

Mother-Tongue Theological Hermeneutics: In Search of Relevant Glocal Interpretation of Scripture

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ABSTRACT

In the attempt to creatively bring the complex multi-religious (Judeo-Christian) scripture to bear on both the contemporary global and local Christian communities, a formulation of a relevant hermeneutical method becomes imperative. The reason is that in a globalised world, there is a tendency for a dominant culture to designate the interpretative approach that comes from a minor culture as only “contextually” relevant. The question that comes to mind is: *Could there be an academic reflection in the interpretative process that is faithful to both the global and local contexts?* This paper demonstrates the quest for such a relevant hermeneutical approach that could also be used to re-read biblical texts by introducing mother-tongue theological hermeneutics. This approach, understood and utilized, would therefore serve as a hermeneutical approach that bridges the gap between *global* and *local* perspectives on a biblical text.

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INTRODUCTION

The search for a relevant hermeneutical approach that brings the complex multi-religious (Judeo-Christian) scripture to bear on both the contemporary global and local Christian communities has been a major concern within recent hermeneutical scholarship. In view of the fact that in a globalized world, there is a tendency that a dominant culture designates the interpretative approach that comes from a minor culture as only “contextually” relevant, the quest for the hermeneutical approach that is both relevant to both local and global contexts becomes imperative.

The use of hermeneutics in this paper refers to the theoretical practice that reflects on the question of how the interpretation processes of texts occur.¹ According to Hans de Wit, the term *hermeneutics* describes the “scholarly reflection on the question of how it is possible to explain (old) text (exegesis in its sense of unfolding the web of significances) and understanding them

¹ Hans De Wit, *Empirical Hermeneutics, Interculturality and Holy Scripture* (Amsterdam: VU University, 2012), 17; John Kwasi Fosu, *Experiences of Pneumatic Phenomena in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity as Appropriations of 1. Cor 12 –14: A Critical Analysis* (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2019), 226.

(appropriation).”² It has to do with the academic reflection on how the interpretation processes work.³ In the argument of de Wit, if the use of the term “interpretation process” is intended to indicate that more is at stake in reading and understanding the Bible than simply an academic interpretation, there is no reason why hermeneutics should not look at the processes involved in interpreting texts locally. Thus, in hermeneutics, exegesis then becomes one phase in a more comprehensive process, in which interpreting the text in the local context and the praxes of contemporary readers play a role.⁴ Methodologically, this paper follows the approach of library research and thus a review of relevant literature particularly relating to hermeneutics. It aims at contributing to the quest for an academic reflection in the interpretative process that is faithful to both the global and local contexts. Whilst admitting that the meaning of scripture is first and foremost dependent on the context of the reader (local), the universal and thus the potential meaning of a text to global contexts come to light when a multiplicity of readers in the post-modern and globalised world engages the scriptures through open discussions and creative dialogue among themselves. In this light, the global and universal meaning of a text is established when interpreters read through the eyes of the other. Among others, this perspective restrains a particular reader/interpreter coming from either minor or dominant culture from designating an interpretation only as contextual.

This paper thus demonstrates the quest for such a relevant hermeneutical approach that could also be used to re-read biblical texts. The procedure adopted for this methodological descriptive paper includes: establishing a conceptual background of the approach, elaborating on mother-tongue hermeneutics, presenting an outline of the methodological procedure, and the uniqueness of the mother-tongue theological hermeneutics in relation to other approaches.

Conceptual Background: Mother -Tongue, Theological Hermeneutics and Glocal

This section discusses the constituent terms which are *mother-tongue* and *theological hermeneutics*. It includes the meaning of the ecclesiological term *glocal* which is chosen to serve as the general hermeneutical perspective.

What is the Mother-Tongue?

From a linguistic perspective, the mother tongue of a person is that person’s native language, the language that one is born into, as it were and grows up with. It is a person’s first language as compared to other languages one might learn later in life. It is not the same as vernacular, the common language of a region or group, no matter how naturally such language and its usage may come.⁵ Kwame Bediako perhaps identifies a theological meaning of the mother tongue in his observation that it is the language in which God speaks to mankind. God does not speak “in a sacred language, but in ordinary language,” so that humans may hear God and realise the gospel is about mankind who have been invited to join a company drawn from every people, tribe, nation and language.⁶

² Hans de Wit, “Exegesis and Contextuality: Happy Marriage, Divorce or Living (Apart) Together?” in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning*, ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 5.

³ The use of the term “interpretation process” indicates that more is at stake in reading and understanding the Bible than simply an academic interpretation.

⁴ De Wit sees exegesis as a way of talking with texts which entails a “systematic and analytical dialogue with the text, diachronically or synchronically, focussing on its grammar and syntax, the meanings it may have in its original context(s), its references to its historical background (s), its more literary aspects, its history of reception, - in short: the exploration of whatever elements of meaning and language texts are made up of.” See de Wit, “Exegesis and Contextuality,” 4.

⁵ B.Y. Quarshie, “Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context: The Challenge of Mother-tongue Scriptures,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5, no 1 (2002): 7.

⁶ Kwame Bediako, “The Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4, no. 1 (June 2001): 2-11.

The Meaning and Nature of Theological Hermeneutics

Theological hermeneutics means interpreting any kind of text (especially biblical text) from a theological perspective.⁷ It describes the diverse attempts to read the Bible theologically in recent times.⁸ In relation to the New Testament, Ulrich Luz identifies five *Besonderheiten* (essential nature) of theological hermeneutics.⁹ In the first place, following Schleiermacher, Luz regards the meaning of the New Testament canon and relatedly, the entire biblical canon as the co-text of every biblical passage. Second, theological hermeneutics is connected to the church.¹⁰ Here, Luz sees the church as “*eine Interpretationsgemeinschaft, für welche die Bibel ein Schlüsseltext ist*” (an interpretative community for which the Bible serves as the key text). The third feature of theological hermeneutics is that it pays attention to the hermeneutical traditions of the church as well as their important experience of the Bible.¹¹ The fourth mark of theological Hermeneutics is its dialogue character. To Luz, “*Kirche ist nur Kirche im Dialog mit der Welt und mit anderen religiösen Gemeinschaften.*”¹² As the name *theological hermeneutics* implies, as its fifth feature, Luz regards biblical texts as “*sprechen von Gott.*”¹³ Luz’s last nature appears to correspond to the dogmatic notion of regarding the Bible to be the sole authority of the Christian faith. This perspective has been questioned in contemporary times. Kwok Pui-lan, for instance, has critiqued this notion based on the historic use of the Bible particularly for legitimizing hegemonic phenomena and its use as a norm to judge other cultures.¹⁴ Proposing an alternative perspective, Pui-lan suggests that the Bible should be regarded as a *sprechendes Buch* (communicative/talking book)¹⁵ that is open for discussion and dialogue in the light of the readers’ own situation.¹⁶ The Bible, therefore, relies on the community of faith in bringing it to life. While it is legitimate to see Pui-lan’s proposal of regarding a biblical text as a *sprechendes Buch* as idealistic and thus as a constructive attempt especially within biblical scholarship and in the hermeneutical enterprise, the fact that the majority of Christians, especially the church globally consider the Bible to be their authority in matters of faith cannot be underestimated.

Glocal as a Hermeneutical Key

From a methodological perspective, the concept of *glocal* is selected as an interpretative key based on the presupposition that the *Church* serves as a habitat for theological hermeneutics. The term *glocal* has recently been coined and used as an ecclesiological concept to portray the dual nature of the church

⁷ Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Developments and Significance* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 8.

⁸ To Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), to interpret Scripture is to encounter God. See also, Stephen Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

⁹ Ulrich Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik des Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Neukirchener Theologie, 2014), 26-27.

¹⁰ Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik*, 26 from this perspective understands the church to be the Christian community and not a particular denomination or the ecumenical church.

¹¹ Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik*, 27 refers to the tradition of the Church Fathers and the reformers. The latter include those who were regarded as *dissenter* and *Häretiker*.

¹² Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik*, 27.

¹³ Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik*, 27 draws his first, fourth and last features from Gerd Theißen’s *Exegese und Theologie*.

¹⁴ Kwok Pui-lan, *Interpretation als Dialog: Eine biblische Hermeneutik aus Asien* (Luzern: Edition Exodus, 1996), 88. To Pui-lan, not only has the Bible been used to legitimize racism and ethnocentrism, in itself the Bible contains oppressing elements for women.

¹⁵ In her critique of the Bible as the *Word of God*, Pui-lan identifies the problematic nature of this view in that it regards the Bible as a monologue requiring only obedience on the part of the reader.

¹⁶ Pui-lan, *Interpretation als Dialogue*, 92 gives five reasons to substantiate this perspective: First, this view attempts to reject the dogmatic perspective that regards the Bible as the authoritative “word of God” for the faith community. Second, regarding the Bible as a *sprechend Buch* highlights the importance of oral tradition of scriptures in the Asian context. Third, this view sees the Bible as dynamic and relevant in diverse discussions. Fourth, designating the Bible as *sprechend Buch* invites us to hear diverse voices from the margins. As a fifth reason, viewing the Bible as a *sprechendes Buch* recognises that truth is not closed and sealed from the ancient times and pushed on today’s context. Instead, truth comes to light through open discussions and creative dialogue. To Pui-lan, history is not only to be shown and researched but most importantly it is meant to be remembered and thus to lead us in today’s context.

as being global and local at the same time.¹⁷ In the words of Jan-Martin Berentsen, “it might have been coined already on the basis of New Testament ecclesiology itself without the midwifery of today’s globalisation” in that “the New Testament portrays the church in a dual way, “sometimes as the universal body of Christ, sometimes as a certain gathering of believers in Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi or Jerusalem.” In this sense, the church from the New Testament perspective is both universal and local at the same time. The universal church appears in local manifestations. Since hermeneutics as a theological enterprise functions partly to serve the church, it is then legitimate to argue that a hermeneutical task could be used in a *glocal* sense. Convincingly, it establishes the possibility of designing a hermeneutical paradigm by which interpreters can rely when challenged by the increasing impact of globalisation on their local communities. From the inception of the church, hermeneutics has sought to answer challenging questions posed by the simultaneity of both the global and the local contexts. Thus, the word, *glocal* as a methodological perspective seeks to answer how the dual universal (global) and local nature of the church and hermeneutics are best expressed to enhance its continuous witness of Christ.

Mother-Tongue Theological Hermeneutics

Among other things, three major dynamics that constitute *Mother-tongue theological hermeneutics* could be identified. In the first place, it attempts to give a relevant holistic interpretation of contemporary times. In the second place, it identifies the essential role of the interpreter as one who is in dialogue with the world of the text, a task that has been described as an integrative approach and in the third place, its significance is realized in its culturally adaptable character.

With reference to the significance of providing a holistic interpretation in contemporary times, following Ulrich Luz, it could be argued that the relevant hermeneutical method that convincingly bridges the gap between Western theological scholarship and the need of the church is the adoption of mother-tongue theological hermeneutics. This significance perhaps corresponds to the dialectical interpretation of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, especially in their attempt to create a balance between faith and reason in their particular historical and cultural contexts. It also finds a similar reflection of the method of correlation that Paul Tillich sought to postulate.¹⁸ Like both dialectic and correlative cases, theological hermeneutics attempts to present a balanced interpretation of scripture. To Luz, theological hermeneutics sees the biblical text as reflecting God’s word thereby situating its relevance to both the contemporary postmodern context and that of the world of secularism.¹⁹ What Luz argues for in the context of European theological scholarship could be said to be relevant in the African theological context. African biblical scholarship, for instance, has historically drawn heavily on the interpretative approaches of European exegetes. The orientation to interpret scripture theologically will then be necessary for African biblical scholarship if biblical studies are to be relevant to the existential realities of Africans.

As a *glocal* hermeneutical paradigm, mother-tongue theological hermeneutics could be categorized among the *integrated approaches* to finding the meaning of a text where the context of the interpreter plays an important role in the interpretation process. Anthony Thiselton describes this

¹⁷ Jan-Martin Berentsen, “Foreward,” in *The Church Going Glocal – Mission and Globalisation*, Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series, ed. Tormod Engelsen, Erling Lundeby and Dagfinn Solheim (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), vii-viii.

¹⁸ Paul Tillich describes his correlation task as one of mediation. As mediator and interpreter, Tillich attempted to stand on the boundaries between theology and philosophy, between religion and culture, between Lutheranism and socialism, between the intellectual life of Germany and that of America, and so on. By this motivation, Tillich questioned the legitimacy of the notion of division and compartmentalism in theological thinking of his time. His aim was therefore to critically engage the divisions endangering the human vision of life and thought as a single wholeness. See Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch* (England - London: 1967). See also Anthony Thiselton, “The Theology of Paul Tillich,” in http://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/088/Cman_088_2_Thiselton.pdf Accessed, April 25, 2018.

¹⁹ Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik*, 7-16 explains that theological hermeneutics answers the contemporary need for building a biblically based church and for embarking on *Ganzheitliche Interpretation* (holistic interpretation) of the biblical text in a secularized context.

attempt as the fusion of horizons.²⁰ Explaining the three major approaches to interpretation, in the view of W. R. Tate,²¹ the author-centred approaches to meaning tend to neglect the world of the text and the world of the reader. While Text-centered approaches, in claiming textual independence, downplay the boundaries imposed by the world of the author upon the text. Tate then observes that reader-centred approaches generally find meaning in the interaction between the worlds of the text and the reader. In this regard, mother-tongue theological hermeneutics as an integrated approach attempts to seek the meaning that results from a conversation between the world of the text and the world of the reader, which is the engagement that is informed by the world of the author.²²

Going further into the integrated approach, as a tool is the engagement of the reader's context that makes use of the mother-tongue. The employment of the mother-tongue with its inherent worldview in the hermeneutical task corresponds to the horizon of *cultural turn* as a current approach in the history of interpretation.²³ Convincingly, by using this method, some sound contextual theological interpretation that takes into cognizance one's worldview²⁴ and existential realities could

²⁰ Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

²¹ In the search for the meaning of biblical text, W. R. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 1-5 identifies the fourth approach to be an integrated approach. The other three are author-centred, text-centered and reader-centered approaches to meaning. To Tate, these three main approaches respectfully correspond to the three categories which are the world behind the text, the world within the text and the world of the reader. Regarding the first category, Tate identifies methods such as source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, historical criticism, and tradition criticism. It is obvious that all these methods relating to the world of the author to some extent constitute higher criticism approaches to biblical studies. In relation to the world within the text, several exegetical methods such as literary, intertextual and rhetorical criticisms are used to arrive at the assumed original intended meaning. This requires adequate knowledge of the original languages. The last category describes locating the world in front of the text. This is where the context of the interpreter plays an active role in determining the meaning of the text.

²² This approach also corresponds to Werner Kahl's "Die Bibel unter neuen Blickwinkeln: Exegetische Forschung im Umbruch," *Bibel und Kirche* 3 (2006): 169 argument and proposition for "Integrationsmodell einer doppelt-kontextuelle Bibelinterpretation" needed in biblical interpretation in contemporary times. To Kahl, the admission of the science of the text, cultural anthropology and semiotic supplement each other in the task of integrational method of interpretation.

²³ Oda Wischmeyer, "Paulusinterpretation in 20. Jahrhundert. Eine kritische relecture der ersten bis vierten Auflage der 'Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart,'" in *Paulus – Werk und Wirkung: Festschrift für Andreas Lindemann zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Paul-Gerhard Klumbis and David. S. du Toit (Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2013), 649-651. Oda Wischmeyer has given a detailed survey of the history of Pauline interpretation in the 20th Century. This period witnessed interpretations based on the history of religions, Bultmann's anthropological existence, New Perspectives on Paul and a horizon of cultural turn approaches. She explains that, "Das zwanzigste Jahrhundert hat mehrere Phasen der Paulusinterpretation durchlaufen. Bestimmte Paradigmen erhielten für einen gewissen Zeitraum eine Leitfunktion. Am Anfang des Jahrhunderts stand die religionsgeschichtliche Schule mit Paulus als theologisch-religiöser Persönlichkeit vor allem im hellenistisch-religiösen Kontext (W. Wrede, W. Bousset, A. Deissmann). Es folgte Rudolf Bultmanns existential-anthropologische Interpretation, die von seinen Schülern in unterschiedliche Richtungen hin weiterentwickelt wurde (G. Bornkamm, E. Käsemann, H. Conzelmann). Seit der zweiten Hälfte des letzten Jahrhunderts entwickelte sich in der New Perspective auf der Grundlage der Neukonstruktion des zeitgenössischen Judentums durch W. D. Davies, E. P. Sanders (common Judaism, covenantal nomism, rituelle und observante Aspekte des Gesetzes als identity markers) und J.D.G. Dunn (rituelle und observante Aspekte des Gesetzes als boundary markers) eine neue Paulusinterpretation. ... Gleichzeitig entstanden im Zusammenhang sogenannter engagierter Interpretationszugänge und im Horizont des *cultural turn* eine Vielzahl von Neuansätzen für die Paulusinterpretation, die bei aller Breite und Offenheit der Fragestellungen eine Gemeinsamkeit haben: Sie gehen über die klassische exegetische Aufgabe von Rekonstruktion und Interpretation im historischen und theologischen Rahmen, die auch für die New Perspective maßgeblich geblieben war, hinaus, indem sie bestimmte gegenwärtige soziale, politische und kulturelle Situationen, Analysen und Ideologien als Ausgangs- und Bezugspunkt ihrer Interpretation definieren (kontextuelle Theologie) und die gegenwärtige politische und soziale Situation ebenso wie die eigene Biographie und die damit verbundene persönliche Perspektive der Exegetinnen und Exegeten in die Kontextualisierung des untersuchten Gegenstandes einbringen (engagierte Lesarten).

²⁴ D. K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 57 in his detailed research on Worldviews identifies the German Philosopher, Immanuel Kant, as the first person to make use of the term in German language as *Weltanschauung* to mean the power that influences how one sees reality. Used in this context, however, worldview designates one's culturally oriented thought that involves a person's beliefs and presuppositions acquired through one's geographical and socio-cultural contexts making it possible for one to assess fundamental issues of life.

be achieved.²⁵ Mother-tongue hermeneutics thus invites Christians from their unique contexts to read the Bible and thus raise questions based on their life experiences.²⁶ In this light, this method demonstrates the contextual nature of doing theology without undermining biblical scholarship as both objective and scientific.

According to Kwame Bediako:

In matters of religion, no language speaks to the heart, mind and innermost feelings as does our mother tongue. The achievement of Christianity with regard to this all-important place of language in religion is truly unique. For Christianity is, among all religions, the most culturally translatable, hence the most truly universal, being able to be at home in every cultural context without injury to its essential character.²⁷

The approach of interpreting scripture using the insight of one's mother-tongue further supports the contemporary task of African exegetes in making scripture relevant to the socio-cultural and linguistic background of the receiving community.²⁸ Paul, for example, portrays his usage of rhetoric which most probably reflected the common communicative action, worldview and style of his time to articulate his views to the understanding of the recipients of his letters. Thus, this example of Paul is appealing.

The hermeneutical approach of theologising and interpreting the Judeo-Christian scriptures in the language of the receiving community will then fully aid us in understanding the essential teachings of Scripture for relevant academic contributions. To follow Luz's argument, it serves as a creative attempt to contribute to the contemporary identity discourse among Christians and churches.²⁹ This entails the search for identity in the *Gemeinschaft* (faith-community) that in the words of Luz includes "*Gleichheit und Differenz, Kontinuität und Diskontinuität, Selbstdarstellung nach außen und Wahrnehmung von außen.*" Thus, by employing mother tongue theological hermeneutics with *glocal* focus, and with reference to Ghana, the Asante-Twi mother-tongue, which is an Akan dialect,³⁰ as an

²⁵ E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Current Trend in Biblical Studies in Ghana. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 3 no.4 (2012), 577; Livingstone Y Torsu, "A Reflection on the Effects of Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics on Christianity: An Entrepreneurial Dimension for Propagating the Christian Faith," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology* 3, no.1 (2021): 13. <https://doi.org/10.38159/motbit.2021332>. Accessed July 25, 2023.

²⁶ Following J. Severino Croatto, *Die Bibel gehört den Armen. Perspektiven einer befreiungstheologischen Hermeneutik*, Ökumenische Existenz heute Band 5 (München Kaiser, 1989), 49, this hermeneutical paradigm does not only ask about the relevance of the text to life situation, but the relevance of *Lebenpraxis for each text*.

²⁷ K. Bediako, *Jesus in Africa. The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropon – Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2000), 32.

²⁸ Commenting on J. E. J. Capitein's translation and hermeneutical method, Ekem for instance argues that, "translating sacred texts into a community's heart language involves a simultaneous creative interpretation that takes due cognizance of concrete existential realities and necessitates the use of appropriate hermeneutical methods. In the case of J.E.J. Capitein, he attempted a blend of 'readings behind the text' and 'readings in front of the text' in his hermeneutical exercise, an approach that is still valid and likely to shape the future of biblical studies in Africa." See John D. K. Ekem, "The hermeneutical approach of Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein to selected biblical-theological texts" in *Transkulturelle Begegnungen und interreligiöser Dialog*, eds. Uta André, Ruomin Liu, Sönke Lorberg-Fehring (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2017), 267.

²⁹ Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik*, 27.

³⁰ The ethnic name "Akan" refers to the Twi – speaking peoples of the Coast of Guinea of West Africa. They consist of Ahanta, Akuapim, Akyem or Akim, Agus or Anyio, Asante or Ashanti, Asen or Asin, Bono or Brong, Busa, Chorkosi, Fante, Guan, Kwahu, Nzema and Wasa. Geographically, the Akan inhabit the Eastern part of Cote D' Voir, the Southern half and part of the North of Ghana and the north of Togoland. The culture and religion of Akans exhibit a fairly uniform pattern in spite of the fact that they consist of many autonomous subgroups, the common language, and social institution link them together. See Emmanuel Asante, *Towards an African Christian Theology of the Kingdom of God: The Kingship of Onyame* (Gueenston: The Edwen Mellen Press, 1995), 73.

example could be used for both the translation of the Greek text and its corresponding contextual discussions.³¹

Outline of Procedure in Mother-Tongue Theological Hermeneutics

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that mother-tongue theological hermeneutics invites fresh re-readings of biblical texts. Accordingly, the procedure to be followed as one applies this glocal hermeneutical paradigm is:

1. Construction of the socio-cultural background of the text corresponding to the *Sitz im Leben* in form criticism or rhetorical situation in rhetorical analysis.³²
2. A textual analysis of the passage with reference to the scope and literary unit, genre and flow of the argument.
3. Translation of the Greek text or phenomenon into one's mother-tongue as it critically dialogues with other existing translations.
4. Discourse analysis of the text with the critical engagement of the socio-cultural worldview, mother-tongue and other existential realities of the reader.
5. Theological interpretation and application of the text to the *glocal* (both local and global) context as synthesis.³³

The Uniqueness of Mother Tongue Theological Hermeneutics

This section looks at the uniqueness of mother-tongue theological hermeneutics as it relates to mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics and other contemporary hermeneutical tasks of theologians in the global south. Mother-tongue theological hermeneutics is similar to mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics in terms of their procedures and elements of historical/socio-cultural and literary analysis of text and the use of one's mother-tongue for theological reflections. Both mother-tongue theological and biblical hermeneutics are, however, not identical. Following the tradition of theological interpretation of Scripture, mother-tongue theological hermeneutics is different from mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics in its treatment of biblical text as having divine authority and its relevance to both academia and ecclesia. Mother-tongue theological hermeneutics, therefore, places much significance on the primary functions of the divine authorship of Scripture (*Biblischen Texte als Sprechen von Gott*)³⁴ Christ-centred text and the Spirit-led reading community in the interpretative process. Following Treier, mother-tongue theological hermeneutics is thus characterised by both special and general hermeneutics that approach the biblical text with theological presuppositions that attempt to hear the text not only as written by human authors but as a word from God.³⁵

Hermeneutical methodological constructions, especially from scholars of the global south, have been critiqued as continuing in the ethnocentric use of the Bible reminiscent of the tradition of the colonial contexts in the pretence of articulating a new model of reading the Bible. Worthy of note, however, is the fact that mother-tongue theological hermeneutics does not aim at challenging the parochialism of Euro-American biblical scholarship for failing to take significant notice of the global

³¹ Here, the exegetical discussions will make use of the insight of the Akan mother tongue linguistic category of some key terminologies and context that is situated in the traditional Akan World view and existential realities for meaningful application.

³² Fosu, *Experiences of Pneumatic Phenomena*, 75 for an elaboration of a Rhetorical Situation which corresponds to *Sitz im Leben* in form criticism.

³³ Michael J. Gormann, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 127-128. The use of *synthesis* as part of this exegetical procedure is meant a creative act of integrating all the various elements into some kind of a unified whole. Fosu has well observed that it goes beyond a summary to include a conclusion about the essential meaning of the text or phenomenon of investigation. Fosu, *Experiences of Pneumatic Phenomena*, 146.

³⁴ Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik*, 27.

³⁵ Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 136.

context.³⁶ Such an approach will appear to be a reactive mode. Rather it tempts to discover the Bible from perspectives that emerge out of the readers' own contexts.

From the foregoing discussions and outline of the procedure, it could be said that the relationship between mother-tongue theological hermeneutics and liberation theologies is paradoxical. On the one hand, while mother-tongue theological hermeneutics does not subscribe to the philosophy embedded in liberation theology, it is needless to point out that it follows some of its constructive and positive elements. Chiefly among them is the fact that mother-tongue theological hermeneutics challenges traditional hermeneutists and theologians to re-examine the presuppositions and ideologies that they bring to the biblical text. Also, mother-tongue theological hermeneutics points out the value of highlighting the close connection between exegesis and application. In this regard, since theology and exegesis are done with the insight of one's mother-tongue, the important role of the laity and the ordinary reader is emphasised. In this light, exegesis could be done at the communal level without making it become the sole reserve of individual activity.

On the other hand, as a point of departure from the liberation theologies, mother-tongue theological hermeneutics does not employ the exclusive use of socio-economic situation as the text and for that matter as the sole hermeneutical lens.³⁷ Rather, it uses both the Bible and its effects on the church and society as (co)texts. In addition, mother-tongue hermeneutics has a broader reader perspective that cuts across diverse societal classes. In this case, it goes beyond the emphasis of God's preferential option and epistemological privilege for the poor as maintained mainly by liberation theologies. Moreover, while drawing from the notion of experience as the co-criterion for evaluating truth, mother-tongue theological hermeneutics does not subscribe to the hermeneutical presupposition of universalism that is oriented towards 'a socialist society.' Instead, it regards the hermeneutical task as holistic evangelism of which the social dimension serves only as an aspect of the whole.

CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed at introducing mother tongue-theological hermeneutics as an approach to reading biblical text and thus offering a theological interpretation of scripture. It has been observed that mother-tongue theological hermeneutics, among others, has the potential to not only contributing to biblical scholarship but to bridge the gap between Western theological scholarship and that of the global south, exegesis and contextual appropriation of scripture and offer a theological reflection that is of relevance to both global and local ecclesial contexts. Mother-tongue theological hermeneutics, therefore, has a broader reader perspective that cuts across diverse societal classes. As an interpretative approach, mother-tongue theological hermeneutics is worth recommending for academic theologians, biblical exegetes, pastors and theological students and seminarians. In a subsequent article, an attempt will be made to apply this method to read a biblical text.

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³⁶ Kwok Pui-lan, *Interpretation als Dialog: Eine biblische Hermeneutik aus Asien* (Luzern: Edition Exodus, 1996).

³⁷ Bruce G. Fawcett, "A critical analysis of some hermeneutical principles found in Latin American theologies of liberation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 4 (1994): 569.

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