



RE-READING THE TRANSLATION OF LUKE 16:3 IN THE ASANTE-TWI BIBLE

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ABSTRACT

Translation is said to be one of the most difficult exercises in scholarship; Bible translation no exception. Bible translation started at the time of Ezra. In contemporary scholarship, there is the question of how the original language could be appropriately rendered in a receptor language to get the intended meaning of the writer. This study examines the interpretation of the Greek word *ἐπατεῖν* (*epaitein*) rendered as *ahwa* in the Asante-Twi Bible. Using Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics approach and exegesis, the study has found out that the translation of *epaitein* as *ahwa* in Luke 16:3 in the Asante-Twi should rather be *asre*. The study has added to the interpretations of Luke 16:3 in Asante-Twi. It is being recommended that in the future revision of the Asante-Twi Bible, the Bible Society of Ghana should consider using *asre* in the translation of *epaitein* (*ἐπατεῖν*).

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is important to most African Christians² and it is said to be inseparably linked to the Christian faith in Africa.³ However, because of the Eurocentric Biblical scholars, some African theologians have argued for the interpretation of the Bible in contemporary African cultural hermeneutics to break the hermeneutical hegemony and Eurocentric ideology⁴ of the Bible. In New Testament studies, some approaches and thoughts have been questioned and criticized as being westernized theology⁵. Due to different worlds, culture and worldviews of Africans, there has been a clash in some approaches used in the interpretation of the Bible.⁶

Reading the Bible within the African context⁷ is growing rapidly among some African contemporary theologians. Though the Bible exists within a specific culture,⁸ it should not undermine the culture of the present readers. The contemporary theological community of the African is developing its own identity⁹ as a result of the emergence of African independent scholarship¹⁰ which does not build and focus on Eurocentric ideas and philosophies in their approaches to Biblical studies.

Bible Translation

Translation has been widely used among scholars in transferring their intentions to their audience¹¹ and this requires the researcher to bring to light his ideas and motives to his readers. There are no two identical languages which have sameness in meaning and understanding¹² and that which communicate the same words in the other language when translated or interpreted.¹³ Kuwornu-Adjaottor adds that the key elements

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² J. G. Van der Watt, "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," (2007) 659.

³ Van der Watt, "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," 659.

⁴ Van der Watt, "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," 659.

⁵ Van der Watt, "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," 659.

⁶ Van der Watt, "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," 660.

⁷ Van der Watt, "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," 660.

⁸ Van der Watt, "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," 660.

⁹ Van der Watt J. G. "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," (2007) 660.

¹⁰ Van der Watt J. G. "Reading the Bible in cross-cultural (South) African context," (2007) 660.

¹¹ R. Freeman, "What is 'Translation'?" Evidence and Policy, 5(4): (2009), 1

¹² J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor & Samuel Kodom, A Study of *ὄχλος* in Matthew 5:1 Implication for Asante- Twi Bible Readers, *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, 1(2) June (2019): 2

¹³ J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor & Kodom, A Study of *ὄχλος* in Matthew 5:1 Implication for Asante- Twi Bible Readers, 2

of Biblical interpretation in general include the biblical text, the cultural context, and the act of appropriation through which they are linked; and the interaction between them must be clearly defined.¹⁴ In a consideration of the African academy as in many parts of the world, the setting is incredibly diverse and affected by numerous components.¹⁵

According to Meenan “if we are to define biblical hermeneutics as ‘methods of interpretation’ in the sense of devising ‘rules’ for a viable understanding of the Biblical text, there appears to be scant regard for a sound methodological approach in general.”¹⁶ The term seems to suggest a much broader sense of understanding as to the fundamental philosophical and theological assumptions ‘behind’ different methods of interpretation. Taking such an approach to the discipline, it becomes possible to discern the complex elements that make up the African consciousness. The Biblical text ever remains the one constant factor in the discipline of interpretation.¹⁷ Yet the text does not exist in a vacuum, it speaks to a audience within a specific cultural context, Speckman opines that the readers perspective should not be ignored because it will deny the influence of the reader's baggage on the text¹⁸

Admittedly, the definition given above is rather restrictive in its demands. Brian Blount asserts that such a restrictive perspective finds its grounding in the “scientifically” correct and the “normative method of Biblical interpretation because of its foundation in historical-critical and literary models” which represents itself as the only accurate measure of biblical interpretation. As Daniel Patte has observed, the scientific paradigm demands that interpretation be adduced based upon textual evidence and set standard values. Given the aforementioned, groups living outside that value system are expected to appropriate the interpretative norms that the “Academy and the guild of Biblical scholars” have established. If anyone wants to interpret biblical texts “correctly and faithfully”, one must adjust accordingly to the values and perspective of the guild. Besides, New Testament scholarship has traditionally, as Blount observes, maintained that “the thematic structure and content of the New Testament materials discourage social and political interpretation”. As a result, the focus of the New Testament scholarship continues to target the believer's individual, spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ, which is considered a textual theme considered key. To this perspective, Musa Dube adds two important points. First, most biblical criticism and scholars tend to enter and flow with the divine story world that biblical writers construct veiling the quest for worldly power and glory. Second, Dube argues, such scholarship consigns biblical texts to “the past, reading them as if they belonged only to ancient times and as if they did not continue to affect international relations through the power relations they advocate”. Postcolonial analysis has added an important perspective in the changing attitudes of reference where the “otherness of others” is recognized and respected. As a theory, it takes seriously the understanding that biblical texts can actively shape and transform the perceptions, understanding, and actions of readers and the reading community. Since postcolonialism is interested in the primacy of language in the development of systems of linguistic prescriptions, it is committed to analyzing both biblical and human language to recover an inner perspective, particularly, voices that have been deemed not worthy of social

¹⁴ J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Patronage and usage of the mother-tongue Bibles in Kumasi, Ghana. *Prime Journal of Social Sciences* 2 (7):121-129.

¹⁵ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Patronage and usage of the mother-tongue Bibles in Kumasi, Ghana.

¹⁶ A. J. Meenan, Biblical Hermeneutics in an African Context, *The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies*, 273

¹⁷ Meenan, Biblical Hermeneutics in an African Context, 273

¹⁸ M. Speckman, African Biblical Hermeneutics on the Threshold? Appraisal And way forward, *Acta Theologica* 2016, 4

consideration. The recovery helps affirm the worthiness of the marginalized voices while refusing to impose alienating ways of thinking on those who are disfranchised. Postcolonial analysis in biblical studies aims at exposing and dislodging colonial attitudes. It also aims at decolonization. The approach sees biblical hermeneutics and decolonization not as separate entities but as processes in a dialectical relationship with each other.¹⁹

METHODOLOGY

Mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach²⁰ is a methodology that reduces the source language (SL) into a receptor language (SL);²¹ thus making the text meaningful to mother-tongue of the readers.²² It analyses a biblical text in both the cultures and worldview of the original readers contemporary mother-tongue readers. It involves the usage of a step-by-step procedure in the analysis, adoption and adaptation of words and phrases in biblical texts to appropriate the word of God for indigenous Bible reading communities.

EXEGESIS OF THE TEXT

Luke 16:3 εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὁ οἰκονόμος Τί ποιήσω, ὅτι ὁ κύριός μου ἀφαιρεῖται τὴν οἰκονομίαν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ; σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω, ἐπαιτεῖν αἰσχύνομαι.²³

Transliteration

Eipen de en eautoo ho oikonomos; ti poieesoo, hoti ho kurios mou aphaireitai teen oikonomiav ap emou? Skaptein ouk oschuoo, epaitain aischunomai.

The Text in Asante-Twi

Na efiepanin no kaa no ne tirim se: Menyɛ den? efiri se me wura rebegye me paninnie afiri me nsam. Menni ahooɔden a mede metutuo, ahwa nso ye me aniwu.

The wider context

The parable of the unjust steward raises exegetical difficulties due to questions some scholars have raised about it; the question of a dishonest steward and its relationship to the followers of Christ.²⁴ According to Mathewson, the parable has been understood as portraying a steward who cheats his master and later commended for his action in a wise way, a quality to be imitated by Christ's disciples in their use of material possessions in light of the coming eschatological kingdom.²⁵ The master calls the steward into account and the steward tries to manipulate those owing his master to get something to live on.

The immediate context

The steward realizes that, if his master takes his position from him as a steward, life will be hard for him because for a person who has lived so well and now left to beg will be a shame to him and the people around him as well. Begging in the Jewish communities was done mostly by the outcast and some foreigners who had no work. He became dismayed after realizing that he could lose his job so he began thinking of how he

¹⁹ Johnson Kinyua, A Postcolonial Examination of Matthew 16:13–23 and Related Issues in Biblical Hermeneutics, *Black Theology*, 11 (1): (2013) 3

²⁰ J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, “African Biblical Studies: Mother-tongue Biblical Hermeneutics Methodology,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 1(2), 2015:1-24

²¹ E. A. Nida, The paradoxes of translation, *The Bible Translator*, 42(2a), (1991):5.

²² J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, “African Biblical Studies: Mother-tongue Biblical Hermeneutics Methodology,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 1(2), 2015:1-24

²³ Bible works 6

²⁴ D. L. Mathewson, The parable of the unjust steward (luke 16:1-13): A reexamination of the traditional view in light of recent challenges *JETS* 38/1 (March 1995) 1

²⁵ Mathewson, The parable of the unjust steward (luke 16:1-13): A reexamination of the traditional view in light of recent challenges, 1

will live when he loses his job. This compels him to think about the beggars and he foresaw the shamefulness in begging.

MORPHOLOGY AND SYNTACTICAL ANALYSIS OF LUKE 16:3

GREEK WORD	MEANING	FUNCTION
Εἶπεν <u>eipen</u>	To say, speak	Verb indicative aorist third person singular
δὲ <u>de</u>	But, and, then	Conjunction coordinating
ἐν <u>en</u>	In, within	Preposition dative
ἑαυτῷ <u>heautō</u>	Of himself	Pronoun reflexive dative masculine singular
ὁ <u>ho</u>	The	Definite article nouns masculine singular
οἰκονόμος <u>oikonomos</u>	A steward	Noun nominative masculine singular common
Τί <u>Ti</u>	Who, which, what, why	Pronoun interrogative accusative neuter singular
ποιήσω, <u>poiēsō</u>	To do, make	Verb subjective aorist active first person singular
ὅτι <u>hoti</u>	That, because, since	Conjunction subordinating
ὁ <u>ho</u>	The	Definite article nominative masculine singular
κύριός <u>kyrios</u>	Lord	Noun nominative masculine singular common
μου <u>mou</u>	I, me	Pronoun personal genitive singular
ἀφαιρεῖται <u>aphaireitai</u>	To take away	Verb indicative present middle third person singular
τὴν <u>tēn</u>	The	Definite article accusative feminine singular
οἰκονομίαν <u>oikonomian</u>	Stewardship	Noun accusative feminine singular common
ἀπ’ <u>ap’</u>	From	Preposition genitive
ἐμοῦ; <u>emou</u>	Me?	Pronoun personal genitive singular
σκάπτειν <u>skaptein</u>	To dig	Verb infinitive present active

οὐκ <u>ouk</u>	Not, no	Adverb
ἰσχύω, <u>ischyō</u>	To be strong, able	Verb indicative present active first person singular
ἐπατεῖν <u>epaitein</u>	To beg	Verb infinitive present active
αἰσχύνομαι. <u>aischynomai</u>	To dishonor, to put to shame	Verb indicative present middle first person singular ²⁶

REFLECTION ON THE TEXT

Then the steward said within himself:

What shall I do? He does not say, what will become of me? I am done, and what shall I do to be saved? or what shall I do for my Lord and Master I have so much injured? or what shall I do to make up matters with him? or what account shall I give? what shall I do for maintenance? how shall I live? what shall I do to please men, and gain their opinion and goodwill, and so be provided for by them? of this cast were the Pharisees, men-pleasers, and self-seekers.²⁷

For my Lord taketh away from me the stewardship: the priesthood was changed, and there was a change also of the law; the ceremonial law was abrogated, and the ordinances of the former dispensation were shaken and removed; so that these men must, of course, turn out of their places and offices.²⁸

I cannot dig; or "plow", as the Arabic version renders it; or do any part of husbandry, particularly that which lies in manuring and cultivating the earth; not but that he was able to do it; but he could not tell how to submit to such a mean, as well as laborious way of life; for nothing was meaner among the Jews than husbandry: they have a saying, that (eqrqh Nm htwxp twnmwa Kl Nya), "you have no trade", or business, "lesser", or meaner "than husbandry"²⁹

And to beg I am ashamed; for nothing could be more disagreeable, to one who had lived so well in his master's house, and in so much fullness and luxury, as the Scribes and Pharisees did.

``want of necessaries, (wtlavm bwj), "is better than begging": (and says one) I have tasted the bitterness of all things, and I have not found anything more bitter "than begging."³⁰

This is literally true of the Jews, after the destruction of Jerusalem; when multitudes of them were condemned to work in the mines; and vast numbers were scattered about everywhere as vagabonds, begging their bread; though both phrases may be mystically understood: and "digging" may intend a laborious searching into the Scriptures, and a diligent performance of good works: neither of which the Pharisees much cared for, though they made large pretensions to both; nor did they dig deep to lay a good foundation whereon to build eternal life and happiness: nor could they attain to the law of righteousness by all their toil and labour, they would be thought to have taken: and for "begging", they were above that: read the Pharisee's prayer in (Luke 18:11 Luke 18:12) and you will not find one petition in it. To ask anything at the throne of grace, in a way of mere grace and favor, and not merit: or to beg anything at the hands of Christ, as life, righteousness, pardon, cleansing, healing, the food they were ashamed of and cared not for.³¹

²⁶ Bible works 6, APK-Scripture direct

²⁷ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/luke-16-3.html> Browse: Accessed July 28, 2019

²⁸ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/luke-16-3.html> Browse: Accessed July 28, 2019

²⁹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/luke-16-3.html> Browse: Accessed July 28, 2019

³⁰ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/luke-16-3.html> Browse: Accessed July 28, 2019

³¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/luke-16-3.html> Browse: Accessed July 28, 2019

IMPLICATION OF AHWA IN ASANTE-TWI CONTEXT

To beg has been translated in the Asante-Twi Bible as *ahwa* which connotes that, a person who begs 'roughly'. In the context of the Asante culture, if someone is being referred as *ahwa* it means that the person habitually uses gestures (mostly) to ask for mercy from people and that this person does it shamefully. There is an adage in Twi which says, 'wɔ de nani gye adee' (he uses his eye to take something). In most cases, the person will not necessarily beg but will stare at whoever he seeks favor from thus indicating his intention of receiving from that person without asking (begging).

THE ACTUAL MEANING OF THE GREEK WORD EPAITEIN (επαίτειν)

The verb used is an infinitive present active which recalls that, the text talks about what would happen to the steward or what would be left of him if his master denounced him. The verb used in Greek means to ask for charity³². There are a lot of stories in the Bible where people, mostly the poor and the sick asked for charity. Matthew 10:46 talks about a blind man who sat by the road and asked for charity (Luke 18:35). Jesus also asked his followers to give to those who beg (Matt. 5:42). In the context of the parable, this kind of begging is what the Steward referred to when he thought about what will be left of him for him to get his daily bread, thus bringing him into shame since he had previously enjoyed great wealth.

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

The word *epaitein* as translated in the Asante-Twi Bible as *ahwa* did not get its appropriate rendition since the text talks about the steward's dissatisfaction if his master chooses to remove him from his position. The steward was making an inference to those beggars by the road who beg to earn a living. Moreover, the Asante-Twi cannot use the word *ahwa* to mean the verb 'to beg' in this context since it is about charity.

CONCLUSION

In the narration is about the the parable of the wicked steward (Luke 16:3). This paper thus submits that the translation of *epaitein* "to beg" in the Asante-Twi Bible did not do justice to all that the Greek word intended. And the word makes it more offensive in the Asante-Twi context. The word should be *asre* instead of *ahwa* and therefore the text... *ahwa nso ye me aniwu* should be *asre nso ye me aniwu*. The finding has added to the translation and interpretation of Luke 16:3 in the Asante-Twi mother-tongue. It is recommended that in the future revision of the Asante-Twi Bible, the Bible Society of Ghana should consider using the finding of this research.

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