***International Journal of Arts, Communication and Pedagogy Vol. 1 No 1, 2022***

## BIBLICAL HERMENUETICS IN PENTECOSTALISM

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### Abstract

*This work examined “Biblical Hermeneutics in Pentecostalism”. The ideal theology that lies behind Biblicalhermeneutics has a strong linkage with the early church in the past; the early Church had some fundamental doctrines and laudable values.But it was discovered in this research that with the intervention of the Martin Luther led Reformation coupled with the advent of Western type of Christianity/Western Civilization, Colonialism, Indigenous African churches/Pentecostalism and so on, several traditional values of the Church were jettisoned and corrupted. The contemporary Nigerian religious landscape has witnessed a massive interpretational abuse of the Bible. Consequently, this paper investigated the early beginning of Biblical interpretation of the Church in Nigeria: 1842-1969 and contemporaneous challenges of Biblical Hermeneutics in Pentecostalism and its effects, contextually on leaders in the Nigerian Church.All these were examined.This work recommended the following as panaceas to the challenges of Biblical hermeneutics and its effects in Nigerian Pentecostalism:*

*(i) The Need for the Christian National Executives to deliberate on professionalism for an ideal Biblical interpretation, and (ii) shunning egocentrism and materialism. The methodology of this paper is socio-historical approach, interview, internet explorations and narrative approaches.*

***Keywords:*** *Biblical Hermeneutics, Africa, Nigeria, challenges, panacea.*

### Introduction

Biblical interpretation in the contemporary Church in Africa, contextually, in the Nigerian Pentecostal Church is currently experiencing massive interpretational abuse of the Bible. Pastorate in the contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal Church is currently witnessing massive vocational and religious life abuse which takes a concrete expression in their ethical crises. These have sharp negative influence on all spheres of our national life as shown in the church leaders’ negligence in the practice of the laid down laudable pastoral and Christian ethics (Jesutunwase, 2019). Corruption is more than ungodliness or immorality, it also includes any action done abnormally that is contrary to the originality (Okpe, 2017).For instance some Church leaders in Africa, specifically some Pentecostal church leaders in Nigeria, lack the knowledge of Biblical Hermeneutics, pastoral ethics, pastoral theology, biblical systemic theology, Church History and so on; all these courses are taught in the theological seminaries as laid down by the early Church leaders. Church leaders in our contemporary days who lack knowledge of these courses are corruptin the context of this research because deficiency in these courses would further lead to incompetency of church leaders which would breed all other forms of corruption in the Church and in the society (Jesutunwase, 2015).

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No doubt, the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the protestant reformation is indeed a time of incalculable significance in the history of Christianity in Nigeria. However, recent research have shown negative implications of the Martin Luther led reformation on Christianity in Nigeria (Jesutunwase, 2019). “The contemporary Nigerian religious landscape has witnessed a massive interpretational abuse of the Bible. It is a matter of concern that the exegetical study of the Bible has been seriously compromised, giving way to the reign of eisegesis” (Effiong, 2015)

The aim of this paper, therefore, was to investigate critically the early beginning of the biblical interpretation (i.e. Biblical Hermeneutics) of the Church of Nigeria: 1842 – 1969 and to assess some contemporaneous challenges of Biblical Hermeneutics in Pentecostalism, contextually in the Nigerian Church. Similarly, it aimed at finding out the suggestive panaceas with the aim of ameliorating the challenges and their effects on the Biblical Hermeneutics of Pentecostal Church leaders and the society in Africa (Nigeria). The method used in this paper is socio- historical approach, interview, internet explorations and narrative approaches.

### Early Beginning of the Biblical Interpretation of the Church in Nigeria: 1842 – 1969

The early beginning of Biblical Interpretation in the Church in Nigeria could be traced back to the 15th Century when Catholicism was introduced (Kay, 2022). After some abortive attempt, Christianity was at last successfully introduced into Nigeria. The story of the emergence of Christianity in Nigeria started in the year 1842 (Ogunbiwaje, 2015). The historical life and leadership style of a Nigerian son namely: Crowther, Samuel Ajayi C. 1807 to 1891 can never be over-emphasized in Nigerian Church History, of course, the life and church leadership style of this rare gem followed the stipulated pattern and the church doctrines of the church leaders in both the Apostolic, and the apostolic fathers’ age. He was a native of Yoruba from Egba land, now western Nigeria (Enegho,2017). He prepared for his future ministry in 1843, he eventually became an Anglican priest.

As a good model of biblical hermeneutics scholar, Bishop Samuel AjayiCrowther followed the good legacy laid down by the earlier pacesetters of church leadership. He was a theologically trained church leader and a follower,unlike most of the church leaders in Nigeria, who have no theological training and were not trained for a day by another experienced Church leader. But alas! They suddenly became General Overseers of their personal churches or Ministries, preaching and teaching heresies. The rise of theological institutions in Nigeria was the bedrock of the age of enlightenment in Biblical Hermeneutics and all other courses in Theological Education that led to professionalism in pastorate in Africa, specifically in the Nigerian- Church leadership. Theological education is a legacy laid down by the early church which was strictly adhered to by the church and her leaders in Nigeria starting from the year 1842.

However, the Biblical hermeneutics and general corruption among church leaders in Africa, contextually in Nigeria, probably started because of impacts of Western Christianity/Western civilization coupled with the wake of Pentecostalism via abuse of Biblical interpretation in the 1970s (rpt.hds.harvard.edu>faq). Petco…); little or no regards seemed to be given to theological or seminary education. Consequentially, the church and the society are witnessing biblical hermeneutics abuse and other forms of corruption being perpetuated by some church

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leaders in Nigeria. The efforts of early Western missionaries on both the secular education and the Christian Theological Education can never be forgotten. That was why corruption was curbed among the church leaders in Nigeria and the church was able to witness spiritual growth among the Christians. There was a very strong passion for evangelism and soul winning between the years 1842 and late 1969. But pastorate and the Church in Africa, specifically in Nigeria, is witnessing massive vocational, religious life abuse especially, an abuse of the Biblical Hermeneutics (or interpretation).

### Assessment of some Suggestive Contemporaneous Challenges of Biblical Hermeneutics and its Effects on the Pentecostal Church Leaders in Nigeria

This section assesses the suggestive contemporaneous challenges of Biblical hermeneutics and its effects on Pentecostal Church leaders in Nigeria, as they are being negatively influenced by some suggestive factors in their Biblical hermeneutics and general church administration/management. These are the suggestive factors that are inimical to the actualization of the ideal Biblical hermeneutics by Pentecostal church leadership in Nigeria: Impact of (i) Western Christianity (ii) Western Civilization.

Impacts of Western Christianity has eaten deep into the fabric of the Biblical hermeneutics in Africa, in Nigeria. The thought of the Africans has been greatly influenced by the effect of colonization. Africans, especially Nigerians are currently witnessing western colonialism. This has a sharp negative influence in all spheres of the Nigerians’ life as shown in the negligence of the good cultural values of a Nigerian cultural heritage. This negligence seems to have resulted into grievous corruption among the Africans, especially the Pentecostal Church leaders in Nigeria. Africans and their good cultural value which are synonymous to the culture of the ancient biblical Israelites have been suffering over the years because of African cultural contact with western culture of civilization, the dynamics of African cultural experience through the phenomenon of slavery and colonialism.

Many of the Western Missionaries and the Eurocentric Biblical scholars have colonized the African tradition, African Christianity, and African-biblical studies (Ogunbiwaje, 2015). Adamo in his 7th inaugural lectures (2004) opines thatthose Biblical studies in Africa has been Colonized by the western missionaries and western Biblical theologians (Adamo, 2004, *7th Inaugural Lecture*). There is the need to re-awake the good African culture, and the culture of the early church for an ideal Biblical hermeneutics. There are good aspects of the African culture. Afrocentric Biblical scholars stressed on the interrelationship of African Culture and the Biblical Ancient Israelites, which according to their investigations suggested that the similarity and the differences between the two races are because of the interrelationship that existed between them in the Biblical periods (Adamo, 2005). Africans are not novices as claimed by the western Biblical scholars in the worship of God, Christianity, Biblical studies and even in Biblical Hermeneutics. The cultural values of the ancient Africans must have influenced the ancient Israelites in the Bible or vice versa.

Therefore, as one of the suggestive panaceas to curb corruption, especially the abuse of Biblical interpretation among Church leaders and other Christians in Nigeria, it is necessary to advocate for the re-awakening of the good aspects of African culture and to encourage

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Afrocentric Approach to the Bible and Christianity, in relation to Biblical Hermeneutics or interpretation. For instance, good aspects of the cultural heritage of the Africans that have been lost due to the advent of western Christianity should be revived. Courses in African culture could be introduced and made compulsory in African Colleges of education, Polytechnics and in all the faculties of African (Nigerian) institutions of learning (Ogunbiwaje, 2015).

To this end, this paper contends that those African Christians who are still Eurocentric in their Christian practices, in terms of their Biblical Hermeneutics should pursue emancipation, worship God, practice Christianity, culture and interpret the Bible in an Afrocentric way without being unfaithful to the Biblical principles so as not to fall victim of syncretism. Donovan (1995) opines that, syncretism does not result in a theology that is biblical. Migration and cultural exchange have their advantages. However, it is good that Africans avoid their disadvantageous aspects. African pastors and theologians were instructed via the Euro- American methodology (Adamo, 2005. “Explorations in African Biblical Studies”). Consequently, when they come to Africa they teach and preach Western tradition and culture in the African Churches and Colleges. African Pastors and Afrocentric Biblical scholars should rise now to the task of having outstanding centers for Biblical studies in Africa (Ogunbiwaje, 2015).

In order to maintain the good values of the traditional African culture, the corrupted African Christian theologians should not be allowed to pass on western colonization and corruption to indigenous African Church leaders to avoid the negative effects on the African- congregations and such converts may not only be ordinary Christians but Eurocentric and corrupted Christian. Similarly, there is the need to re-awake the Biblical Hermeneutics methodology laid down by the early church and transferred to the church and her leaders in the early beginning of the church and Biblical interpretation of the church in Nigeria; 1842- 1969. History reveals that in Nigeria abnormities in the Biblical interpretation and the general corruption among church leaders and other Christians were curbed between 1942- 1969 simply because, the church in that dispensation held strongly to the early church’s laid down legacy in church administration and management. However, the present church in Africa, Nigeria inclusive is witnessing harvest of scandals and “massive interpretational abuse of the Bible (Effiong, 2015). No doubt if the church leaders and all other Christians are influenced positively by an ideal Biblical Hermeneutics, there is the hope that the church of God would have great positive influence on the general society; thereby resulting into the moral and spiritual development of the citizenry. When the citizen of a country is godly, they would discharge their national duties as faithful, obedient, and patriotic citizens which of course would enhance vibrant national economic buoyancy, peace, unity and national security would prevail.

Theroles played by Late Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther in the translation of the English Bible to Yoruba was an excellent one, pioneering the subsequent translations in other local languages in Nigeria. However, the contact of the NigerianPentecostal church leaders and the Nigerian citizenry with the philosophy of the modern-day Western missionaries negatively influenced the Nigerian culture, the church doctrines and the ideal Biblical hermeneutics that were done by theologians of the church. In the same vein, the emergence of ‘prosperitygospel’ or prosperity theology has been abused by some Pentecostal church leaders in Nigeria, hence it

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has negatively influenced their Biblical interpretation methodology, as so many Pentecostal church leaders interpreted the Bible to suit their selfish intentions. Prosperity gospel, among many other negative influences of western Christianity, has plagued the church in Nigeria. Kate, (2022)corroborates this ideal, the prosperity gospel according to her is more of a materialistic viewpoint, pleasure, sound health, and so on. Of course, that is not the essence of Christianity. Prosperity is good, but evangelism is the heartbeat of God. Christians especially Church leaders should know the sensitivity of their position as the representatives of Jesus Christ here on earth. Church leaders must have a change of attitude to worldliness and materialistic pursuit; church leaders must be ready to represent Christ well on earth.Church leaders and all Christians in Africa, especially in Nigeria should shun extremism and the influence of western Christianity/western civilization in biblical interpretations and in their general practice of Christianity.

A Christian is to be compassionate towards the poor. Ademiluka (2008) asserts that, rather than attribute poverty to unrighteousness, our attitude to the poor should be that of compassion. He goes on to assert that, from the biblical perspective, poverty arising from unfortunate circumstances should not evoke philosophical speculation or self-righteous fatalism. Hence, the doctrines that all can live in abundance, and that poverty is due to unrighteousness are not biblically correct. The church of God in Africa especially in Nigeria is encouraged to put on Christ-like psychological life and avoid the sinful desire for wealth.The teaching that all can and should be rich invariably creates in Christians the desire for wealth, egocentrism, and lustful desires. Thus, prosperity Gospel does not take adequate cognizance of what many consider to be the center of New Testament teaching on attitude to wealth, namely, that there are dangers inherent in the desire for riches (Ademiluka, 2008). It appears ‘Mammonish’ has crept into the church in Africa, with reference to Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Mammonish’ in the context of this paper means: to love money. Bible says: loving money is the origin of evil (1 Timothy, 6:10).This paperreveals the massive interpretational abuse of the Bible for egocentric intention towards materialistic pursuit. Many Pentecostal church leaders in Nigeria are involved in ‘Mammonish’. According to Willmington(1984) this letter (1 Timothy 6:10) is among the three books in the New Testament which reflects against the love for money. Others are 2 Timothy and Titus (Willmington, 1984). Apostle Paul in his epistles wrote against pastors and Christian been covetous.Money is good, but Apostle Paul says: its love is bad. The theology of the Western Christianity which has been embraced by members of churches, especially those called neo-Pentecostal could be faulty. Ademiluka (2008) opines that the teaching that every believer is destined to be rich is contrary to life experience, in and outside of the bible. He goes on to assert that, the experience that is true to life in all generations is that some people, not all, have sufficient goods. There are the classes of the extremely rich, the middle class, the poor who have less than they need and the destitute.

Moreover, consequential to the effects of the prosperity theology via the emergence of contemporaneous Western type of Christianity in Nigeria, majority of the church leaders are no longer after soul winning but interpret the bible to suit their selfish ambition to acquire wealth, fame, pleasure, and they have turned the gospel of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ into business.According to Fuller (2005), when it comes to missions, missionaries tend to present the gospel in the way that it makes sense to them. They might use illustrations that are

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very convincing to people in their own culture. But these acquired methods, illustrations and applications might not be very sensible or convincing in a different culture and context. To contextualize in missionary work is to use method that works in the new context, to use illustrations and applications that make sense.In this sense may be needed to emphasize aspects of the gospel that are most needed or most relevant to the context (Fuller, 2005). The positive impact of the emergence of the indigenous African churches and her leaders in Nigeria in contextualization cannot be overemphasized as it has doubtlessly promoted the good cultural values of the Africans which are synonymous to the cultural values of the Ancient Israelites in the bible. Therefore, at the wake of indigenous African church emerges African Christian theology (i.e., Afrocentric Christian Theology as an agent of gospel contextualization.Of course, the emergence of indigenous African Church helped to decolonize African culture, the Bible, Christianity, and even biblical hermeneutics from Western domination.

However, this paper reveals that, most of the Pentecostal church leaders and indigenous African churches don’t have theological education, hence they are guilty of the abuse of biblical hermeneutics.Alabi (2012) supports this idea, by asserting that: “majority of the indigenous African church leaders did not attend theological seminary”. Similarly, Adekunle (2022) states that: “Heretical teachings and fetish practices are more rampant among the indigenous African church leaders because most of their church leaders did not have theological training”. It is, therefore, save to contend that churches in Nigeria today, as well as in other African neighboring countries, are business centers in contrast to Paul’s teaching on Christian ethics. Ryle (2010) opines that, the great rock on which thousands of young people are condemnably being crushed against and destroyed is the sin of lust, the pleasures of the world and desire to keep within the world.

The executive leaders of CAN at all levels in Nigeria should encourage all pastors, especially those in full time ministry that lack theological education to attend recognized theological college or seminary and any negligent church leaders should be called to order with some punishable penalties. It is high time the executive of CAN should rise to encourage and formalizeprofessionalism in the pastorate. Thefindings from this paper have revealed that most of the corrupt practices are common among Church leaders that lack professional/theological training. Church leaders who don’t have theological training should not be given any official responsibility at the CAN Executive levels, be it at the national, state or local levels. Of course, professionalism in pastorate would doubtlessly reduce the rampant heretical preaching and teaching in our Churches in Africa, especially in Nigeria. Professionalism would help the Church leaders in Nigeria to demonstrate their competency of the theological knowledge of Biblical Hermeneutics on both spiritual and secular matters.

Furthermore, church history reveals how vast the early African church fathers were theologically sound and they were able to interpret the Bible accurately without the Bible being corrupted. Their moral lives too could not be left unmentioned. It appears that the emergence of Martin Luther’s led reformation under the claim of a “liberation” from Catholicism allowed everyone even the “uncalled” into the pastorate, this has consequentially

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opened way for diverse corruption in the church especially among the modern-day Pentecostal church leaders in Nigeria.

Biblical hermeneutics required competency. The early church fathers knew the value of theological education. In fact, they were the pioneers of the early universities and theological seminaries. There are certain codes of conduct that were thought in the theological seminaries. Prophet Hosea in the Bible prophesized the mind of God when he reflects on the importance of knowledge (Hosea 4:6) God wants everyone to have knowledge, especially priests and pastors in Nigeria to curb the heretical teachings among them.

It was discovered that the abuse of Biblical interpretation apart from the misinterpretation of prosperity theology has also resulted to other challenges among some Nigeria Pentecostal church leaders. For instance, among many others are: (i) sexual scandals rocking the Pentecostal world is sky rocketing (SAGE, 2015). (ii) Obnoxious desires for power and position (Jesutunwase, 2015). (iii) Church leaders’ involvement in ‘Bivocationalism’ and ‘multivocationalism’ in Nigerian Pentecostalism (Jesutunwase, 2015). (iv)Assumptive Biblical interpretation for egocentric intention (Jesutunwase, 2015). (v) Disunity among the Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria because of fallacious doctrinal beliefs (Jesutunwase, 2015).

The Pentecostal and indigenous African churches in Nigeria are characterized by lack of professionalism in church leadership. Most of the church leaders in Nigeria are not competent in the biblical interpretation (Jesutunwase, 2015). Babatunde, a cleric (2009*:* A7) shared his opinion: “clerics and other men aspiring to work in churches or vineyards of God have been enjoined to enroll in reputable theological seminaries, Bible Colleges… in order to be grounded in the word of God”. A disciple is a follower that needs to be mentored by a superior for a transformation (Munroe, 2005). On the contrary, it was observed as one of the negative implications of the Martin Luther led reformation that many people stumbled into pastorate in Nigeria without basic theological training. Hence, they lacked pastoral and Christian ethics that are taught in the theological seminaries.

Jesus Christ trained the twelve disciples for three and half years before he released them into the world. After His ascension, Peter, one of the disciples, stormed the world with the message of redemption and three thousand souls were won for Christ in a day (Acts 2:4). In the Old Testament of the Bible, we read about sons of the prophet- ofcourse, that was Prophet Elisha’s own theological seminary that time. In our contemporary days, pastoral ethics are being taught in the theological seminaries.it was discovered that many new generation pastors especially in Pentecostal churches do not go for training or formation in the seminary, this is corruption in the context of this paper because it is a deviation from the way it was been laid down by the early church fathers in the history of the church. Lack of basic theological education is one major type of corruption of church leaders in Nigeria, and these had negative effects on the members. Professionals are taught rudiments of their job’s ethics in the school. “Not doing what is right at any level is corruption” (Okpe, 2017). The Bible is the world’s best-selling book, it remains the least understood book, not only because of its multifaceted character but also because of its presumed simplicity (Effiong, 2015).

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Western civilization is good but there are disadvantages which are detrimental to the actualization of the ideal biblical hermeneutics in Africa, especially in the Nigerian churches.Of-course Western civilization came to Africa alongside western Christianity. In assessing the challenges experienced from Western civilization and their effects on the biblical hermeneutics, Church leaders and the other people in Nigeria, this paper basedits examination only on the negative impacts of migration and cultural exchange on the churches and their leadership in Nigeria as affectingbiblical hermeneutics among many other factors of Western civilization.

The world is becoming more pluralistic and complex. Western Civilization science, technology and Western philosophy have great influence on biblical theology, biblical hermeneutics, Christianity, human thoughts and so on. Western civilization with the aid of science, technology and so on enabled Africans to migrate to other places of the world, especially the western world. Hence, cultural exchange took place.Consequently, the fundamental doctrines and culture of the early church that were passed across to the church of the future generation(s) have been negatively influenced.Therefore, during man’s migration and cultural exchange, he came across various ideologies in life which affected his original ways of life (Jesutunwase,2015). In the same world of pluralism and complexity, came the ideologies of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Clifford Geetz among many other sociologists. The opinions of the aforementioned early sociologists served as the fundamental principles of the various schools of thought of people in this modern world of ours (Nigeria inclusive); their scholarly opinions helped in the identification, categorization and in assessing the school of thought of some church leaders in the modern world which tend to corrupt the applications of the principles of the above scholars in the practice of Christianity and in the biblical hermeneutics which consequently affects negatively their original accepted Christian traditions. Through the course of migration, there exchanges of opinions, beliefs and so on, and of course, there are tendencies for the exchange of negative opinions as well.

The roles of CAN executives and other church leaders of Pentecostal churches in curbing the abuse of Biblical interpretation and all other form of corrupt activities among the church leaders in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. The Executive leaders of CAN at all levels and other church leaders in Nigeria should sanitize themselves firstly and stop using their vantage position to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor members of their congregations who often see them as next to God. This paper suggests that CAN Executives in Nigeria as the highest Church leaders supposed to have qualitative mentorship ability to influence all other church leaders positively (Jesutunwase, 2015) Odebunmi (2007) suggests qualities of a mentor, these are few ones among the long list suggested:

a.) Modesty – does not offer threat nor danger to those around you. b.) Self-respect-accepting one is the way to wisdom.

c.) Integrity – act in covert with your dreams and goals. d.) Enthusiasm for change-nature’s teacher.

e.) Self-discipline. Church leadership demands absolute sanctification and qualitative mentorship.

The word “Sanctification” is clearly examined in the Bible. Derek (2019) asserts that, church leaders are to know that they are ‘separated’ from other lay people of the world into godliness

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and holy life. God is holy and majestic, and his people are called to recognize his holiness and his sovereign claim over them (Is.6:3ff, 8:3).

### Conclusion

This paper investigated: “Biblical hermeneutics in Pentecostalism”. The paper suggests that an ideal Biblical hermeneutics was one of the cultural values of the Churcheswithin the year 1842

– 1969, which establishes the fact that, the Churchesin Nigeria within that period of Church dispensation complied with the laid down legacy of the early church fathers which was transferred to the church of future generations. Church history reveals how vast the early African church fathers were theologically. They interpreted the Bible accurately without the Bible being corrupted. Their moral lives too were exemplary. All these values were jettisoned at the wake of Eurocentrism in Africa (Nigeria).

Finally, the paper made recommendations to curb the contemporaneous challenges and their effects on the Pentecostal Church leaders and Nigerian society for moral, spiritual, security and general national development.

### Recommendations

1. There is the need for the National Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (P.F.N) Executives to deliberate on the Church leaders’ professionalism for an ideal Biblical interpretation.
2. Church leaders especially in the Pentecostal Churches are advised to shun egocentrism, materialism and avoid all other corrupt practices.

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