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Julius Gathogo

2 Afro-Biblical Hermeneutics and Joachim Kügler’s Contribution

A Comparative-historical Engagement

Abstract

The chapter seeks to understand Joachim Kügler, a German Roman Catholic professor of theology, by drawing from history and compares him with some earlier European “friends” of Africa who contributed heavily to promoting Afro-biblical hermeneutics. Such include: Clement Doke, Robert Moffatt, Johann Ludwig Krapf and other contributors during and prior to the early 20th century. Hypothetically, the chapter understands Afro-biblical hermeneutics as a broad-based term that addresses biblical studies from an African lens. This includes: publishing on the interface between Bible and Africa’s contextual-cultural realities, translations, interpretations, reflections, and related activities. In view of this, Afro-biblical hermeneutics was birthed in the 17th century when the Bible was first translated into some Bantu languages of Africa, though the New Testament appeared only in 1840. Henceforth, a flurry of activities that ushered in biblical translations took place; and by the 1950s, many African nationalities had the new translated versions that strengthened the growth of Afro-biblical hermeneutics in concrete terms. This chapter is conscious of the fact that Kügler is not necessarily a replica or a reincarnation of the above “friends” of Africa who trace their origins in Euro-America. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to recall that African ancestrology insists that exemplary human beings return in disguised ways. In utilising a comparative-historical engagement as its research design, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how Bible translations birthed Afro-biblical hermeneutics and underscores Kügler’s contribution as following in the same continuum.

Key words: *African Christianity, Afro-biblical Hermeneutics, Ancestrology, Joachim Kügler, Robert Moffat, Translation*

1. Introduction

Afro-biblical hermeneutics is a wide-reaching term that incorporates biblical studies, biblical translations, moral-ethical comparisons of the Bible and Africa's cultural-contextual realities, Bible and science debates, Bible and information technology, Bible and gender, Bible and race relations, Bible and indigenous cultures, Bible and ecology, the activities of African instituted churches and other related activities. The contributions of European missionaries, such as Robert Moffatt of Southern Africa, Clement Doke of Southern Africa and the Tübingen-Derendingen, German-born Ludwig Krapf of Eastern Africa (Gathogo, 2010b) and others who made initial attempts at Bible translations in the local African languages, become a critical turning point.

Although Joachim Kügler is not viewed as a Bible translator, his hermeneutic contribution and interests in Bible in African studies is clearly evident since 2004. His contribution is critically important, as it is in continuum with earlier initiatives that birthed Afro-biblical hermeneutics right from the 17th century when the Bible was first translated into Bantu languages of Africa.

Nevertheless, the first complete Bible translation, covering both the Old and New Testament appeared in 1857 after Robert Moffat, a Scottish Congregationalist missionary to Africa, supervised its translation into Setswana, a language of Southern Africa. Despite appearing too limiting, Afro-biblical hermeneutics have also been defined as the scriptural interpretations that are typically African in originality,

“character and practice; done in Africa, especially among African instituted Churches. Consciously or unconsciously, they borrow heavily from African religious heritage, in their dialogue with the gospel of Christ.” (Gathogo & Kinyua, 2010c, p. 251).

This definition is clearly seen when considering the Afro-biblical hermeneutics of the African instituted churches. Nevertheless, this definition has been strengthened by Zablon Nthamburi and Douglas Waruta who say, thus

“unless an African is enabled to understand scripture in his/her own cultural [and contextual] patterns, the scripture will not only lose its validity but its authoritative relevance as well.” (Nthamburi & Waruta, 1997, p. 40).

Certainly, Kügler's model is not necessarily geared towards appealing to culture; rather it's a broad appeal to the African context. In engaging sociocultural realities of Africa, he co-partnered with renowned Zimbabwean scholars to establish the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series in 2009. In light of this, I was privileged to author one article on religion and civic-developmental responsibilities in the Kenyan context, which appeared in Kügler's co-initiated project.

2. Afro-biblical Hermeneutics and BiAS

2.1 NRM Concern

Besides the exuberance that goes with Afro-biblical hermeneutics, a red flag can be raised in regard to some "distorted" hermeneutics that are seen in patriarchally-driven interpretations of the Bible, especially among the New Religious Movements (NRMs) (Lewis, 1998). In turn, some cultic NRMs have had the characteristic of advocating for a distorted afro-biblical hermeneutics by encouraging their members to keep off non-believers, to isolate themselves from family and old friends, to treat their leaderships as deities, as others encourage withdrawal from the 'sinful' world. Some NRMs also use the Bible to promote terrorist cults, doomsday cult, political cult, polygamous cults, and racist cults among other digressions from the norm (Lewis, 1998). Or was the idea of arresting distorted hermeneutics the primary motive in founding the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series?

As Kügler and his team set out to establish the above initiative, one is driven to think that they were conscious of the earlier initiatives right from the 17th century, and were indeed progressing from there rather than constructing a new outfit altogether. In my own interpretation, I am persuaded that the pioneers of BiAS were seeking an authentic and/or orderly hermeneutic contribution that was modelled on St. Luke's version of telling Theophilus (that can also refer to the lovers of God in Africa), thus:

"With this in mind, since [we] have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, [we] too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Lk. 1:3–4).

The “orderly [Afro-biblical] account” is the most critical contribution among the BiAS; hence Kügler will always take credit for its establishment.

Certainly, Kügler and his team were striving to usher in a more accurate and well-researched account of Afro-biblical account. This has been confirmed by the various volumes bearing diverse themes with reference to cutting-edge issues facing the post-colonial Africa. The gender question, leadership, politics, pandemics, and development are some of the themes that are accurately captured in these BiAS series.

In a nutshell, distorted hermeneutics reminds us about the Apartheid South Africa where the Bible was used to favour one race, a phenomenon that calls for careful and intellectually-inspired interpretation of the Bible. With the Shakahola Massacre of April 2023 where the NRM “Pastor” Paul Mackenzie of *Good News International Ministries*, Kilifi, Kenya, led in foreseeing poor biblical interpretation and indoctrination that advocated fasting to death as a route to meeting the resurrected Christ (Theuri, 2023), the call for an intellectually-driven biblical hermeneutics that Joachim Kügler and team have been advocating for becomes an urgent task.

2.2 Methodology

Methodology in Afro-biblical hermeneutics includes: thematic interpretation of key concerns in Africa today, analysis and publishing researched areas of concern, conference resolutions, translations, gospel-cultural dialogue, and narrating our relevant experiences among others. As a methodology in Biblical hermeneutics, Bible translation becomes a critical starting point. Contextual reflection of biblical contents in light of some African realities becomes another significant approach. With Africa having over two thousand spoken languages, she accounts for nearly 27% of the globally spoken languages that go up to 7,010 (Mbiti, 1986). It is these translations that unlock the written knowledge and eventually aid oral theologies that are critically visible in Africa, as gospel artists release their diverse themes and messages. Further, daily conversations in the African context are guided by biblical verses and quotations that have become societal archetypes – a phenomenon that underlines the value of Bible translations and indeed the Afro-biblical hermeneutics that Kügler and team have been articulating via publications since 2009.

In Africa, translations have magical impacts on the respective audiences. For as John Mbiti has noted, “nothing is more decisive as a watershed than publication of the scripture in a local language.” (Mbiti, 1986, p. 24). In other words, Bible translation provides a direct contact where the African Christian finds herself or himself in his or her own mother tongue. In view of this, David Barrett validates the significance of these translations in aiding Afro-biblical hermeneutics when he explains that the translated scriptures get enshrined in the souls of the African peoples (Barrett, 1968).

Kügler and team's works, in Afro-biblical hermeneutics, progresses from these early translations albeit in different historical circumstances. A comparative-historical engagement, as a research design, helps us to draw broadly from various actors in biblical studies and early translations in order to understand Kügler's place in Afro-biblical hermeneutics. Was he conscious of this as he mooted the idea of the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series? Was BiAS conscious of distorted hermeneutics in Apartheid South Africa and other places, or even among some NRMs; and were there priority areas that needed to be addressed thematically?

2.3 Impetus Gained in 2004?

And although Joachim Kügler's, a Catholic Theology Professor of the University of Bayreuth/Germany, engagement with Afro-biblical hermeneutics can be said to have begun after he supervised an African student, Honoured Serima in 2004, it is equally true that he got into a deeper engagement in 2009 (Togarasei, 2009). This was clearly felt when he teamed up with noted Zimbabwean scholars, namely: Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Lovemore Togarasei, Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, and Ezra Chitando and began to engage in Afro-biblical hermeneutics, without necessarily proclaiming it along these terms. After their Afro-German dialogue, they began the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series (Togarasei, 2009). The University of Bamberg Press, Germany, has been publishing these Afro-biblical series that addresses diverse topics.

Ripples are that a German-Zimbabwean 'conversation' ended up as a Euro-African dialogue in biblical scholarship that has brought on board scholars from Kenya (author's home), Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, and Ivory Coast among other areas. Like a

Mustard Seed which grew into a big tree where birds of the air refreshed themselves, the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series has widened its horizons within a period of about ten years, courtesy of Professor Kügler.

Just as in the biblical citation of the Mustard Seed that remains the “smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Mat. 13:32), the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series has stood out as a huge and all-inclusive enterprise for scholars of all shades.

2.4 Some Afro-biblical Hermeneutic Concerns

In one of the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series books, *Religion and Development in Africa* (2020, Eds. Ezra Chitando, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Lovemore Togarasei & Joachim Kügler), where the author produced a chapter on “Religion and Civic Participation” diverse contextual concerns have been addressed. Such includes: Rethinking development, role of religion in developmental matters, youth and religion in Africa, gender in religion and development, Faith Based Organizations and development, non-biblical religions and development, religion and justice, married women in public spheres, interplay between religion and development, church-state relations, political-economy of land, sustainable peace and development, Seventh Day Adventist and development, indigenous oral literature and sustainable development, Ubuntu values and environmental concern, Bible as a source of development in Africa, Bible and liberation in Africa, and resurrection as “corrective” creation. Other Afro-biblical concerns in this book are: ecology and biblical texts, Bible and sexuality challenges, and developmental agenda in Africa today. These concerns are critical in helping us understand the shape of Afro-biblical hermeneutics that is being propounded by Kügler and his team.

Other volumes by the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series, which have addressed diverse themes include: *Queen of Sheba: East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation*. It was edited by Loreen Maseno, Esther Mombo, Nagaju Muke & Veronica Kahindo, as a 2024 publication of the University of Bamberg Press (Circle Jubilee Volume 2). The volume is geared towards celebrating the pioneers of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle) such as Mercy Oduyoye, Isabel Phiri, Musa Dube, Musimbi Kanyoro, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Teresia

Hinga, Mary Getui and Brigalia Bam among others (Gathogo, 2008b). The movement that began informally in 1976 was formally launched in 1989, in Accra-Ghana, in 1989. Its main objective has always been to give African women theologians' hermeneutical voice; and was indeed "a culmination of a decade-long work and the realization that while women were the majority in faith-based organisations, they were visibly absent in religious leadership and academic study of religion" (Tsholofelo, 2019, p. 1).

Another volume by the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series that gives the shape of Afro-biblical hermeneutics is: *Sankofa. Liberation Theologies of West African Women* (Circle Jubilee Volume 1). It was edited by Seyram B. Amenyedzi, Yosi Apollos Maton and Merceline L. Yele, in 2023. This publication was set as a preparation for the July 2024 conference of The Circle, as they commemorated 35 years of existence (1989–2024). To "return" The Circle to Accra-Ghana, where it was founded after Mercy Oduyoye's famous speech, "Let the Bird fly [with two wings of men and women]" was another major reason for this preparatory book that was published under the auspices of Kügler's *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series. The book also celebrated Rabiātu Deinyo Ammah, who is the first Muslim woman to join The Circle. It was dedicated to her.

Another volume from Kügler's BiAS is: *Identity and Socio-Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel: The Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20–49) and Greco-Roman Panegyrics*. It was edited by Louis Ndekha in 2023. Its main argument is that a reading of the Sermon on the Plain can only make sense when we view it from the Greco-Roman panegyric. The book also appears to agree with Kügler's overall perspective of understanding salvation from a holistic perspective.

A more contemporary concern is the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (hereafter COVID-19). In view of this, Kügler and his team authored a book in 2023, namely: *The Bible, Quran, and COVID-19 Vaccines: Studies on Religion-based Vaccine Perceptions (Africa, Europe & Middle East)*. It was edited by Joachim Kügler and Kathrin Gies. By giving an Asian-African-European perspective, via a multi-religious design, this volume further brings out Kügler's holistic approach to biblical hermeneutics. Further, in addressing the question: "Why should God, Scripture, and Church be against vaccination?" (Kügler & Gies, 2023), the volume offers some practical solutions to the challenge of New Religious Movements (NRMs)

which tends to avoid biblical exegesis in their discourses, and approach the Bible from a lay-person's perspective. Such literal interpretations are common in the African context as well as in other parts of the world.

Molly Manyonganise's book, *Daring Patriarchy?: A Biblical Engagement with Gender Discourses on Political Participation in Post-colonial Zimbabwe* (2023), is another publication by the Kügler-led BiAS. It brings out critical themes such as patriarchy concern, Bible and gender, women and politics, religio-cultural disquiets, and post-colonial African realities, and the influence of the Bible in reshaping some troubling religio-cultural realities in Africa and globally.

Besides this, a Nigerian scholar, Kingsley Ikechukwu Uwaegbute, has authored the book: *Material Possessions in Luke 12 and in Nigerian Christians' Practise* (2022). The theme of materiality is critical in post-colonial Africa, as America's prosperity theologies enter Africa rhythmically. Manyonganise's (2023) book resonates with the hermeneutic concerns in Ishanesu Sextus Gusha's publication: *Paul's Ethics of Reconciliation with Ndebele and Shona Ethnic Cohesion* (2022). The latter goes beyond by ushering in the theme of reconciliation in a continent (Africa) that has over 2,000 ethnic nationalities (Mbiti, 1969). It argues that the tension among the two Zimbabwean ethnic groups (Shona and Ndebele) is pre-colonial though it graduated into a serious concern during the colonial era. With such ethnic tensions, African nations and/or the global society cannot progress, as even the political mobilization will be done along ethnic lines rather than through ideological convictions. The ZANU (ruling) and ZAPU political parties of Zimbabwe are cited as practical cases that speak for various corners of Africa. This drives the concern for a democratic culture, as the reader wonders whether it is feasible in Africa. A Pauline hermeneutics of reconciliation is given out as the panacea for such tension-prone cases of the tropical Africa, as St. Paul's writings to Corinthians inspire social cohesion among Jews and Gentiles. St. Paul's symbols such as New Creation, new baptism, Ambassadors, the Cross of Christ, Christ are cited as hermeneutic keys of reconciliation.

3. The Work of Joachim Kügler

Clearly, Kügler-led BiAS has several publications that are critical of our understanding of Afro-biblical hermeneutics; and indeed, his contribution is evidentially seen along these lines. Isn't he in continuum with the earlier Euro-American actors who loved Africa and its people and eventually contributed substantially (refer to Doke, Krapf, Moffat and others)? Here, Kügler's uniqueness comes out clearly when he offers transformative leadership in academia, a phenomenon where the team leader strives to empower everyone to do something and grow upfront.

This contrasts transactional leadership, a phenomenon where a leader strives to maintain the status quo (Gathogo, 2017). While a servant leader strives to serve the people, however dedicated to the job, a transformative leader helps everyone to grow and serve society as well, as she or he works hard to arrest dependency syndrome or over reliance on the leader. In utilizing transformative model of leadership, several themes or concerns have been brought to the fore for wider consideration and action.

3.1 Afro-centric Concern

As noted above, an Afro-centric concern is clearly evident in the *Bible in Africa Studies* Series (BiAS), as African realities that need our collective attention are well captured in light of biblical traditions. Kügler's contribution, like Robert Moffat before him, is thus afro-centric and broad-based in scope. It has far-reaching prospects in addressing a hotchpotch of issues facing Africa. It underlines the importance of the Bible in addressing cutting-edge issues facing tropical Africa. In both Moffat (who is associated with one of the early translations of the Bible), and Kügler, it resonates well with the position taken by African theologians since the mid-20th century. Jesse Mugambi underlines this critical importance of the Bible in addressing African woes when he says:

“The Bible is central to African Christianity. It is the most widely translated, and the most widely read book in tropical Africa. The Bible is the most widely available book in both rural and urban areas. It can be regarded as the most influential book in Africa. The Bible is read at primary and secondary schools, in colleges and universities, in seminaries, during

worship services, in fellowship meetings and in private devotion and meditation. Most Christians carry copies of the Bible, or parts of it, everywhere they go, and read it when they have a little time to spare. Even when they do not have the Bible in their hands, they will refer to it as they talk and pray.” (Mugambi, 1995, pp. 142–143).

It is after the biblical translations that its power and influence became manifest to African Christians. This is due to the fact that “soon as they acquire the skills of literacy [they] are able to discern [the] meaning from the Bible” (Mugambi, 1995, p. 143), as it now speaks directly to them. In translating the Bible into African languages, thus, the birth of Afro-biblical hermeneutics began in earnest.

Historically, and as noted earlier, it was in the 17th century when the first Bible translations into Bantu languages were produced (Doke, 1958, p. 82). Nevertheless, only in 1840 did the first New Testament appear. A complete Bible appeared afterwards in 1857 in Tswana language, courtesy of Robert Moffat (born 1795, died 1883). He translated the earliest biblical book of Luke into the Tlhaping dialect of Tswana in 1830. Moffat, the Scottish Congregationalist missionary to Africa, was the father to Mary Moffat Livingstone and the father-in-law of David Livingstone (born 1813, died 1873). In turn, Livingstone was a Scottish physician, pioneer Congregationalist missionary under the auspices of the London Missionary Society. The latter was an interdenominational evangelical society that began in England in 1795. It was instigated by a Welsh Congregationalist cleric, Edward Williams (Doke, 1958, p. 82). As Moffat settled among the Batswana, at Kuruman to the north of the Vaal River, from 1820 onwards, he would move as far north as the Matabele nation of Southern Africa in the present Towns and cities such as Hamanskraal, Mokopane, Polokwane, and Zebediela (Dodds, 1998).

3.2 Bible Translation & Robert Moffat

Robert Moffat (1795–1883), like Joachim Kügler, was greatly admired for his passion to improve the living standards of Africa and her people. Despite living in the dark days of African history where the post industrial revolution Europe was in a hurry to conquer Africa and utilise her raw materials for their emerging industries at home, Moffat, as this chapter

seeks to demonstrate, remained true to his missionary calling. Put differently, Moffat had a clear agenda of avoiding proselytization (false or immature conversion), and strived to ensure conversions to Christianity; a phenomenon where dialogue between the Gospel and the cultural-contextual realities were emphasized for authenticity. This noble agenda came out strongly when he led in biblical translation after learning the local languages of Southern Africa keenly. As noted above, he was also the father-in-law of the missionary-explorer, David Livingstone (1813–73), who played a critical role in exposing the evils of slave trade; and also famous for his famous prayer:

“God, send me anywhere! Only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. And sever any tie in my heart except the tie that binds my heart to Yours. If you have men [and women] who will only come if they know there is a good road, I don't want them.” (Horne & Coshham, 2013, p. 13).

By striving to improve the ‘standard of living’ among the indigenous people, it means that Moffat had the wherewithal to approach Christianity from a holistic perspective, as advocated by modern African scholars (refer to Mugambi 1995, Mbiti 1986, Nthamburi 1991, Muzorewa 1985 and others). It implies that he viewed the ‘good news’ as going above mere spirituality; thus, he sought to address the broad-spectrum of life. Hence, the quest for improving the standard of living refers, but not limited to, raising the measure of consumption of goods and services, private and corporate growth, increase of the well-being of the greater number, environmental care and/or management, addressing people’s concern with a view to making it better, arresting the dysfunctions of rich ones getting richer as the poor get poorer, value addition of material and human resources, improvement of quality living in terms of nutrition, monetary measures, monetary indicators, foreign exchange, local and foreign trade, and provision of necessities such as food, shelter, clean water supply, life expectancy, and clothing among other areas (Tikkanen, 2023). In light of this, Moffat compares with the Rev. Dr. John William Arthur (1881–1952) who was largely seen as the “friend of the Africans” in the colonial Kenya due to his support for the African education. He had concerns with some African cultural issues, in light of his biblical understanding and his measured biases, though he also represented African interests in the so-

called Legislative Council of Kenya, from 1924 to 1926, and served the Executive Council of the colonial Kenya from 1928 to 1929 (Hutcheson 1923, Gathogo 2010a). Following the death of the Rev. Dr. Henry E. Scott, as the head of the Scottish mission in the colonial Kenya, in 1911, Dr. Arthur, who was primarily a medical missionary who performed the first surgery on the first African president in Kenya (Jomo Kenyatta) while a pupil in their schools, took over from him after his ordination in 1915. Afterwards, Dr. Arthur concentrated on evangelical work as opposed to his medical work. He however, served dedicatedly in the then British East Africa, from 1907 to 1937 (Gathogo, 2008a). Arthur's zeal and capacity for work led to his being honoured by the Kikuyu with the tribal name *Rigitari* (meaning, the Doctor, our Doctor) (Hutcheson, 1923). Unlike Moffat, the latter's promotion of Afro-biblical hermeneutics was seen through offering leadership and promotion of school education and/or general education among the Africans in the colonial Kenya. Kügler's contribution to post-colonial Africa is in promoting biblical reflection on contemporary concerns; which compares well with the former duo.

Although the first Bible translations into Bantu languages of Africa, in the 17th century, were rather informal and premature, as language remained a barrier to any serious translation work, Moffat's role was more solid, hence pragmatic and realistic. Indeed, the formal Bible translations in Africa, and Southern Africa in particular, were done by the missionaries in the latter part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

“Early Bible translation was undertaken by an individual or a group of missionaries, usually from the same society. In some cases, the translations were published by the mission itself, either on a mission press, or a commercial press in South Africa, or on a press in the mission's home country. In other cases one of the Bible Societies, such as the [British and Foreign Bible Society] BFBS, the American Bible Society (ABS) and the French Bible Society made grants of paper and/or financial aid for printing and binding. As an indication of the dedication of missionaries in Africa to Bible translation, Doke pointed out that up to 1938 nearly one quarter of the world's New Testaments, one seventh of the world's complete Bibles (Doke 1958, p. 82), and nearly one sixth of Scripture portions, were translations into languages classified as Bantu Languages.” (Hermanson, 2004, p. 7).

Hermanson goes on to say that:

“During this period, formal-equivalent translations of the Bible were made in Tswana (London Missionary Society) Moffat, 1857; Wookey 1908; Central Tswana (Berlin, Hermannsburg and Dutch Reformed) 1970; Xhosa 1859 (Wesleyan Missionary Society) Appleyard 1864; Revised 1899; 1942; 1975; Southern Sotho 1881 (printed)/1883 (distributed) (Paris Evangelical Mission 1883), Revised 1899, 1909; 1961; 1976; Zulu (American Zulu Mission [ABS]) 1883; Revised 1893 (still in print); new translation 1924 (discontinued); (Hermannsburg Mission) 1924; (Natal Missionary Conference [BFBS]) 1959; Tsonga (Swiss Mission) 1906, Revised 1929; Northern Sotho (Berlin Mission) 1904, 1951; Venda (Berlin Mission) 1936; Afrikaans (Plenary Committee Dutch Reformed Church [BFBS]) 1933, Revised 1953.” (Hermanson, 2004, p. 8).

Robert Moffat’s works in biblical translation, as the starting point in Afro-biblical hermeneutics, helps us to understand Joachim Kügler’s contribution as a contemporary theologian with a bias towards the African concerns. Certainly, Kügler’s selflessness is a progression of earlier initiatives, though from a different dimension. His uniqueness is greatly favored by historical circumstances and his innovative approach that invites the wearers of the shoe (African scholars) to speak more and stop the African shoe from pinching further. His uniqueness is also seen in the ongoing conversation, in the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series, where a Euro-African dialogue is given prominence.

3.3 A Reincarnation of Clement Doke?

Further, in rethinking the contribution and dedication of Joachim Kügler in Afro-biblical hermeneutics, that is evident through his co-founded *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series, one is left wondering: Could he be the proto-reincarnation of Clement Martyn Doke (1893–1980)? In a continent where ancestors are believed to return in disguised ways, as in the “form of visitors from other places” (Gathogo, 2017, p. 175), one is easily driven to think that “God has done it again” by bringing back Clement Doke through Joachim Kügler’s works. In my local Kenyan language, we say that the “Cutting of one Mugumo Tree brings yet another stronger one” (Gathogo, 2001, p. 21). In other words, the demise of C. M. Doke in the last half of the twentieth century (on 24th February 1980), brought back

another well-engaging friend of Africa (Kügler), whose impact is continental and global. In turn, Doke is one of the most dedicated scholars in South Africa who initiated an intellectual revolution in the study of African languages; and who eventually created the so-called Bantu literature. After completing his Bachelor of Arts degree at the age of 19, in 1914, he began the missionary career at Lambaland in the then Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). This went hand-in-hand with his desire to lay a strong ground for biblical translation in the languages of the indigenous peoples. To do this, he first studied the Lamba language. This also gave him ample time to prepare for Lamba-English dictionary. By studying Lamba language first, he wanted to avoid Dutch's biblical translations of the 17th century which were done without first studying the Xhosa, Zulu and other African languages hence, the first attempt at biblical translation failed due to language barriers. Nevertheless, Doke managed to transform the "study of Bantu linguistics, folklore and literature not only in Zambia, but also in Southern Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] and in South Africa" (Masilela, 2023, p. 1).

Doke's preparation for the study of African languages and biblical translations to the indigenous tongues was well-prepared right from childhood days, albeit unconsciously. Born in Bristol, England, on 16 May 1893, his parents began to prepare him for future tasks when they took him to the New Zealand, together with his siblings, before he was one year old. They were to remain there from 1894 to 1902. This relocation from the United Kingdom to the New Zealand and the final settling in Southern Africa served him well on four accounts. First, it gave him intercultural exposure that helped him later as he navigated through the vicissitudes of life in Southern Africa. It also helped him to avoid ethnocentrism in mission, to embrace cultural relativism in mission, to learn new norms, to appreciate cultural diffusion, to overcome culture shock in mission, and enabled him to appreciate cultural universals as he later settled in Africa (Gathogo, 2017, p. 166–169). He was about ten years old when his family relocated to Southern Africa in 1903. Second, the relocation to Africa saw his father, Joseph John Doke (1861–1913), becoming interested in scholarship, and in particular the contribution of the Indian lawyer-turned-activist (Mahatma Gandhi) as he practiced law in South Africa. After about five years, Doke Senior (his father), managed to make history by publishing the first

known biography of Mahatma Gandhi, who lived from 1869 to 1948. His father's contribution was an inspiring gesture and indeed, it gave him a strong foundation that later served him well as he likewise sought to research and document the Bantu peoples of southern Africa and the rest of the tropics (Doke, 1940; Doke, 1958; Masilela, 2023).

Third, Doke Junior (Clement) followed the footsteps of his father, a Baptist Cleric, and got ordained by the Baptist Union of South Africa. As a missionary, in following his father's trend, he spent 8 years with the South African Baptist Union of South Africa, from 1914 to 1921, in the then Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Fourth, upon his return to South Africa in 1923, he was appointed a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Bantu Studies at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. He also earned his PhD at the same University in 1924, and was subsequently crowned as the specialist in African languages. This was followed by dozens of publications on Bantu languages. It included the Lamba-English dictionary and the Zulu-English dictionary. Following his deep commitments in African languages that led to his biblical translations, he earned Honorary Doctoral degrees (*Honoris Causa*) from various universities who felt that his outstanding role in languages and translations were huge contributions warranting special honors. It is no wonder that Rhodes University conferred him in 1971 as Witwatersrand honored him in 1972, as he was viewed as one who was in a class of his own, hence a great role model (Kemp, 2023).

Critically important is the fact that Clement Martyn Doke sought to establish the study of African languages on a scientific basis and/or via scholarly means through editing of the African Studies journal. This came after he changed the journal from the old title which was Bantu Studies, a year after he assumed its editorship in 1942. Further, as noted by Ntongela Masilela:

“There are basically four recognizable ways in which Doke made his mark: (1) His early collections of what he referred to as wisdom-lore; (2) His encouraging reviews of newly published works in journals such as *Bantu Studies* (later *African Studies*) of which he was editor from 1931 to 1953, and *South African Outlook*; (3) His consistent review of developments in the field of literature qua literature; (4) His consistency in encouraging translations of classical works from other languages [...]. Between 1935 and

1953, Doke was [the] editor of the Bantu Treasury Series of poetry and drama, published by the University of Witwatersrand Press in Johannesburg. In that capacity, his most direct contribution to the growth of Bantu literature came in the form of eleven publications [...]. Plaatje's translations, no doubt inspired by Doke (notwithstanding their difference of opinion as to which works were most suitable for translation), were followed by many other translations of English classics into various Bantu languages." (Masilela, 2023, p. 1).

Further, as Doke has noted:

"The period commencing about 1830, down to the present day, became a period of intensive monograph study of the Bantu languages, a period in which almost all the research and recording work was done by missionaries, to whom Bantu literature owes an unrepayable debt." (Doke, 1958, p. 9).

Equally, the twentieth

"Century was well known before Native [African] writers began to take a hand in the development of Bantu literature, although Tiyo Soga had made his great translational contribution to Xhosa as early as 1867." (Doke, 1940, p. 2).

On the whole, Doke, like Kügler who came afterwards, remains a very realistic hermeneutically-tuned scholar in African studies, as he viewed "advanced literacy" as a critical step and/or authentic way towards effective Christianity. Nevertheless, he only completed the translation of the Bible into Lamba (Zambia) after his retirement. It was published as *Amasiwi Awa Lesa* (The Words of God) in 1959 (Masilela, 2023). In view of this, Kügler's co-partnership with African scholars in Afro-biblical hermeneutics that addresses gender, development, environment and other contemporary concerns, is on a continuum with Clement Doke's approach to the African studies.

3.4 Joachim Kügler & the Poverty Theme

In view of this, Joachim Kügler compares with Robert Moffat in the way he takes the Bible as a "power" that can be utilised to create a better world, especially with reference to Africa. He also compares with Doke in the way he takes African studies with gusto. Despite not being concerned with

translation, as in the case of Moffat, their common denominator is seen in the fact that they all make the Bible a point of reference, a gateway to literacy, modernity, and as a forum through which myriad of problems can be addressed and thereby create a progressive society. Certainly, African challenges in the twentieth century were characterised by themes of racism, colonialism, slavery, disease, poverty and ignorance among others, which were well paid attention to by Moffat and Doke. Equally, the African challenges in the twenty-first century include, but are not limited to: poverty, gender relations, exclusivism, North-South gaps, neo-colonialism, patriarchy, environmental justice, quality and relevant education, poor distribution of resources, and hermeneutics of suspicion among others, which are well taken care of by Kügler-led BiAS.

In particular, Kügler has elaborately addressed the theme of poverty, among other contemporary themes, which is a major subject in post-colonial Africa. He bemoans the gap between the rich and the poor in the global matrix. In this case, the poor include those who are threatened by HIV and AIDS. It may also mean people whose environment is polluted by car's exhaust pipes, burning of coal, sewages that pollute water and land, spew pollutants via pesticides and/or chemical poisons as we strive to kill insects and weeds and eventually harm wildlife and waterways, hence more poverty and suffering. With African governments failing to manage floods and droughts from a long term basis, poverty may remain a perennial concern.

In light of this, Kügler says, thus:

“The gap between those who are well off and those who suffer is getting wider and wider, and additional threats like HIV/AIDS contribute to the ‘shadow of death’ which many people are living in. This process can be seen in the Western countries, but is much more dramatic in the global South, i.e in the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Zimbabwean Christians, as well as those in other countries, cannot ignore this severe problem, but have to understand it as a challenge of peace and justice. All of us should understand that the struggle against poverty is part of our Christian mission.” (Kügler, 2013, p. 323).

He goes on to say:

“As a Catholic scholar, I may point to the texts of the Second Vatican Council, which defines the Christian Church as a kind of sacrament [which] was

formed by God to preach and realize God's love to [humanity]. Being Church in itself means to serve those in need. And [failure to serve] those who suffer is equivalent to not being [a] Church. Our faith in God's love and justice urges us to ask what we can do to share in solving the problem of poverty. As a biblical scholar, I have to ask, what the tradition of the Bible can contribute to this struggle and how it might help in overcoming need and suffering. It is well known that the Old Testament has a lot to say on poverty and on the God's relation [with] the poor and [the] oppressed." (Kügler, 2013, p. 323).

Apart from his North-South approach to the poverty debate, Kügler addresses the challenges of prosperity theologies which are pitching tents in continental Africa. He cautions the danger inherent in their prosperity gospel. He contends that such theologies may end up turning away the poor, especially if their needy status is blamed for lack of faith. While cautioning on the inadequacy of charity, he argues that it must be accompanied by "the struggle for justice in economic and political structures" (Kügler, 2013, p. 337). In view of this, practitioners of the faith, evangelicals in particular, have to open up

"for the political dimension of eradication of poverty" as "poverty is not only an individual fate; it is also a product of economic structure which must be changed." (Kügler, 2013, p. 337).

In a sense, Kügler (2013) takes us to the difficulty in defining poverty, as it may be understood as applying not just to those who are victims of a

"maldistribution of resources but, more exactly, to those whose resources do not allow them to fulfil the elaborate social demands and customs which are placed upon citizens of the society in the first place." (Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1993, p. 503).

Iliffe hardens the debate when he says that the poor are diverse, as poverty has many facets. He goes on to say that African people, in their indigenous society, had their own varied and changing notion of it. This therefore means that a precise and consistent definition is not feasible. He further argues that poverty, nevertheless, "has an inescapable connotation of physical want, especially in the poor countries" (Iliffe, 1988, p. 2). Pedro maintains that the life of the poor has no privacy and violence is frequent, including wife and child beating; the marriage is often at the risk of disintegration; child and wife abandonment is also frequent; many families

are mother centred; and authoritarianism in the family is marked. These views seem to be speaking about the actual situation of Mathare slums in Nairobi, Kenya (Lewis, 1959, p. 16). The only problem is that they give a wrong impression that divorce is only found in the non-industrialised world, while the truth of the matter is that divorce is more common in the industrialised world than in the non-industrialised world.

As in Kügler's broad dimension of understanding poverty, Oscar Lewis' two books: *Five Families* (1959) and *The children of Sanchez* (1961) are still relevant today with regard to poverty. Many authors acknowledge his many years of research in Mexico. In these books, Lewis pointed out that poverty creates its own culture. He says:

“One can speak of the culture of the poor, for it has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members.”
(Lewis, 1959, p. 16).

And through his research, he discovered that the culture of poverty includes people with relatively high death rates and low life expectancy; low level of education; and low participation in organization. For instance, unions or political parties; no participation in medical care or other health programmes; little utilization of city facilities, such as stores, museums or libraries; low wages and little employment security; low skill levels; lack of savings or access to credit; and no food reserves in their homes (Lewis, 1959, p. 43).

Nevertheless, Kügler's hermeneutical axis has paid attention to such life threatening challenges that are prevalent in tropical Africa, just as with the Afro-biblical hermeneutics seen in the works of Masiwa Ragies Guda, Lovemore Togarasei, Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, Ezra Chitando, Sophia Chirongoma, Chammah J. Kaunda, Sokfa France John, Tarisayi Andrea Chimuka, Loreen Maseno, Susan Mbula Kilonzo, Hassan J. Ndzovu, Muhammed Haron, Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, Elizabeth Pulane Motswapong, Lilian C. Siwila, and Nelly Mwale. Further, the works of Chita Joseph Chita, Mutale Mulenga Kaunda, Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye, Andrew David Omona, Julius Gathogo, Uziah Maate Kiriaghe, Sonene Nyawo, Petronella Munhenzva, Lindiwe Princess Maseko, Beatrice Taringa, Musa W. Dube, Sidney K. Berman, Francis Machingura, Ishanesu Gusha, Canisius Mwandayi and all other African scholars who have contributed in the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series. These scholars have teamed up with Kügler

so as to address the African agenda, and have all demonstrated Ubuntu (humane) spirit effectively. That is, Kügler's hermeneutics resonates well with other scholars in Africa, and beyond the continent, who appreciate the beauty of biblical hermeneutics as deserving an all-inclusive treatise. This is largely seen as the better way of addressing the myriad of issues facing our contemporary society. In their diverse approaches and orientations, they express mutuality in building a better society in light of Afro-biblical hermeneutics. Kügler's contribution is certainly a curtain raiser in African scholarship that has substantively borne fruits.

4. Conclusion

The chapter sought to explore Afro-biblical Hermeneutics with special reference to Joachim Kügler's contribution. In teaming up with Zimbabwean scholars who have focused on biblical hermeneutics consistently (refer to Masiwa Ragies Guda, Lovemore Togarasei, Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, and Ezra Chitando) to establish the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series since 2009, and in having supervised an African student in 2004 – where he engaged deeply with African socio-cultural realities at close range, Kügler's initiation into Afro-biblical hermeneutics began in earnest. As a fully initiated afro-Biblicist, Kügler found himself addressing one of the critical themes in African studies, namely poverty. Here, he resonates well with African scholars who have a holistic understanding of poverty; and who identify the various types of poverty: inherited, instant, temporary, new, relative, absolute, hidden, endemic, overcrowding, and terminal poverty, among other dimensions (Gathogo, 2020).

Coming from continental Europe, and having an African agenda in mind, he fits into the shoes of his missionary predecessors such as Johann Ludwig Krapf, who was a fellow German to East Africa of 1844 (Gathogo, 2010b), Robert Moffat the Scottish missionary and Bible translator who worked hard to improve the living standards of southern Africa in the early 1800s, David Livingstone, the Scottish physician and pioneer Congregationalist missionary under the auspices of the London Missionary Society in mid 1800s, and John Arthur, a Scottish missionary, who was largely seen as a "friend of the Africans" due to his support for African education in the colonial Kenya. He has been viewed as a reincarnation of

Clement Martyn Doke (1893–1980), devoted scholar who formed the so-called Bantu literature. Is the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series another form of Bantu literature? Has the proverbial African Mugumo tree brought forth another one in disguised ways?

In this treatise, Joachim Kügler has also featured more as an ancestral return of Robert Moffat despite the latter being a Congregationalist, and the former being a Roman Catholic theologian. In particular, Moffat strove hard to ensure real conversion of Southern Africans to Christianity, as opposed to false conversion (proselytising) where dialogue with local realities is avoided altogether. In writing about the holistic dimensions of poverty and in the formation of the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series so as to address cutting-edge issues facing Africa, Kügler found himself a replica of Moffat in God's mysterious ways. In a sense, he becomes a returning African ancestor, as the former comes in disguised ways. Of great concern Kügler's works in the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series is whether he had distorted hermeneutics in mind as they began this initiative. Although he blames prosperity theologies for distorting biblical hermeneutics, his position on Apartheid South Africa's hermeneutics, especially among the Dutch Reformed Church, is not clear. BiAS does not appear to give it attention. Or could it be viewed as a non-contemporary concern in a democratic world? Equally, BiAS has not given xenophobia the much needed attention, yet it's a major concern in our contemporary Africa. Nevertheless, the initiative is a welcome trajectory that puts Africa on an academic pedestal that strives to address African challenges in light of the Scripture.

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