

Intercultural Interpretation of Scripture: Evaluating the Approach of Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole for Interpreting the Bible in Africa

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Abstract

Intercultural methods of biblical interpretation are gradually gaining popularity and are preferred for biblical studies in the African context. Appropriate methods or approaches for biblical interpretation are critical if the objective of the interpretation is to engage the receptors' or the target audience's cultural features and that of the text for a mutual understanding of cultural values in a text to shape contemporary cultural issues. Intercultural criticism of scripture has been variedly engaged by biblical scholars for the interpretation of biblical passages. In this study, I explore the proposition of intercultural mediation by Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole and how he employed it to interpret scripture for the benefit of Africans. It emphasises the uniqueness and the weakness of the approach modelled by Loba-Mkole towards intercultural mediations and motivate others to consider intercultural mediation for biblical studies.

Keywords: Africa; Biblical culture; Church culture; Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole; Intercultural mediation; Intercultural interpretation; Target culture

Introduction

The Bible is often considered to be written in the cultural milieu of the audience/initial receptors and the authors of the various books of the Bible. As such, there is a need to effectively delineate and understand those cultures as a prerequisite for a good and appropriate interpretation of any biblical text. Culture is primarily the way of life of a particular people. Cultural ways of life become societal norms and values by which members of society are expected to live. It indicates one's relationship with his/her neighbour (horizontal) and relationship with God (vertical). According to Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole (2008:1347–1364), vertical intercultural studies is not limited to the relationship between God and humans but also the relationship between leaders in society and their subjects. Both horizontal and vertical relationships with God and fellow humans allude to cultures that can be theologically and anthropologically influenced over a period of time. This demonstrates an individualist and collectivist relationship in a specific cultural milieu, which Loba-Mkole does not highlight. It also indicates clues for understanding some human actions or inactions.

Prior to the year 2000, the quest for appropriate means of biblical interpretation for the African context became intensified, leading to the proposition of various methods and approaches, including intercultural biblical criticism. Intercultural biblical criticism upholds the sacredness of the Bible for life and nurtures and attempts to re-interpret it from contemporary cultural tenets with critical insights from historical scrutiny. In other words, it is the critical interpretation of scripture that considers the culture of the receptors or target beneficiaries of the interpreted text. This is presented against the backdrop that Africans engage the biblical text to solve existential problems; subsequently, African culture becomes a subject of interpretation in the context of the biblical text selected for intercultural interpretation (Nyende 2010:122–139). Hence, biblical interpretation in Africa has a component of appropriation in a particular context in Africa. It makes the scripture passage more relevant to the African situations. It is the quest to revert to how scripture and the culture of the initial audience of the texts were configured.

Historically, Justin S. Ukpong (1996:189–210) has been acclaimed as the first African biblical scholar who publicly began the discourse about intercultural studies of the Bible through his inculturation hermeneutics in 1996. Intercultural hermeneutics is mainly the application of the inculturation paradigm in biblical hermeneutics. It interprets the text from a contemporary socio-cultural perspective by making it the subject of interpretation. Ukpong engaged the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1–13 to illustrate how to use intercultural hermeneutics. He discussed the socio-cultural context of the reader (contemporary target culture), previous scholarly interpretations of the text, and interpretation of the text as a parable in its historical context. In the nutshell, Ukpong asserted a three steps procedure for intercultural hermeneutics.

Other scholars have also contributed to the proposition of Ukpong concerning intercultural criticism of the Bible. Antoine C.N. Cilumba (2001) propounded intercultural exegesis. He narrowed down the historical-critical aspect of inculturation hermeneutics by Ukpong to the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer to emphasise literary composition, redaction, and tradition of a text, as well as its engagement with the cultural context of the target audience (contemporary). Cilumba used John 2:23–3:36 for intercultural exegesis as a practical example. The literary and historical context analysis of the text, redaction and traditional criticism of the passage shows that faith, life, and sign are critical turning points of John 2:23–3:36. He then applied the key elements of faith, life, and sign as encountered in the text in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) context. Cilumba does not consider the cultural position of the exegete but demonstrated how the text could influence contemporary target culture.

Chris U. Manus's (2003) model of intercultural hermeneutics hinges on three principles/steps: (i) a study of the contemporary context; (ii) analysis of the socio-historical context of the text; and (iii) synoptic interpretation of the text. Manus's model of the intercultural hermeneutic model closely reflects that of Ukpong (Loba-Mkole 2007:7–28), which is vivid throughout the work of Manus during the interpretation of Mark 1:40–45. Manus discusses the contemporary cultural context of Nigeria affected and infected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. He offers a socio-historical interpretation of the text and then presents a discussion of Mark 1:40–45 to argue that persons affected

and infected by HIV/AIDS should pray while society expresses compassion towards them. The synoptic analysis may be due to the fact that the text chosen by Manus is a synoptic passage that can be found in Luke 5:12–16 and Matthew 8:1–4 with varied emphases and *points of view*. It suggests that Manus' model of intercultural hermeneutics is limited to synoptic passages.

Musa W. Dube (2010:363–388) states that “intercultural biblical interpretation takes place within a context of power struggle - between cultures and their readers.” Dube (2010:365) argues that the biblical text is highly cultured according to the tenets of the initial receptors of the document. Hence, interpretations that do not consider the interpretation of that culture within a contemporary culture are likely to lead to oppression and colonisation. Intercultural interpretation of scripture is appropriate for liberation and freedom. John D. K. Ekem (2007:75–93) includes intercultural interpretation as one of the critical elements in the principles/steps in mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics. Intercultural interpretation can be used as an independent method or a contributing factor to other methods, which avoids the tendency of using scripture to enslave or oppress but expresses liberty and freedom to contemporary people in a particular context.

It is significant to mention that prior to the period of Ukpog, intercultural interpretation was limited to the various cultures that a text may allude to in a particular book and the dynamics it presents in the composition by the author. An example is the cultural textures of socio-rhetorical criticism propounded by Vernon K. Robbins (1996). That notwithstanding, intercultural hermeneutics/interpretation/exegesis takes support from prior methods of biblical hermeneutics, particularly historical-critical methods' derivatives of literary criticism, historical criticism, redaction criticism, traditional criticism, and social criticism of the text. This signifies that intercultural interpretation has a wider audience to benefit from the work besides the contemporary target audience. Arguably, intercultural hermeneutics can be considered a strand of historical-critical method of biblical interpretation.

While appreciating the works of Ukpog, Cilumba, and Manus Jean-Claude, Loba-Mkole finds a need for improvement; hence, he opines for intercultural mediation, which this study seeks to scrutinise. My procedure is to (i) analyse intercultural mediation propounded by Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole to identify the strength and weaknesses of his assertions; (ii) examine a few texts interpreted by Loba-Mkole using his model of intercultural biblical exegesis; (iii) undertake a discussion; and (iv) draw a conclusion.

Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole's Model of Intercultural Mediation

Loba-Mkole (2008:1347–1364) propounded intercultural mediation which comprises three (3) models of intercultural criticism, namely intercultural biblical exegesis, intercultural Bible translations, and intercultural canonicity. My attention in this study is focused on intercultural biblical exegesis. It is due to the materials gathered for this study, the availability of space, and my intention to undertake a critical and detailed discussion of each of the models of intercultural mediation.

The terms “intercultural” and “mediation” are indispensable constituents in intercultural mediation by Loba-Mkole. Loba-Mkole (2007:99) defines “intercultural” and “mediation” thus: “...intercultural’ involves a relation between two or more cultures while ‘mediation’ evokes the idea of representation. In that sense, intercultural

mediation is a representation of two or more cultures: a source-text culture, a target-text culture, and a church culture (the latter is expected to be sensitive to both Christian and non-Christian audiences.) Intercultural mediation takes into critical consideration a triple reference: the original biblical culture, the church culture, and a contemporary targeted prevailing culture seeking response. It demands sophisticated skills in contemporary target cultures, biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to delineate the source-text culture. For the church culture and the target culture, Latin or Greek and the language of the contemporary target culture which could be Akan, Ga, Ewe, Hausa, Swahili etc. are needed (Loba-Mkole 2007:100). Intercultural mediation seeks cogent negotiations between three cultures made up of the Bible, tradition, and contemporary norms.

Further, Loba-Mkole (2007:99) defined culture as the total human experience within a certain space and time. It differs from the usual definition of culture as a sum total of the norms (verbal and non-verbal) of society. Loba-Mkole's definition periodises culture in order to make the translated/interpreted document/passage more relevant to the contemporary target culture. It has the potential of keeping a particular translation and interpretation over a long period of time before considering re-interpretation if contemporary culture evolves. The role of the "mediator" who is the interpreter is significant in intercultural mediation. Loba-Mkole (2007:102) stated that "...it is important to bear in mind that an intercultural mediation requires the practitioner to be creative in order to invent points of agreement between the cultures concerned." It reminds one of the issue of technical skill and objectivity in biblical translations/interpretations. The points of agreement mentioned by Loba-Mkole can be issues that agree with the cultural experiences of the mediator. Hence, there is a certain degree of subjectivity. It is unfortunate Loba-Mkole does not observe points of disagreement between a culture in texts and contemporary culture. However, this may be the reason why he used "mediator" instead of "interpreter".

Critical to intercultural mediation is the conception of "culture" and the "mediator". How do these engage with existing propositions concerning cultural criticism of the Bible and the presupposition of the interpreter, and the way forward? Cultural criticism of the Bible has been receiving attention from biblical scholars. It is often engaged by interpreters whose presupposition is to express liberation to contemporary culture through the use of biblical texts. Hence, it is argued that cultural criticism of the Bible is a subset of liberation hermeneutics, which can be approached from either a social scientific or reader-response perspective (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard Jr. 2004:91).

Cultural criticism of the Bible is not wholesale appropriation or reappropriation of biblical texts nor the Bible influencing contemporary culture or contemporary culture influencing the Bible in a non-critical and contextual manner. Rather, it is a process of unearthing mutual cultural redefinition for the life and nurture of culture (Segovia 2000:59–83). It is an interactive dialogue between the Bible and contemporary culture for a common ground for human development, social justice, and mutual respect. Early propositions of cultural criticisms did not emphasise church culture/tradition as a critical component in the interpretation spiral. Intercultural mediation by Loba-Mkole attempts to bridge the cultural gap between the Bible, tradition, and contemporary culture. The biblical culture is the main factor to influence societal transformation of target contemporary culture with support from church culture/tradition.

The main contribution of Loba-Mkole in the cultural criticism enterprise of the Bible is his focus on the church culture/tradition of a particular text or concept in the Bible. He does not limit intercultural mediation to biblical culture and contemporary target culture. It indicates how biblical culture, church culture, and contemporary culture may agree or disagree and how significant is the dialogue for the contemporary target culture. It does not put aside church tradition/doctrine concerning a text or particular concept but considers it as one of the critical elements in the hermeneutics spiral. This will foster a close significant relationship between church cultures, biblical culture, and contemporary culture, which will limit the number of pitfalls in biblical studies (biblical interpretation).

The weakness of intercultural mediation is situated in the fact that varying presuppositions inform a church to adopt/adapt a particular understanding of a text or concept. There may likely arise disagreements between biblical culture and church culture. Ukpong, Cilumba, and Manus do not include church culture/tradition in the procedure provided for intercultural interpretation probably to avoid issues of disagreements. Loba-Mkole has clarified that when there are disagreements, the epistemological principle of the character and statement of Jesus in the text should be the supreme object of dialogue for the target contemporary culture (Loba-Mkole 2013). It is not clear what should be done for texts outside the gospels. Clarifying this will strengthen intercultural mediation.

The selection of a text for intercultural mediation is not motivated by academic interest, although academic principles are engaged for the interpretation. The motivation for the selection of a text is guided by the identification of a problem in the contemporary target culture seeking liberation. Due to its nature of being liberative, it has been recommended as the ideal for biblical studies in Africa and deprived contexts (Wimbush 1989:43–55; Aarde 2005:683–708). However, the argument is problematic because it has the potential to select texts perceived to speak to situations of liberation for interpretation. “That is, we start into a text with a specific slant we are looking for, and we use the text merely to search for details that fit with our agenda. Anything that does not fit in with the meaning we are looking for we simply skip and ignore” (Duvall and Hays 2005:89). Practitioners of intercultural mediation must guard against this pitfall.

Nevertheless, a creative amalgamation of a few principles of scripture translations, inculturation hermeneutics by Ukpong, intercultural interpretation model by Cilumba, and some aspects of mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics (Nida and Taber 1969; Ekem 2005; Wendland 2005; Kuwornu-Adjaotor 2012; Aryeh 2019) can be seen in the composition of intercultural mediation. This makes intercultural mediation an all-encompassing approach to Bible translations and interpretations that captures many aspects of biblical interpretation models developed for the African context. Loba-Mkole (2007:102) concludes that he cannot describe the various components of intercultural mediation in more detail. However, a substantial detailed principle and procedure have been made available for use by scholars for intercultural mediation. This reflects the assertion that cultural criticism of the Bible is an ongoing hermeneutical method that is finding hermeneutical unity in the field of biblical studies (Klingbeil 2005:261–277). Cultural criticism is open for dialogue and input.

Intercultural Biblical Exegesis

Intercultural biblical exegesis is a subsidiary of the intercultural mediation model propounded by Loba-Mkole for the interpretation of biblical passages. The biblical culture, church culture, and target contemporary culture are critical components of intercultural biblical exegesis. Loba-Mkole asserted the procedure for the intercultural biblical exegesis model:

- Self-introduction by the exegete in terms of her/his cultural positions.
- Describing and discussing the main interpretation of the chosen text for the current target culture.
- Describing and discussing parallel interpretations of the chosen text for the current target culture.
- Describing and discussing the main interpretation in the past church culture.
- Describing and discussing parallel interpretations in the past church culture.
- Describing and discussing the main text chosen from the original biblical culture within its canonical contexts.
- Describing and discussing parallel texts in the original biblical culture.
- Establishing the similitude and difference between the texts of the original biblical culture, the interpretations of the church culture and those of the target culture, followed by a way forward, in other words, a new synthesis of those interpretations, including their epistemological and ethical values (Loba-Mkole 2019:173).

It can be deduced from the procedure given by Loba-Mkole for intercultural biblical exegesis that the following belong to the target culture: (i) describing and discussing the main interpretation of the chosen text for the current target culture; and (ii) parallel interpretations of the chosen text for the current target culture. For the church culture: (i) describing and discussing the main interpretation in the past church culture; and (ii) parallel interpretations in the past church culture. For the biblical culture: (i) describing and discussing the main text chosen from the original biblical culture within its canonical contexts; and (ii) parallel texts in the original biblical culture. The first and the last points represent the thesis of the exegete (mediator) and the findings/results of the intercultural biblical exegesis. In all the procedures, a comparative analysis is a common feature.

Self-introduction by the exegete/mediator in terms of her/his cultural position is key in intercultural biblical exegesis. It demonstrates the views of the mediator concerning issues in the target contemporary culture that the study hopes to address. The role of the “mediator” is so significant that there is no objectivity or disinterest of the interpreter/mediator (Segovia 2000:267). The interpreter/mediator acts as someone who has identified a problem of subjectivity, social injustice, greed, poverty, oppression etc. that has necessitated the deployment of a biblical text in intercultural parlance to address. It is not limited to the discovery of knowledge to feed a particular field of biblical endeavour but to also influence a targeted contemporary culture for development and liberation. Hence, the interpreter/mediator is not only contributing to knowledge exclusive to the field of study but an agent of change and development in society. The position of the interpreter/mediator can be considered as the presupposition of the exegete to be relevant to a wider audience of both academic and non-academic audiences, which is the attempt to be more tangible. It is not the interest of practitioners

of intercultural biblical exegesis to delineate the meaning of a text in its historical context and leave it there but also to apply the meaning of a text in a specific contemporary context (Klingbeil 2005:268).

The biblical culture involves describing and discussing the text chosen from the Bible in its canonical form. Any established method of biblical interpretation can be used to delineate the meaning of the text in its socio-historical culture with literary and historical contextual analysis if found appropriate and relevant for the study (Loba-Mkole 2005:291–326). Church culture/tradition seeks to ascertain various interpretations of the text from the past by a particular church denomination/tradition. This can take a diachronic or synchronic approach. The findings of the biblical culture are juxtaposed with the church culture to identify the minutest differences and similarities and reasons examined. Analysing the interpreted text and drawing its parallels in the target contemporary culture fosters the attempts of mediation and subsequently determines how the target contemporary culture should evolve and provides appropriate justification. These will be demonstrated in texts interpreted by Loba-Mkole.

The Practice of Intercultural Biblical Exegesis by Loba-Mkole

Loba-Mkole engaged intercultural biblical exegesis to interpret a few key biblical passages to serve as examples to would-be practitioners and provide solutions to some problems in the African contemporary culture, particularly that of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The Social Setting of Jesus' Exaltation in Luke-Acts (Lk 22:69 and Ac 7:56)

In the interpretation of Luke 22:69 and Acts 7:56, Loba-Mkole (2005:291–326) argues that the title “Son of Man” as used in Luke 22:69 and Acts 7:56 is used to show solidarity with humans (particularly the socially disadvantaged). This departs from other concepts of the “Son of Man” as the eschatological saviour, judge, etc (Bosch 1992; Hare 1983; Goulder 2002; Luz 1992; Marcus 2003; Wink 2002).

Interpreting the biblical culture, Loba-Mkole (2005:305–308) argues that the genre of Luke-Acts is not history but Greco-Roman biography that follows the following pattern: the life of a founder of religious movement, the disciples and successors of the founder, and the teachings of the community of believers. He added that the passages selected for the study have some commonalities, for example, the trial of Jesus (Lk. 22) and the trial of Stephen (Acts 7), which both take place in Jerusalem. Loba-Mkole (2005:312) states that “in the Lukan account of Jesus’ trial, the latter was killed as a prophet of God, but not as “a divinely Son of Man”. Similarly, Stephen was killed not because he confessed Jesus as the “divinely Son of Man”, but rather because of his association with Jesus Christ in a context of the persecution against the first Christians.” For Loba-Mkole (2005:312–313), the phrase “Son of Man” was used by Jesus to refer to himself as a fellow human being who seeks the common good of members of a group. This is based on linguistic relationships from the history of religion, Mark’s gospel, and the “Q” source.

In an economic sense, the changes that Jesus’ social group was aiming at could have been governed by the following principles: the wickedness of the wealthy and the common-sense observation that no one should die or suffer for lack of the

necessities of life. In fact, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God with God controlling his own land in the sense of the Torah jubilee would entail the redistribution of wealth in Israel and a restitution on the part of the wealthy Israelites (Loba-Mkole 2005:317).

Jesus' teachings addressed issues affecting the poor and the rich. The rich, who were amassing wealth at the expense of the poor, were cautioned to stop and to attend to the needs of the poor. This would strengthen the motif of the exaltation of Jesus because Jesus sparked hope and salvation among his disciples (Loba-Mkole 2005:317). The trial and crucifixion of Jesus, which his disciple Stephen also experienced, has both a shame and honour tandem. Individuals in the first century Mediterranean society are persons who are group-oriented or dyadic persons as opposed to individualistic persons. Jesus selected twelve persons to proclaim the kingdom to the larger society. In other words, he was a group-oriented individual who continually sought the good of all groups of persons in society, particularly the socially disadvantaged.

For church culture, Loba-Mkole (2005:301–303) relies on ethnographic research conducted among various Yoruba and Igbo Christian denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, Seventh Day Baptist Church, Assemblies of God, and many other newer Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches concerning how they perceive Jesus in Luke-Acts. Regardless of the denomination of the respondents, the majority of them see Jesus as the provider of all existential needs, protector and deliverer, and the provider of empowerment to succeed. The response is not different from the Amawodi people of Kwazulu-Natal Province in South Africa during a contextual Bible study of Luke 4:16–22 in 1988. It is also expressed in gospel music lyrics from the Congo (Loba-Mkole 2005:303). The response shows that for Africans, salvation is critical to the work of Jesus. Salvation is not limited to life after death but includes the provision of existential needs. It reflects the general concept of salvation in African primal religion as the provision of food for the hungry, clothes for the naked, shelter for the homeless, health facilities/healing for the sick, and provision of social needs. In other words, the ability to receive/have daily needs supplied is at the centre of salvation. Hence, in Luke-Acts, Christology and soteriology must be seen to function simultaneously (Mbiti 1975; Sarpong 2002; Gyekye 2003; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015; Aryeh and Anum 2021).

The target contemporary culture is generally Africa, specifically the Yoruba and Igbo of Nigeria. According to Loba-Mkole (2007:2005), independent Africa is expected to live above poverty, intimidation, and disease, among others, but the reverse is the situation in Africa. Its leaders are always in a queue to beg for aid from the West. The continent has become synonymous with all things negative and ideological propaganda that does not aid development in the long term. This indicates the self-introduction by the “mediator” or exegete in terms of his cultural positions and what he intends to mediate using Luke 22:69 and Acts 7:56 and church culture.

Mediating between the biblical culture and the church culture for solutions to the problem identified in the target contemporary culture, Loba-Mkole asserted that the understanding of the phrase “Son of man” as Jesus referring to himself as a fellow human being who seeks the welfare of others agrees with the phrase “*mwana wa moto*” (Son of Man/Woman or daughter of man/woman) among Congolese musicians. On a majority scale, the socio-economic conditions of the first-century Mediterranean society largely

prevail in Africa today. Jesus' model of a group-oriented person is necessary to express salvation and total solidarity with the plight of the underprivileged in Africa. Therefore, leaders in Africa must be group-oriented persons who will seek the common good of the underprivileged. They ought to perform the role of the "Son of man" as a fellow African who pursues the common good of fellow Africans, not a judge, tyrant, opportunist, and trojan horse.

In a nutshell, the intercultural interpretation of Luke 22:69 and Acts 7:56 have no doubt contributed to the low Christology of Jesus that depicts him as a fellow human being endowed to seek the mutual good of others. The church culture and the target contemporary culture are closely related because the church culture was based on current ethnographic research among five Christian denominations. Hence, the church culture has no tradition but a common feature among both the Christian denominations and non-Christians. The selection of a church culture based on contemporary ethnographic research among principal Christian denominations makes this work very relevant to contemporary African people. The biblical culture expressed in Luke 22:69 and Acts 7:56 will inspire collegial leadership objectives in Africa.

Ethics of Prayer and Work in 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Loba-Mkole identified similar work and prayer ethics in the biblical culture and church culture to encourage work in the target contemporary culture despite the eschatological expectation. Biblical culture in this study is the principles of prayer and work in Thessalonians; church culture is the works of church fathers, such as John Chrysostom (347–407), and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) concerning prayer and work; and the target contemporary culture is Africa (a multicultural setting) and Asia (Japan).

In the Biblical culture, Loba-Mkole's (2013) main argument is that ceaseless prayer and work is the concept of thanksgiving and exemplarity. He states that "it assumes that giving thanks to God for whichever reason – or just because he is God (Rev. 11:17) – is a form of prayer, whilst a work – that is, a good produced, received, being expected or something declined for a sound reason (cf. Rom. 14:6) – can be the motif of a thanksgiving prayer" in the context of Thessalonians. The instruction of prayer and work was given in the framework of the expectation of the second coming of the Messiah. Thanksgiving, which is prayer and work, run through 1 and 2 Thessalonians as a rhetorical structure. "The letters to the Thessalonians are structured around the thanksgiving motif with a strong flavour of paraenetic rhetoric. These letters present Paul and his companions as models to imitate with regard to constant prayer and work" (Loba-Mkole 2013).

The biblical culture is similar to that of the church culture. Discussing prayer and work in the epistles of Paul, Chrysostom and Aquinas argued that the epistles to the Thessalonians emphasised a conjugal relationship between prayer and work. The Apostle Paul serves as an example of prayer and work when he combined ministry and work for sustenance (Acts 18). It is considered as faith working through love (Loba-Mkole 2013).

In the target culture of contemporary Africa, Loba-Mkole (2013) identifies prayer and work as reflecting almost every facet of life. In other words, spirituality and economic/general well-being mutually co-exist. The problem that exists in Africa concerning work is "just wage, unemployment as well as the protection of the

environment,” and over-reliance on prayer or spirituality (Loba-Mkole 2013). The reverse is true in Japan, due to the issue of Zen masters, which is gradually leading to intense secularity. “The ‘one’ for whom the master worked is the transindividual, whereas the ‘I’ that worked for the transindividual is the ‘individual’” (Loba-Mkole 2013). This philosophy waters down the pursuit of transcendence (God) and empowers eminence. The situation in Africa and Japan may be so because Christians are the majority in Africa while in Japan they are not. The religious situation in a particular target contemporary culture determines the emphasis on either prayer or work.

The intercultural mediation that is needed for the target contemporary culture is the coordination between prayer and work not relying heavily on one to the detriment of the other. This ought to be balanced effectively to demonstrate thanksgiving and exemplarity (Loba-Mkole 2013). A good combination of the two would aid eminence and transcendence to enhance human dignity (Loba-Mkole 2013).

The uniqueness of this work is the encouragement to pray and work, even if the eschaton is expected at any moment. It will be very insightful if applied to a target contemporary culture where eschatological expectations are dominant and have caused believers not to take work seriously – thus a situation that is similar to the background of Thessalonians. Although eschatological expectations are religious candor, the emphasis on prayer/spirituality in Africa and work in Japan is not influenced by eschatological expectations but by a religious inclination to life and how it should be nurtured.

Beyond Just Wages: An Intercultural Analysis of Matthew 20:1–16

In his intercultural exegesis of Matthew 20:1–16, Loba-Mkole (2014:112–134) argues that the main biblical perspective for alleviating poverty, promotion of social justice, and empowerment of the poor/socially disadvantaged persons is not “just wages” but justice. The biblical culture was the Matthean culture of the Gospels (the world behind the text). The church culture was the Roman Catholic Church (the world around the text), and the target contemporary culture in this study was Congo DR and Rwanda (the world in front of the text).

In the biblical culture of Matthew, Loba-Mkole (2014:126) argues that the employer/patron used choice to determine what to pay to the two different groups regardless of the time taken at work, which seems to suggest unfairness. It raises the issue of justice in paying some groups more than others. Loba-Mkole (2014:126) concedes that justice is the cohesion point of the parable/narrative. Hence, the parable was composed to correct injustice in society between employers/patrons and employees/labourers.

In Palestine during the time of Jesus, patrons were high-status, well-situated, and powerful individuals who controlled the first order resources such as land, jobs, goods, funds, and power. To honour their status, they were expected to grant generously some favours to their clients. In the text of Matt. 20:1-20, the patron shows his patronage and generosity by giving to the last hour workers as much wage as that which was given to the first-comers (v. 14). If this was the case, the generosity of this patron is questionable in two ways. Firstly, this generosity does

not apply to every client he had hired, and secondly, the amount of one denarius represented only a mere average of a day's work wage (Loba-Mkole 2014:127).

Unfortunately, the parable deviates from the norm where brokers hire labourers for patrons, which suggests a unique source for the parable. Although there are biblical Jewish parallels to the parable, Loba-Mkole (2014:129) believes that the parable might have been told by Jesus and redacted by the author of the Gospel for a theological impact. This is due to the phenomenon of Jesus condemning the bad character of the affluence and wealthy religious leaders to advocate for the rights of the poor and socially disadvantaged, including labourers. However, labourers were hired on a contract or non-contractual basis. Hence, labourers ought to focus on the contract and work assiduously rather than be envious of their co-labourers (Pak 1997:136).

In the church culture, Loba-Mkole (2014:121) refers to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* that describes what "just wages" can enable a labourer to undertake/accomplish effectively: "to cultivate worthily his own material, social, cultural, and spiritual life and that of his dependants, in view of the function and productiveness of each one, the conditions of the factory or workshop, and the common good." "Just wages" calls for employers to put measures in place that allow the employee's productivity to be utmost, so that "just wages" will promote a sense of community based on what "just wages" can do to others linked to the employee.

Discussing the problem to be tackled in the target contemporary culture, Loba-Mkole (2014) asserts that the economic challenges/poverty in the DRC include about 25% of the population living on US\$ 1.00 per day amidst fatal illness of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis etc. These challenges were expressed in the per capita GDP of DRC being US\$400 in 2006 and Rwanda at US\$1400 in 2011. "A striking cultural difference between the DRC and Rwanda is the fact that managers of the former imagine that their citizens can work without regular and just wages while the latter strives to progress in the opposite direction" (Loba-Mkole 2014:120). The issue of "just wages" is not achievable if fundamental issues in these countries, such as political mismanagement/instability, social disorientation, extreme poverty, and bad governance are not prioritised through justice.

Loba-Mkole (2014:130) opines that "giving just wages or increasing salaries would not eradicate poverty where justice and discipline are lacking. The parable of Matt 20:1-16 does not prescribe just wages as the remedy for alleviating poverty; it rather provides grounds for promoting justice which goes beyond just wages." The generosity of an employer/patron, unemployment, and underpayment should not be seen as the only causes of poverty, as poverty is mainly caused by injustice (Loba-Mkole 2014:130).

Most populous interpretations of Matthew 20:1-16 emphasise the responsibility of the labourers to deliver at the utmost. Loba-Mkole is among the few who delineate justice for the labourers. It contributes to work ethics and justice. However, a selection of a target contemporary culture and audience that are Catholic faithful will show whether there is a departure of the stipulation in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* or not and will analyse whether the reasons assigned are based on the biblical culture or changes in the target contemporary culture.

Interculturality in Peace-Building and Mutual Edification (Rom. 14:19)

The focus of Loba-Mkole is set forth to show a critical relationship between peace-building and mutual edification in Romans 14:19. The biblical culture is the Pauline corpus, the church culture is the church fathers (the interpretation of the text by Saint Gennadius of Constantinople, 458–771 CE; Clement of Alexandria, 150–215 CE; Saint John Chrysostom, 347–407 CE; and Saint Augustine, 354–430), and the target contemporary culture is the DRC (Loba-Mkole 2019).

In the biblical culture, Loba-Mkole shows appreciation for the three variant readings based on *διώκω* which fit into ethical exhortation. He adds that there are eight (8) rhetorical flows of Paul's argument, which start in Romans 14:13–23, where verse 19 emphasises the code of conduct. The concept of *διώκω* and the code of conduct culminate in peace building, which starts at the table fellowship (Loba-Mkole 2019).

The church culture of the church fathers considers peace as the climax of the argument of Paul in the pericope. One is expected to be peaceable towards their neighbours, without which there will not be edification. Hence, any action or inaction that does not promote peace must be avoided. Each Christian is encouraged to cultivate righteousness, peace, mutual edification, sinlessness, and joy (Loba-Mkole 2019).

In the target contemporary culture, Romans 14:19 was selected in 2002 by the Association of Episcopal Conference of DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi (ACEAC) as a pastoral approach to call for peace and the cessation of wars in the region. It empowered the clergy within the region to talk against the abuse of human dignity and rights, fueling violence, ethnic hatred, bad governance, and other such issues.

They urged politicians of the three countries to work hard to restore the state of rights, the judges to reject corruption and render equitable justice for all, the armed forces to ensure security, the youth to reject whatsoever that leads to war, social workers to promote fellowship among the people, the business men and women to improve the standard of living of the people and the international community to plan an international conference with the states of the Great Lakes sub-region (Loba-Mkole 2019).

The approach in this study by Loba-Mkole was diagnostic. The text was engaged to stop war and promote peace from a pastoral perspective. It is intended to ascertain the success or otherwise of the use of Romans 14:19 by ACEAC to proclaim peace in the war zones of DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi. According to Loba-Mkole (2019), the engagement of Romans 14:19 to end wars was successful, and if Christians in the target contemporary culture were to hide from Romans 14:19, they would not give attention to wars that would necessitate the pastoral use of the text. In addition, "..., peace cannot be kept by armed forces, it is the opposite of armed conflicts. A practical way towards sustainable peace entails putting up reconciliation strategies that integrate things of mutual edification (love, reign of God, service to Christ, righteousness and sinlessness)" (Loba-Mkole 2019).

Salt and Peace. Intercultural Ecojustice Hermeneutics of Mk 9:50

Loba-Mkole (2020:88–116) uses the concept of salt in Mark 9:50 to resolve conflict and consolidate peace in the DRC. The biblical culture is Mark 9:50, the church culture is

the Roman Catholic Church, and the target contemporary culture is Ituri. The phrase “intercultural ecojustice hermeneutics” was coined by Loba-Mkole (2020:88) to allow “for constructive and ecologically minded dialogue between a target culture, a Church culture and an original biblical culture.”

Interpreting Mark 9:50 for the biblical culture, Loba-Mkole (2020:96) argues that the immediate context/setting of Mark 9:50 is the introduction of Jesus and his disciples in Capernaum (Mk. 9:33). The Greek sentence *echete en eavtis ala ke irinevete en alillis* (Mk 9.50c) should be translated and understood: “continue having salt among yourselves and keep making peace with one another” (Loba-Mkole 2020:103). Loba-Mkole (2020:103) explains thus:

Strictly speaking, the prosaic peace saying in 9:50c can stand on its own as an independent clause, which has three words: one verb (*irinevete*, continue making peace), one preposition (*en*, in, with, among) and one complement (*alillis*, with one another). Even if the clause “make peace with one another” is autonomous, it is strongly connected with the preceding independent and figurative clause (*echete en eavtis ala*, continue having salt among yourselves) at least in two ways: first by the conjunction *ke* (and, then) and secondly by the parallel construction of which it serves as a second member.

These catch-terms form the main building blocks of Mark 9:50, which is a continuous phenomenon. Hence, salt was metaphorically used to denote the word of God and peace which is open-ended, where salt refers to the sacrificial nature of discipleship and peace represents the wisdom of Jesus. Salt also has an ecological value of preservation, protecting against corruption (Loba-Mkole 2020:108).

The church culture, the Roman Catholic Church, sees peace as the fruit of justice and love on earth. By extension and implication, ‘...peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good.’ This was elaborated in a six-point presentation by Mgr. Dieudonné Uringi, Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Bunia in December 2015 (Loba-Mkole 2020:101). It depicts that peace among humans and between humans and nature is a critical ethos in the Roman Catholic Church culture.

In the target contemporary culture, Loba-Mkole (2020:97) states that

Ituri is one of the most war-torn provinces of Eastern Congo where the Walendu Bindi County and others have been in armed and multifaceted hostilities. The Walendu Bindi County has endured the consequences of what is called the Ituri war for the last 20 years, from 1999 to 2019, when FPRI (Patriotic Resistance Front in Ituri) agreed to hand over their arms to join the national army since May 2019.

Ituri is bedevilled with conflicts and war and needs peace. The ethnic conflict in Ituri was caused by the occupation of Lendu territories by the Hema in an attempt to expand. It was believed that the expansionist agenda of the Hema was supported by some persons who are politically connected for economic reasons. “The root causes of Ituri war are to be addressed from these three frames of reference and peacebuilding attitudes of ecojustice are to be promoted in the constant pursuit of freedom from worries” (Loba-Mkole 2020:114). Loba-Mkole (2020) recommends that an intercultural ecojustice

hermeneutic of Mark 9:50 together with the Roman Catholic Church culture of peace will help resolve the ethnic conflict of Ituri.

Discussion

Loba-Mkole's intercultural biblical exegesis is composed mainly of biblical culture, church culture, and the target contemporary culture. From the beginning, it can be argued that among the three cultures, biblical culture and target contemporary culture are the most critical in intercultural biblical exegesis. It makes the target contemporary culture an object of interpretation and makes the Bible relevant for today. As such, the Bible becomes a key document for the nurture of life and social norms in the target contemporary culture/society. Due to dynamics in the target contemporary culture, intercultural biblical exegesis can be approached from varied perspectives deemed fit by the mediator/exegete in the quest to cause a desirable change that ensures justice, equality, and freedom to all in society.

Intercultural biblical exegesis seeks to emphasize continuous and dynamic interpretation of the Bible based on changing cultural norms. Changing times and current situations in target contemporary culture influence the result of biblical interpretation in a particular context without neglecting conventional principles/modes of biblical hermeneutics/exegesis where literary, historical, and redaction backgrounds are key elements (Strauss 2011). The parallel discussion of issues in the biblical culture, church culture, and target contemporary culture demonstrates that all related issues are brought to the interpretation spiral. Allowing all these variables to communicate without neglecting their cultural settings helps to have a culturally sensitive interpretation that will easily communicate with the target contemporary culture (Brown 2007; Croy 2011).

The intercultural exegetical works of Loba-Mkole principally contributed to the quest for peace and socio-economic development in Africa generally, and the DRC in particular. This demonstrates that the study of other contemporary languages should not be limited to students offering missions or intercultural missiology. It calls for a re-design of the biblical studies curriculum in Africa to include local languages so that the student will be well equipped to undertake intercultural biblical exegesis (Aryeh 2017:182–210). Nonetheless, this is a herculean task in view of the myriads of languages in Africa, and it must still be seen whether there are lecturers available to teach them. If the Bible is to remain relevant in Africa, as a principle of Levinas where for Jews the Bible has to be engaged with the biblical Jewish Talmud and other rabbinic documents (Aronowicz 2003:33–48), it can be argued in the same vein that for Africa, the Bible should be engaged with reference to its culture without neglecting church traditions/cultures.

The Interface between Intercultural Mediation and Other Models of Cultural Interpretation

It will be the summit of naïvety not to examine the interface between intercultural mediation by Loba-Mkole and other models of intercultural biblical interpretation or interpretation models that have cultural ramifications. The cultural mediation is critically hinged on biblical culture, church culture/tradition, and contemporary culture of a biblical text to make the text relevant to Africans. This objective partially reflects models of biblical interpretation in Africa with some points of divergence and agreement.

Liberation hermeneutics was propounded to combat apartheid and the use of the Bible by colonial masters to subjugate Africans. Liberation hermeneutics emphasises the economic and political liberation of Africans relating to “race and class”; without neglecting religio-cultural elements in biblical and contemporary culture (West 2010: 1995). Liberation hermeneutics did not include church culture/tradition as part of the interpretative spiral because it may consider the church culture/tradition as a dogma that led to the interpretation of scripture to subjugate Africans. In other words, the church culture/tradition blurred the interpretive optics of the interpreter to do justice to the biblical text. Liberation hermeneutics does not consider any dialogue with church culture/tradition. This is where intercultural mediation and liberation hermeneutics part ways, but both models agree that biblical culture and contemporary African culture must dialogue in the pot of biblical interpretation. That notwithstanding, Cone (2011) has argued that liberation hermeneutics ought to critically include spirituality to make it more comprehensive. It is not clear whether the church culture/tradition of Loba-Mkole deals with spirituality. The leaving out of church culture/tradition supports Mburu’s (2019) assertion that needs to be a local community exercise rather than a global church culture/tradition.

Postcolonial biblical interpretation is closely related to liberation hermeneutics. Postcolonial hermeneutics examines the methodologies through which ordinary Africans are to engage with a biblical text that has historically functioned as an instrument of colonisation. To effectuate decolonisation of the biblical narrative, it is imperative that such texts are interpreted in opposition to imperialistic influences, including, but not limited to, considerations of geography, universalising tendencies, and modes of suppression (Dube 2000). It relates to Mother Tongue biblical hermeneutics principles that encourage local communities’ interpretation through the use of native languages to make the biblical document resonate with their culture (Ekem 2015). The tenets of postcolonial biblical interpretation and Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics do not make space for church culture/tradition probably because church culture/tradition has not served Africans well enough. Church culture/traditions that are imported to Africa have often been perceived as colonial agents in the past and continue to be seen as such even today. Consequently, Loba-Mkole has the herculean task of comprehensively explaining the conceptual understanding of church culture/tradition to make intercultural mediation more welcoming to Africans.

Conclusion

Cultural criticism of the Bible is not a new phenomenon. The contribution of Loba-Mkole to the task of intercultural biblical exegesis is the procedure that merges biblical culture, church tradition/culture, and target contemporary culture into one interpretive conversation for mediation to solve or diagnose existential problems. Intercultural biblical exegesis is not limited to being used in the African context. Although many Africans have contributed and applied it to African situations, the principles underlining its proposition show that it can be applied to other contexts. The inclusion of church culture in intercultural biblical exegesis is the key contribution of Loba-Mkole to cultural criticism of the Bible. It helps to either build on or depart from tradition with tangible justifications. Loba-Mkole has demonstrated through intercultural biblical exegesis that culturally-centred interpretation of the Bible is appropriate for solving the myriad

problems facing Africa today. However, church culture/tradition needs further clarification so as not to serve as a subjugating element to Africans.

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