerns God's gratuitous offer of divine favor or grace to believers as he presents it in Galatians without paying attention to the relationship between grace (χάρις) and faith (πίστις). In my opinion, these two terminologies are not mutually exclusive in the argument of Galatians. Rather they both undergird the character of the relationship between God and believers, and also its corresponding impact on believers in the Christian community. Suffice it to say that any meaningful reading of Galatians must be attentive to the intricate weave of the connection between divine grace and the faith of the believer. Accordingly, this is what I have done in my book, and I have looked at it from the Greco-Roman context of Paul's Gentile audience.

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