ADDRESSING ETHNICITY VIA BIBLICAL STUDIES: A TASK OF AFRICAN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

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Abstract

In view of the ethnic crisis in Africa and the complexities of the discipline of Biblical Studies, one wonders how African biblical scholarship could address ethnic issues in Africa through its study of the Bible and its Biblical Studies curriculum. I identify three ways of addressing ethnicity through Biblical Studies which I argue for, make sense of, and distinguish by means of methodology (broadly conceived), and the goals of African biblical scholarship.

1. Introduction

I have argued in a recent article (Nyende 2009) that due to the current ethnic crisis in Africa, there is an urgent need to include ethnic studies in the curriculum of theological education in Africa. In the same article, I have proposed in general terms the ways in which ethnic studies could be included in the curriculum of theological institutions in Africa. In view of this urgent need, and in turning from general ways in which ethnic studies can be included in theological education in Africa to particular ways in which ethnic studies can be absorbed in the discipline of Biblical Studies (unless otherwise, BS from here on) in Africa, the question before us as biblical scholars in Africa is this: how do we address ethnic issues through the study of the Bible and in the BS curriculum that we offer? I attempt in this paper to provide an answer to this question by proposing some ways in which ethnic concerns can be addressed in the field of BS in Africa and thus, *ipso facto*, integrate ethnic studies into BS in Africa.

While restricting myself to proposals which are commensurate with the goals of African biblical scholarship, I will suggest ways of addressing ethnicity through BS which I will argue for, make sense of, and distinguish by means of methodology (broadly conceived). The ordering of my proposals around methods, and restricting them to what is commensurate with the goals of African biblical scholarship is requisite since, as it has been observed, any "academic study of anything requires that those involved should consider three questions: why, what and how" (Sharpe 2005, 21). In concrete terms, the academic study of any subject (*what?*) is best understood along the lines of the method (*how?)* used to study that subject and to what end (*why?*).

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In BS however, plotting the study of a given subject on *how* and *why* is complicated because there is no single method in the discipline concerning how to proceed in studying a specified subject, and there is bound to be no agreement on the purpose for undertaking such a study. Indeed in BS today there is no agreement on the philosophy of the discipline. In addition, there is also an acute appreciation of difficulties in trying to arrive at the meaning of a Bible text and in trying to determine the goals for which those meanings are sought. For this reason, biblical scholars are not all doing the same thing with the text, nor do they have the same scholarly goals in view. Methodological clarity and philosophical choices are, therefore, a necessity if one is to avoid indiscriminate and, subsequently incomprehensible, or chaotic ways, of addressing ethnicity (and other subjects) academically through BS. This state of affairs in BS deserves a further, albeit brief, discussion in what follows, before suggesting ways in which ethnic issues can be addressed through BS.

2. State of Biblical Studies

2.1 Methodological Pluralism

Broadly speaking, the emergence of historical critical studies for systematic interpretations of the Bible in the 1700s and their development in the 1800s fostered a sense of unity in biblical interpretations where the goal of interpreting the meaning of a text was perceived as arriving, through grammatico-historical methods, at some objective historical meaning of the text. Biblical scholars and others alike who intended to apply readings of the Bible to contemporary issues of *ecclesia* and society would have had such a determinate meaning of a text as their starting point.[1]

However, two shifts occurred in succession which displaced historical criticism as the central method, or at least disturbed its hegemony, in studying the Bible. "Close reading" (similar to "formalism" and "New Criticism") emerged in the 1920s[2] and shifted the reading of texts from their social and historical context, and

1 J. P. Gabler [1753-1856] (Eldredge and Sandys-Wunsch (1980), was perhaps the first one to delineate this clearly in an attempt to free biblical research from dogmatic theology and in effect to herald the sub-discipline of biblical theology in BS. For more on Gabler's programme see Eldredge and Sandys-Wunsch (1980), Morgan (1987) and Stuckenbruck (1999). It seems that the influence of Gabler's programme still endures in, for example, Standahl (1962), in whose articulations Stuckenbruck (1999, 154-57) sees Gabler's sentiments in modern garb.

2 The impact of this approach though was to be felt in biblical studies only from the 1960s; see Detweiler and Robbins (1991) for more. Some of the hermeneutical approaches which close reading has spawned include: Narrative criticism, Reader-Response criticism, Structural criticism, Rhetorical criticism, and Literary criticism. See Hartin and Petzer (1991), Malbon

from the writer's mind and life, to the text itself. In interpreting a text what mattered was the text itself, its structure, architecture, intrinsic form and the internal relationships of its parts. A literary reading of texts was called for - this is the so called "textual paradigm".[3] Then in the 1960s, the textual paradigm was itself challenged by the emergence of poststructural criticism, which shifted the controlling principle in reading texts from the text itself to the reader. The reader mattered most since s/he was the one understood to confer meaning to a text ("the readers paradigm"). Consequently, the field of BS is a methodogically plural and contested ground.

In the first instance, any method proposed or practised in the place of historical criticism brings with it new and perhaps weightier philosophical and theological problems, enough to have it challenged or rejected as well. For example, a reader-orientated approach to the study of the Bible may be charged with watering down the historical contingencies of a Bible text vital to its meaning (Noble 1996), and/or with solipsism, which is nothing more than a projection of the whims and desire of the reader onto the text, the stuff of textual manipulation. Whilst literary approaches as a way of studying the Bible could be opposed on the grounds that they are divorcing the Bible from its theological reality (Childs 1992, 723), or (for structuralism) that in the absence of an outside reference or the transcendentally signified in language, what we have is an endless differential network of signs referring infinitely to signs-and-more-signs and not meaning at all (Derrida 1981, 280).

Secondly, any attempt at an integration of these methods faces the difficulty of competing methods and, at times, irreconcilable philosophical presuppositions behind the methods. Indeed some attempts have been made to integrate various methodologies in BS.[4] The problem, though, with such proposals is that the philosophical presuppositions of the individual approaches that do not agree seem overlooked, yet integration presupposes complementary modes of studying the Bible which take us in the same direction. For example, in noting that: "Every method is...anchored to a set of underlying presuppositions that determine the set of questions to be put to a text; and the answers are those expected in advance" (Tate 2003, 195), Tate seems to touch on this problem of conflict but falls short of addressing how such a problem could be transcended in integrating methods of studying the Bible.

The alternative to integration is exclusivism, a "balkanization" of hermeneutical approaches in BS. For example, Templeton (1999, 293-329), who clearly understands the philosophical presuppositions at stake, chooses literary

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and McKnight (1994) and Porter (1997) for a broad look at these new approaches in BS, and Minor (1996) and Powell (1992) for comprehensive bibliographies.

3 See Seldon (1989).

4 See Tate (2003) and Jonker (1997).

criticism to the exclusion of historical criticism in reading the Bible. For him, the Bible is literature rather than history on the basis that "many realities of which the NT speaks are simply not accessible to the historian. What we have in the NT is the language of the human heart, the language of emotion ..." (Templeton 1999, 306). The Bible then should be approached literarily; a position whose implications he alludes to in his pronouncement: "To lose the Bible as history is not to lose truth, but to lose one kind of it and find another. But we have not lost it and do not lose it. We change the question merely" (Templeton 1999, 327). But the disadvantage of capitulating to exclusivism in hermeneutical approaches is to fail to do justice to the complexity of the *genre* of biblical literature which seem to make room for more than one approach in making sense of the Bible. As Barton points out, "the Old (and New) Testament contain(s) some very strange literature; perhaps it will not be surprising if it takes more than one kind of sensibility to understand it" (Barton 1994, 15, in brackets mine).

It seems that methodological pluralism in BS cannot be eliminated. To avoid, therefore, indiscriminate and in effect chaotic or incomprehensible ways of studying the Bible, those involved in any study or teaching of the Bible must be clear on how they intend to study the Bible and to what end. Such clarity and choice may not be easy to make, because they entail an awareness of hermeneutics, a capacity to balance subordinate judgements, and an awareness of the variable scholarly goals in Bible study. This may be the reason why a generation ago Keck (1974, 435) hoped for, somehow, a convergence of approaches leading to a redefined common method in BS. To the contrary, multiple methods of studying the Bible in BS are, in principle, commonplace.[5]

2.2 Philosophical Bifurcation

I have already pointed out, in view of methodological pluralism in BS, the need for clarity in method and to what end we employ it for our Bible study. Unmasking goals for the study of the Bible not only reveals the ends for which the Bible is studied, but in addition, they provide perspectives on, and orientation to, the Bible. This is because the goals for which the Bible ought to be studied are directly related to the views held on the nature and functions of the Bible. Some years back Fiorenza (1990) identified two broad approaches to the nature and function of Bible in recent times in BS which may be understood to make the Bible requisite for study. The first approach we may call the "functional view" of the Bible. Here the nature and function of the Bible is understood in virtue of its functions in the church (and society at large): i.e., because the Bible is used by the Christian

5 Various attempts at ways forward from the problem of methodology pluralism which have been offered are a good indication of the problem; see for example Clines (1993), Hengel (1996), Bockmuehl (1998), Bartholomew *et al* (2001), and Johnson and William (2002).

community to understand its faith and order its life, it must be reckoned with as such. Consequently, the need to study the Bible is grounded in the acknowledgement of its significance to Christian communities and perhaps in the fact that the Bible is too potent and relevant to Christian communities to be left to ignorance.

The second approach we may call the "canonical view" of the Bible. Here the nature and function of the Bible is understood on the basis of its divine and definitive content. With regard to its divine content, for example, the Bible is understood as God's self-communication and, therefore, taken to be absolutely vital for understanding his nature, and his will and purposes for the world. As regards its definitive content, the Bible's content is viewed as the locus of the primal events and traditions that constitute the beginnings of the Christian community; because these primal events and traditions are considered to be definitive of the identity and self-understanding of the Church (ever since), the Bible is required in forming authentic Christian communities. The canonical view of the Bible houses a variety of understandings of the divine nature of the Bible in words such as, "inspired", "sacred", "revelational", "authoritative", on the basis of which the Bible is looked upon for provision of truths to live by and act upon, and the context within which to appropriate and understand one's existence.

Functional and canonical views of the Bible are not the only persuasions regarding the nature and function of the Bible; we may add to them a third view, viz., the "historical view" of the Bible. Here the Bible is viewed no less and no more than a historical document or artefact, with its theological nature and current value largely ignored if at all reckoned with. On the basis of such a persuasion, the Bible is not privileged as such, nor is there a distinction made between the Bible and other historical-religious literary artefacts. In addition, and consequently, the Bible is not looked upon as a body of authoritative literature by which Christian communities ought to fashion their lives, values and convictions.

Scholars and scholarly communities who hold to a functional or canonical view of the Bible would, with few exceptions, consider their efforts to study the Bible, and the products of their study, to be useful to, and in some way normative for, Christian communities and the socio-economic and political contexts which they inhabit. They would also, in various ways and shades of emphases, have this usefulness of their Bible study as their goal and motivation. For these reasons, scholars with a functional or canonical view of the Bible actively implicate their biblical *interpretatio* in their ethical, political, social, and cultic concerns or involvement. In contrast, scholars and scholarly communities who hold to an historical view of the Bible would not be in sympathy with such goals and may actually resist them. Scholarly communities that hold to an historical view of the Bible would not consciously consider the results of their Bible study to be of current use nor normative to any Christian community, rather, they would tend to

see their work as one of historical value. That is, the goals of their study of the Bible would be mostly understood as one of reconstructing, enlightening and understanding the past (i.e., the history of early Christianity).

Small wonder that the history of BS has had struggles between these two goals of studying the Bible, together with the views on the nature and function of the Bible which they belie. From the field of NT studies, for example, William Wrede at the beginning of the Twentieth Century,[6] Albert Outler in the middle of Twentieth Century,[7] and most recently Heikki Räisänen,[8] would be prominent representatives of scholars who locate the goals of their study of the Bible within the interests of understanding (early Christian religion's) history. This is in contrast to Franz Overbeck[9] and Adolph Schlatter[10] at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, and more recently Stephen Fowl (1998), who would be prominent representatives of scholars who locate the goals of their study of Bible within its sacred content, which they argue needs to be understood for application in theology and church.[11] Now, depending on the scholarly community in which one finds him or herself, one or the other view of the Bible and the related goal of its study predominates.

If we are to address ethnic issues through an intelligible and comprehensible Bible study and through an orderly BS curriculum and syllabi, then clarity in methodology, and choices on the goal for the Bible study are both necessary and decisive. In the light of these conclusions, I will, in what follows, propose and distinguish ways in which ethnic concerns can be addressed *via* BS by means of methodology. My proposals will be limited to what is useful to the goals of African biblical scholarship. Throughout my proposals, I will appeal to actual studies by biblical scholars who have addressed ethnic issues *via* their Bible study and in effect show that my proposals are already being carried out in the works of individual Bible scholars and perhaps what remains is for African biblical scholarship to adopt them in their study of the Bible and BS curriculum in order to address African ethnic issues.

Since I will restrict my proposals on ways of addressing ethnic issues through BS to those ways which are commensurate with the philosophy and goals of African biblical scholarship, the following observations are in order. As I have

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6 For more see Morgan (1973, 1-67 and 68-116) and Matlock (1997).

7 For more see Keck (1981).

8 See Räisänen (2000) but also Koester (1975) for more.

9 See Keck (1981).

10 See Morgan (1973, 117-166).

11 Although I have drawn my examples on the goals and philosophy for studying the Bible mostly from the field of New Testament (Biblical) Theology, such discussions are all too often present in discourse on Bible interpretation or biblical hermeneutics: see, for example, Schneider (1999), Fowl (1997), and Mosala (1989).

shown in an earlier study (Nyende 2005, 513), African Bible scholars tend to study the Bible circumstantially, to address a perceived pastoral, moral, even political problem. In other words, they study the Bible with the aim of relating it to the church and to the life of the society.[12] This is supported further by virtually all discourse by African biblical scholars on hermeneutics which advocate ways of interpreting the Bible which are engaged *ecclesially*, socio-politically and economically with African issues.[13] This kind of Bible study by African biblical scholars (and theologians) betrays a dominant philosophy and goal in African biblical scholarship, viz., the Bible (in keeping with the canonical and functional view described earlier) is in some specific and definite ways the word of God written and as such an expression of divine will and disclosure, and an authoritative source of inspiration, truth and instruction to Christian communities, often in relationship to the socio-economic and political context they inhabit—African society at large. In other words, according to our views of the Bible discussed above, the predominant view of the Bible that prevails in African biblical scholarship is the canonical view. For this reason, the Bible is studied and its interpretation brought to bear on contemporary ecclesial and societal issues. With this is mind, we are now in a position to turn to my proposals on the ways in which ethnic issues in Africa can be addressed through BS in Africa.

3. Ways of Addressing Ethnicity *via* BS

3.1 Addressing ethnic issues through the Bible's teaching

I propose that the most direct and perhaps most obvious way of addressing ethnicity through BS is by finding out what the Bible says or teaches *directly* about ethnicity and bringing that to bear on ethnic issues. This could take place in three distinct modes. In the first mode, a teaching of a Bible text relevant to an ethnic issue (which would concretely revolve around Israel and other nations in the Old Testament, or around Jews and various ethnic populations [Gentiles] especially the Greeks, and perhaps on discourse of a new identity in Christ in the New Testament) is used to advocate or inspire certain values, practices, beliefs which mitigate the negative aspects of ethnicity (ethnocentrism). Relevant Bible texts could also be used to question and correct certain values, practices or beliefs which foster the negative aspects of ethnicity.

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12 African institutional interpretations of the Bible have this end to their interpretations; see my discussion (Nyende 2007) for more.

13 See Abogunrin (2005), Manus (2003), Ukpong (2000 and 1995), Ntreh (1990) and Mosala (1989).

It is important to note here that although texts on Israel and other nations in the Old Testament, and on Jews and various Gentile groups in the New Testament, are the predominant discourse in which one can find what the Bible has directly to say or teach about ethnicity, it should not be presumed that such discourse is therefore either dated or of value only to Jewish-Christian relations. Such texts have informed and can inform ethnicity generally and other ethnic relations. Biblical scholars such as John Barclay and Timothy Beal have done exactly this in their Bible studies. Barclay (1996) reflects exegetically on Paul's words that "there is neither Jew nor Greek..." (Gal 3.28) with the conclusion that Paul envisions "an alternative form of community which could bridge ethnic and cultural divisions by creating new patterns of common life" (210). As for Beal (1997), "The book of Esther is about surviving dead ends: living beyond the end determined for those projected as quintessentially not-self (or 'other'), the privileged representatives of divergence, marked as sacrifices for the furtherance of a vision of identity and political homogeneity" (107). It is possible to envisage studies on the Bible by African biblical scholars, and BS courses offered in African theological institutions which, by design, major on such kinds of study. Courses for study could be offered which discuss broadly the Bible's content relevant to ethnicity such as "Paul and Ethnicity" or "The Synoptic Gospels and Ethnicity". Alternatively, courses for study could be offered which discuss a book of the Bible or a specific text of the Bible relevant to an ethnic issue such as 'Esther and Ethnicity" or "Romans and Christian Identity".

However, there are problematic texts in the Bible which can be seen to teach ethnocentrism directly, and whose teaching, then, rather than addressing corrosive ethnic issues actually appears to foster them. Indeed the history of the use of the Bible through the centuries offers numerous examples where the Bible has been used to advocate ethnocentrism. The most overt and deadly example of this here in Africa is the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Munyeneza's (2003) study shows that the root of this genocide was ethnocentrism which was watered, in good measure, by certain interpretations of portions of the Old Testament in which, for example, the *Abatutsi* understood themselves to be like Israel of old and thus superior to their neighbours, the *Abahutu,* who were understood to be the equivalent of the Canaanites, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites etc. Indeed, the geography of the Old Testament was mapped on Rwanda with the result that Rwanda could be perceived like Israel of old. The power of such uncritical readings of the Bible to shape hostile and destructive ethnocentric attitudes is strong, and since one cannot assume that such uses of the Bible have run their course, biblical scholarship in Africa must grapple with these problematic texts in efforts to address ethnicity

through BS.[14] In such a spirit, we could have African biblical scholars investing in studies on problematic texts. We could also offer BS courses in Africa, such as "Sacred Texts and Ethnocentrism", whose subject of study are these difficult texts. In such courses deliberate attempts can be made not only to account for their ethnocentric/racialist readings but also to show how they can be ethically or responsibly interpreted in ways contrary to ethnocentric readings. This is the second distinct mode of addressing ethnicity through what the Bible has to say or teach directly about ethnicity.

Isolating and studying problematic texts, and offering ways in which interpretations of these texts can be reshaped from ethnocentrism, is taking place already in biblical scholarship. One of the ways offered in which problematic texts can be re-read are symbolic interpretations which go beyond the literal sense of the text to understand the communication from God somehow enshrined in the problematic literal sense.[15] Another way is through rhetorical and polemical interpretations. Such interpretations take seriously the historical context of these writings together with the use of ethnic rhetoric in the face of threats to a community and in the advancement of that community's teachings. One outcome of rhetorical and polemic interpretation is that care is exercised to distinguish "between the encoded adversaries with their ascribed traits in the narrative world of the text and their real life counterparts in the real world behind the text" (Bowe 2007, 100).[16]

The third distinct mode of addressing ethnicity through direct teachings of the Bible is through the values, principles, and vision of life which the Bible promotes. Bible texts which promote the values of, for example, love, justice, oneness and acceptance can be identified and studied by African biblical scholars, and offered for study in the BS curriculum in Africa with the express intention of using them to counter ethnocentrism. This way of addressing ethnicity could mean a re-reading of the problematic texts which we have already looked at, that shifts focus away from their potential ethnocentric teaching by emphasizing alternative motifs or positive viewpoints within the Bible which in effect relativize the problematic texts and rob them of their ethnocentric force. Such readings may also show that biblical narratives unless critically scrutinized and carefully qualified, may not be the ideal source of how to deal with the ethnically other. I would add here that courses that broach Christians' "New Identity in Christ"[17] and/or the "Universal

14 Fortunately, some biblical scholars have looked into these problematic texts that have engendered ethnocentrism. See, for example, Anderson (2009), Sadler (2005 and 2006), Hunter (2003), Stegemann (1996), Chilton (1993), and Sanders (1969).

15 See Bryon (2002), Culpepper (1983) and Bultmann (1971, 86ff).

16 See Bachmann (2009), Punt (2004), Malchow (1990), and Johnson (1989).

17 See, for example, Elser (2003) and Walter (1983).

Scope of the Gospel" as portrayed in the writings of Paul can be offered since they would be invaluable in helping address ethnocentrism which thrives on exclusive ethnic identity and privilege, as well as on various forms of perceived ethnic entitlement.

Directly using a teaching or discussion of a relevant portion of the Bible to bear on ethnicity would not, and does not, privilege any precise method since several methods can be used for this purpose or outcome. However, as you may have gathered already, it does rule out all manner of reader-response and literary methods that take no regard of the historical contingencies of the Bible. This is because it is by virtue of the Bible consisting of God's communication and discourse, through historical persons, addressing real people, in real time, that attempts are made to apply its content to contemporary times and situations. Put differently, because the Bible is understood as God's communication to peoples past, that communication is understood to be universal and of permanent value, and thus must be identified for, with and in, every culture and historical situation. In consequence, methods that have no regard to the historical contingencies of the Bible will in the final analysis subvert this way of using the Bible to address ethnicity. For this reason, Bible scholars who have applied their readings of the Bible to ethnic issues in the way described above have used methods that take the historical contingencies of the Bible seriously.

Addressing ethnicity through what the Bible says and teaches directly will be of significant value to, and easily upheld by, African biblical scholarship because such a way of interpreting and using the Bible presupposes a canonical or functional view of the Bible by virtue of which the teachings of the Bible bear on the contemporary issue of ethnocentrism. This is because, as mentioned earlier, African biblical scholarship has endeavoured, and endeavours, to make the Bible's message bear on African realities in the church and society in Africa because of the canonical view held on the Bible. African biblical scholarship, then, should explore such modes of studying the Bible in order to address ethnic issues in Africa and offer the same in its BS curriculum. Certainly, this way of using and interpreting the Bible has the potential to be highly effective in helping the church and African society face the crisis of ethnicity in Africa.[18]

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18 However, it is worth noting here that these ways of studying the Bible, particularly its problematic texts, which address ethnocentrism would not be acceptable to scholars who do not hold a canonical view of the Bible. Some in fact would simply see the Bible as being at the centre of the problem and thus unhelpful in addressing ethnocentrism. Hunter (2003, 92-93), for examples has written: "... for we too often let the Bible off lightly in discussions of the contribution it undoubtedly makes, and has made, to human bigotry, prejudice and cruelty. ...the Bible at many points (and not just in the "old" Testament) directly advocates the violent suppression of the enemy."

3.2 Addressing ethnic issues through the Bible's example

The second way of addressing ethnicity through BS is, unlike the first above, indirect and less obvious. In the first way of addressing ethnicity through BS, the chief concern was with the application of relevant and specific content of the Bible to ethnic issues; in this second way of addressing ethnicity through the Bible, the focus is not on the Bible's content *per se* but on the way in which the writers of the Bible are seen to tackle ethnicity in their own time in order to use them as models in our struggle to address contemporary ethnic issues. In other words, the Bible becomes the model or paradigm to help us in addressing ethnicity in Africa. Essentially, what is being done here is that the logic and spirit of the Bible author's way of addressing ethnicity wherever this may be found is put to use for contemporary times. Some leading questions in studying the Bible for such a purpose would be these: What strategies for combating ethnocentrism are articulated in this text? What strategies for promoting love, justice, acceptance etc. are to be found in this text? How does the text proceed in its implicit or explicit reflection on ethnocentrism? On what sources (authorities) does the text draw? I imagine a course such as "Tackling Ethnocentrism Paul's Way" offered to cater for this way of addressing ethnicity which by design would proceed by probing, understanding, and evaluating how Paul deals with ethnocentrism in the places he does so directly and indirectly. But such courses would not be limited to Pauline texts.

Denise Buell and Caroline Hodge in their article, "The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul", have not only advocated this way of addressing ethno-racial issues through BS but have done that in some measure in the same article. As they put it: "By analyzing how Paul recrafts the possible meaning of Judeanness and Greekness, we are better equipped to reimagine and envision communities in which differences are neither erased nor hierarchically ranked" (Buell and Hodge 2004, 251). Buell and Hodge are concerned with "traditional interpretations of Paul in which the understanding of ethnicity or race as 'given' operates as a foil for a non-ethnic, all-inclusive Christianity" (Buell and Hodge 2004, 236). Whilst, positively, such readings of Paul have led to tackling racist and ethnocentric oppressions, Buell and Hodge feel that negatively they have led as well to "racist and anti-Jewish effects" (Buell and Hodge 2004, 237). For them the solution (which makes up the heart of their article) lies in first understanding that in Paul's world ethnicity, unlike many modern theories of it, is mutable and, secondly, in a re-reading of Paul which gives attention to the details of how Paul deals with the problem of real and apparent Judean and Greek ethnic gulfs. In Buell and Hodge's own words:

> Paul uses "ethnic reasoning"[19] to solve the problem of the exclusion of gentiles from God's promises to Israel. He constructs his arguments within the scope of ethnoracial discourse, but shifts the terms of membership and the relationship between existing groups—Greek and Judean—such that they can be brought into an ethnoracial relationship with one another. Ethnic reasoning serves Paul well in that it offers a model of unity and connection among peoples while still maintaining differences. He preserves the categories of Greek or gentile and Judean while uniting them, hierachically ("first the Judean, then the Greek"), under the umbrella of Abraham's descendants and God's people (Buell and Hodge 2004, 238).

Such a way of addressing ethnicity through BS as demonstrated by Buell and Hodge is promising and should be pursued in depth by African biblical scholarship. The fact that those who are to use the Bible this way in tackling ethnicity would have to embrace either a canonical or functional view of it means that this way is an open avenue for African biblical scholarship to use the Bible as a definitive and necessary resource in tackling ethnic problems bedevilling Africa.

With regard to methodological details of this way of addressing ethnicity through BS, a variety of approaches which take seriously the historical contingencies of the Bible text can be employed. But in addition, for such a way of addressing ethnicity through BS to be successful as Buell and Hodge's research shows, Bible scholars and students must become familiar with, and engage critically and comparatively with, both ancient and modern discourse on ethnicity (and race), since knowledge of both gives one the tools to make informed, incisive and critical evaluation of the way writers of the Bible tackle ethnic realities and barriers from which one can learn and in turn participate in contemporary struggles with ethnocentrism. Even though some theoretical orientation is needed in the proposed ways above and below of addressing ethnic issues through BS, and also needed for the purposes of unmasking tacit, if not uncritical, ethnic/racial views which affect Bible interpretation and use, the need for a theoretical orientation on ethnicity is especially in the foreground in this second way, and thus most keenly felt. It is on account of this that some scholars dealing with ethnic and racial issues have insisted that engagement with ethnic discourse and theories is imperative in BS and should be made central. Bryon (2009, 174), for example, says that "... for biblical scholars, discussions about race, ethnicity, blacks, Africans, or any other 'Africanist presence'—or indeed any other cultural or ethnic subjectivities—should not hover at the margins of the biblical scholar's imagination but move to the center of the interpretive process." What this means then is that ethnic studies would be an invariable requirement for African biblical scholars who wish to address ethnic issues in Africa through this way of studying the Bible and through this way of teaching the Bible in their BS curriculum. Fluency in ethnic theory and studies for the study of the Bible is not a new phenomenon; Biblical scholars have

19 See also Buell's (2001) earlier article on "ethnic reasoning" by Paul.

made forays into ethnic studies and used them variously as a means to understand and make sense of some content of the Bible.[20]

3.3 Addressing ethnicity through theologies of ethnicity

Theological reflection, and its attendant articulation or discourse, as distinct from Bible reflection can be understood to take place when one ponders a theological subject or ponders a subject theologically. In effect, theological discourse is normally characterized by the intersection of issues about God (*theological subject*)—his words and actions, agency, nature, character etc., and his world *(the subject discussed theologically*)—human beings, nature and the environment, societies/communities etc. The Bible then plays a part in such theological reflection, but it is not considered by itself as the subject of study out of which the theological reflection emanates. Indeed, Kelsey (1975, 122-134),[21] following Toulmin's (1963) analyses of the standard pattern of arguments, points out four roles the Bible could play in theological reflection and articulation. The Bible may be used to provide *data* when appealed to in a theological articulation. It may be used as a *warrant* when invoked to move a theological discourse from its data to its conclusion or claim. It could be used as a *backing* when it serves "to show that the warrant is true" (Toulmin 1963, 144). Lastly, it may be used to *approve of* or *rebut* the applicability of the warrant. Kelsey goes on to show that in a good number of theological articulations, the usage of the Bible may be limited to only one or two of the mentioned roles, leaving the other constituents of the theological discourse to be filled by other sources such as philosophy, or other spheres in human culture of thinking, validation, or theory. In consequence, the degree to which the content of the Bible is the subject matter of theological reflection depends on the part it plays (whether it is used for data, or as a warrant, or as a backing, or as an approval or rebuttal) in theological reasoning and articulation.

Such an understanding of theological reflection and the role the Bible plays in it casts into relief a third way in which ethnic issues can be addressed through the study of the Bible, viz., through theological articulations on ethnicity or "theologies of ethnicity" whereby ethnicity is the subject reflected on theologically with the Bible playing some role in the reflection. I know of two articulated theologies of ethnicity, one by Miroslav Volf (1996) and the other by Douglas Sharpe (2002) although with respectively European and North American audiences in view. To such work we may add "theologies of culture" whose subject area can be integrally related to, intersect, and has much in common with, ethnic discourse. Mission theologians such as Hesselgrave (1978) and Kraft (1979) have indirectly

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20 See, for example, Hagedorn (2006), Coote (2006), Dulling (2005), Smith (1996), Stanley (1996) and majority of the papers in Brett (1996) and in Sparks (1998).

21 See also his earlier "Appeals to Scripture" (Kelsey 1988).

and inadvertently come up with theologies of culture in their pursuit to understand and advocate ways in which the gospel has been contextualized or should be contextualized in various *locales*. These theologies of culture from mission theologians have aided in understanding cultures theologically and thereby shaped theological perceptions of culture, their functions, value and relativity. Such theologies have contributed, and can contribute to an appreciation of the role of ethnicity/culture in a society, to a diminution of ethnicity's quasi-divine, superior, and exclusive status, and to an openness to, and tolerance of, other ethnic groups and culture. Comparable theologies of ethnicity/culture in Africa by African biblical scholars (and theologians and mission theologians) are needed which could act as fodder for BS courses which wish to address ethnicity through theological reflections in which the Bible plays a role.

This third way of addressing ethnicity through the study of the Bible would bring together the disciplines of BS and Theological Studies, a fact that would resonate deeply with African biblical scholarship. This is because in African theological institutions and her university Religious Departments and Faculties of Theology, there is in practice no division between theological and biblical study. NT studies in Africa, unlike in the Anglo-American scene, tend not to stand on their own. As Gerald West (2000,4) observed, "African biblical studies is one strand in the closely woven cord that is African Theology. The separation of biblical studies from other theological disciplines, so common elsewhere, does not happen in African Biblical Studies".[22] Consequently, Theological Studies in Africa are integral to Biblical studies; they mix and merge in various ways in their common pursuit to speak to the African context in constructive and helpful ways. This thesis is supported in a survey done not so recently by Maurier (in Okoye 1997) covering over 2,000 theological writings from Africans, which found that "theological writing in Africa has been circumstantial, focused on particular pastoral or moral problems" (Okoye 1997, 69). It is in these theological writings that one tends to find the Bible studied, and not in studies exclusively on the Bible, in order to relate it to African realities.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have offered, in methodologically sensitive terms, ways of addressing ethnic issues in Africa which are congruent with the goals of African biblical scholarship. These proposals are not a detailed blue print on how African biblical scholarship should address ethnicity through studies of the Bible, but rather my attempts at a more modest goal of pointing out ways by which the essential task of addressing ethnic issues in Africa through studies of the Bible could be

22 Here, it is worth noting G. West's (1999) earlier article, "On the Eve of an African Biblical Study", which is a programmatic essay from him that is set out in the light of this reality.

profitably undertaken by African biblical scholarship in both its research and in its BS teaching curriculum. Whatever debates and discussions what I have written engenders, I can only hope that it will contribute to African biblical scholarship attending very carefully to addressing ethnicity through studies of the Bible as an integral part of its task, or at the very least prove useful to African biblical scholars as a place to begin exploring the issues of addressing ethnicity in Africa through the study of the Bible since the responsibility for this task is primarily our own.

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