

*Inductive Biblical Interpretation and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics: A Proposal for Pentecostal/Charismatic Ministries in Ghana Today*

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**Abstract:**

This article seeks to discover a common goal between inductive Bible study and “Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics” and will propose a viable biblical interpretation for Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries in Ghana. African Christians accept the Bible as the “Word of God” without critically engaging in some of the issues raised in Scripture. Biblical interpretation is a critical enterprise in biblical studies and is the essential element that nurtures the Christian church. However it is often influenced by denominational biases and the priority of the interpreter. Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries in Ghana attempt to interpret the Bible by seeking to find internal evidence and support for their interpretation. My thesis is that in view of the fact that Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries do not consciously interpret the Bible to agree necessarily with ecclesiological council decisions or dogmatic philosophies, but respond to the existential needs of their audiences, the adaption of inductive biblical studies or mother-tongue biblical hermeneutic would be appropriate.

**Key words:** Africa, Bible, hermeneutic, Holy Spirit, inductive biblical studies/interpretation, mother tongue, Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries.

## Introduction

Though the Bible reached North Africa during the early centuries of church history, it was not available to sub-Saharan and other parts of Africa until 30 to 42 decades ago.<sup>1</sup> The Bible was brought to most parts of Africa quite late; nevertheless, African Christians hold the Bible in high esteem. It is considered unquestionably as the “Word of God.” Persons asking too many questions were labeled hypocrites or “too known.”<sup>2</sup> G. O. West states that “The encounter between Africa and the Bible has always been more than an encounter with a book.”<sup>3</sup> Simply put, the Bible is not a book on the same level with books on the economy, geography or, agriculture, but a divine book which can be used to cause desirable change by those who subscribe to its tenets. It is generally believed that holding the Bible in one’s hand, one has the power to exorcise the devil from a person that is demon-possessed. In African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal/Charismatic Ministries (PCMs), persons who could not read the text of the Bible in English were encouraged to take along the Bible to Church or any other places, when it was necessary; there they could engage someone to read it to their hearing. It shows the importance Ghanaians attach to the Bible and its contents.

J. D. K. Ekem posits that every language, whether spoken by a majority or a minority ethnic (or non- ethnic) people is a mother-

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1. Gerald West, “African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation” in *Interacting with the Scriptures in Africa*, ed. Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole and Ernst R. Wendland (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2005), 4.

2. The expression “Too Known” as generally use in Ghana refers to persons who attempts to show off and defend the little knowledge they have concerning an issue. It is significant to state that it is not used in the arena of scholarly debates.

3. Gerald O. West, “Mapping African Biblical Interpretation” in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, ed. Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke and Justin Ukpog (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2001), 96.

tongue.<sup>4</sup> This places all languages on the same pedestal of importance. Therefore every language is a mother-tongue of a particular people. Many AICs and PCMs prefer the King James Version (KJV) and the translations in the local *Akan* languages due to its popularity. The KJV was probably preferred because it was one of the earliest translations brought to many African Christians by missionaries from the Euro-America. The popularity of the *Akan* versions may be due to its easy flow of thought and appeals to lower educational echelons in Ghana. The acceptance and use of the Bible in Africa could be a result of its identification with the religio-culture and social *Sitz im Leben* of first century Palestine and Africa. Many societies in Africa share a patriarchal system, the celebration of festivals and a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular with Jewish societies - albeit with some trifling variations or modifications.<sup>5</sup>

However, it is noteworthy to indicate that there are educational, cultural, social, geographical, and political, gaps between the Bible and contemporary periods. This calls for the interpretation of the biblical text in a context that will benefit a contemporary audience. In such a situation, the hermeneutical method used is critical to unearth an appropriate meaning of the Bible for contemporary times. J. N. K. Mugambi offers that “Hermeneutics, as a critical discipline, should help us to distinguish between the essential message of the gospel, and the cultural gap in which it must necessarily be clothed from time to time and from place to place.”<sup>6</sup> Biblical scholars generally agree that biblical hermeneutics began during the postexilic period. When Ezra, assisted by some Levites read the Torah in Hebrew and would have had to translate it into Aramaic so that the audience could understand what

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4. John David Kwamena Ekem, “Professorial Chair Inaugural Address” *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics* 1 (2015): 158-74.

5. Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, “The Relevance of Mother-Tongues Biblical Hermeneutics in the Ghanaian Context,” *Journal Of Applied Thought* 3 (2014): 282-301.

6. J. N. K. Mugambi, “Foundation for the African Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics” in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, ed. Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke and Justin Ukpong (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2001), 20.

was written because the Jews had lost their understanding of Hebrew in exile. Thereafter, many hermeneutical principles, methods and approaches were propounded during the era of ancient Jewish exegesis, the time of Jesus and the apostolic era, and the church fathers, the patristic period, the medieval era, the reformation and, post-reformation, the modern and contemporary periods. *Midrashic*, *pesher*, allegorical, literal, anagogical and, ethical methods, just to mention a few were explored at different periods.<sup>7</sup> In contemporary periods, scholars have propounded several hermeneutical and exegetical methods to the understanding of the Bible which includes Inductive Biblical Studies (IBS) and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics (MTBH). In this article, the terms Inductive Biblical Studies (IBS) and Inductive Biblical Interpretation (IBI) will be used interchangeably.

In a monumental work on IBS by D. R. Bauer and R. A. Traina,<sup>8</sup> the term “inductive” has both a broader and a narrower usage. In the broader sense, it involves the desire to move from evidence in a scriptural text or passage to conclusions in an effort to unearth the meaning of a text. The evidence in the text is used to support one’s interpretation of that text and helps direct a dialogue between scriptural evidence and the realities of the theological, social, religious, educational and, economic background of the reader or interpreter. The narrower use relates to the study of the history of proponents of IBS: William Rainey Harper and Wilbert Webster White who hold that going behind scripture to reconstruct the history or background of the text to aid interpretation often results in academic speculations that may undermine the sense of canon and faith. In studying the Bible in one’s mother-tongue, the structure, form and movement of a particular

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7. For discussions on the history of biblical interpretation see Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993) and Henry A. Virkler and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

8. David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1.

book of the Bible can lead to its interpretation. In this study we will adopt the narrower sense of IBS.

Examining the significance of IBS, Bauer and Traina write:

Inductive Bible Study is probably best known, however, in its lay oriented forms. For example, it has become central in the discipleship development program...and it has been introduced to millions through the writings of popular authors. One of the advantages of Inductive Bible Study is that it can contribute to the most sophisticated and serious biblical scholarship while also equipping laypersons to study the text for themselves.<sup>9</sup>

The authors indicate that scripture interpretation does not only reside in the bosom of the formal theologically trained person. Simply put, lay persons can also interpret the Bible using their experiences to make it meaningful in their culture. After all, the Bible was not written for only academics. IBS emphasizes the final form of scripture — which has been made available for adherents of the faith. As a result, it could be argued that non-canonical sources are not critical to the interpretation process although they can be useful.

*The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines mother-tongue as “the first and main language that you learnt when you were a child.” It suggests that mother-tongue is not necessarily one’s native language but a leading language that is used in communication during a person’s formative years and in which that person has proficiency and control. To a large extent, it agrees with first language (L1) as used in linguistics.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, it implies that one cannot refer to a person’s native language which that person does not understand, as mother-tongue. Adapting the definition by B. Y. Quarshie, Ekem defines mother-tongue as the language one is born into or the first lan-

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9. Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 2.

10. Mohammad Torikul Islam, “First Language Acquisition Theories and Transition to SLA,” *The Asian Conference on Language Learning 2013 Official Conference Proceedings* (2013): 499-510.

guage that one is able to speak naturally as antithesis to languages learnt later in life. He explains that depending on the wider coverage of a mother-tongue, it could become a vernacular language of a people, region or nation.<sup>11</sup> He added that “mother-tongue is the language that affirms a person’s identity and self-worth.”<sup>12</sup> Ekem’s definition emphasizes the native language in which a person is born into without neglecting L1 of a person. Alternatively put, Ekem prefers a person’s native language as a mother-tongue while acknowledging the fact that L1 is also a mother-tongue. Therefore mother-tongue in biblical hermeneutics include the engagement of “viable tools for the scientific analysis of the phonetic, phonological, morpho-syntactical and semantic component”<sup>13</sup> of a mother-tongue in the process of biblical interpretation. Alternatively put, it is an enterprise that requires proficiency in a mother-tongue, a good understanding of the world of the Bible, an understanding of biblical languages and, a knowledge of the African worldview.<sup>14</sup> That is, making the Judeo-Christian Scriptures speak to/ with the issues of life and thoughts in the African context for Africans. This enterprise is expected to result in translation of the Bible into local languages, writing commentaries in local languages and writing study Bibles in local languages.

The definitions of Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries vary from one scholar to the other due to the cultural environmental settings and conditions. For example, in Europe and Western contexts, Pentecostals were largely said to have taken their origin from Charles Fox Parham and William Seymour’s Azusa Street phenomena that took place in 1901 and 1906 respectively. Yet, J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu

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11. John D. K. Ekem, “Jacobus Capitein’s Translation of ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ into Mfantse: An Example of Creative Mother Tongue Hermeneutics,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 66-79 n. 67.

12. Ekem, “Professorial Chair,” 158-74 n. 66.

13. Ekem, “Professorial Chair,” 162.

14. Ekem, “Professorial Chair,” 166.

argues that there were Pentecostal phenomena in India and Haiti that predates that of America.<sup>15</sup> In this article, we adopt the definition of Asamoah-Gyadu:

Pentecostalism [Pentecostals] refers to Christian groups which emphasize salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which pneumatic phenomena including ‘speaking in tongues’, prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general, [were] perceived as standing in historic continuity with the experiences of the early church as found especially in the Acts of the Apostles, are sought, accepted, valued and consciously encouraged among members as signifying the presence of God and experience of his Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Charismatic ministries are the contemporary versions of Pentecostal ministries in Ghana. Both believe in the experience of the Holy Spirit in worship life and vibrant worship services. Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries in Ghana are mostly founded by indigenous Ghanaians. In Ghana, Charismatic ministries are not found in the main-line Churches such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Methodist Church Ghana, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana etc. The Charismatic ministries are independent Churches that compete with the main-line Churches for members. It is significant to mention that the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana have been able to accommodate charismatic group called Catholic Charismatic renewal in the Church.

To achieve my goal, I will discuss some literature on inductive Bible studies and mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics so as to appreciate their significance and to locate a common platform between the two. Scripture interpretation in Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries in Ghana will be examined to find its strength and weaknesses. Inductive Bible studies and mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics will

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15. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Development within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 10-13.

16. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 13.

be proposed as a hermeneutical approach to biblical interpretation by Pentecostal/Charismatic ministries in Ghana.

## **Some Scholarly Views on IBS and MTBH: A Common Goal**

There are several methods propounded by scholars for the study and interpretation of the Bible. IBS is one hermeneutical procedure for the study of the biblical material. IBS is being encouraged in the West to make it possible for Westerners (people) to better understand the Bible in their own context. For that reason IBS was initially called “English Bible.”<sup>17</sup> It lays emphasis on a lay-oriented interpretation and total dependence on the canon. MTBH as propounded by several African scholars is directed towards scripture translations and commentaries in African local languages so that it will take into consideration the religio-cultural and social norms of African societies in the interpretation of scripture. Invariably, foreign perspectives unconsciously accompany translations and exegetical procedures developed by missional cultures for receptor cultures, so there must be a conscious effort to either eliminate or minimize foreign intrusions and carefully replace them within the settings or environment of the reader or interpreter of the Bible. IBS and MTBH share that objective with perhaps different approaches in different contexts. Just as Asbury Theological Seminary found the need to have a center for IBS and a journal of IBS, Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana have found the need and established a “Centre for Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics” and Journal of Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics (JMTBH) to facilitate academic discourse on the subject matter. This is an indication of how serious academia has taken the issue of contextualization of biblical texts. The common ground between IBS and MTBH which this study seeks to project is (i) the desire to have the Bible in local receptor languages and (ii) the engagement of a person’s worldview in the interpretive journey. The

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17. Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 2.



point of disagreement between the two is the emphasis on the canon by IBS, whilst MTBH may consult extra-biblical materials for interpretation.

D. R. Bauer<sup>18</sup> traces the history of IBS to its proponents William Rainey Harper and Wilbert Webster White. They were motivated to make the Bible and its commentaries available in mother-tongue languages, while emphasizing the teaching and learning of Hebrew and Greek languages in the universities as a prerequisite for good translations. A. M. Howell acknowledges the efforts of African scholars in translation works and writing commentaries; he adds that many of the commentaries in Africa were undertaken by Western missionaries. He further stated that “Language as a vehicle of culture is intricately intertwined with beliefs, values, and the worldview of its speakers.”<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the recently published *African Bible Commentary* was written in English. Howell seems to indicate that translations and commentaries in African languages will come along with the African worldviews. He elaborates that “Writing a commentary based on the mother-tongue Scriptures requires not only grappling with the meanings of words, phrases and expressions in that language, but also interacting with the Bible in other languages, such as Hebrew, Greek and English as well as other African languages.”<sup>20</sup> It is problematic that many students do not want to study Hebrew and Greek because they think they are not necessary for preaching. There is therefore a need to review the approach to the teaching of biblical languages so that students will be interested in studying them.

Without denying that English translations of the Bible is useful, Ekem postulates that as a prerequisite for dialogical exegesis, there is the need for Bible translations to be done in African mother-tongue

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18. David R. Bauer, “Inductive Biblical Study: History, Character, and Prospects in a Global Environment,” *AsTJ* 68 (2013): 42-55.

19. Allison M. Howell, “Beyond Translating Western Commentaries: Bible Commentary Writing in African Languages,” *Journal of Africa Christian Thought* 13 (2010): 21-33.

20. Howell, “Beyond Translating Western Commentaries,” 26.

languages. He uses the term *πρωτότοκος* (first born) (Col. 1:15-17) which can be translated in *Akan* as “*abɔdɛ nyina farbaa*, that is, the foundation and source of all creation to show that *πρωτότοκος* in the context of Colossae and as translated by the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and other English versions may not necessarily be ‘first born of all creations’ in the *Akan* context. Such rendering fits better in the context of Colossians....Jesus becomes, in a metaphorical sense, their divinely ordained *ɔkandzifo*, pioneer,”<sup>21</sup> by this a dynamic equivalent translations is preferred over the literal word for word translation of the Bible.

There is the need for translations and commentaries in vernacular languages to meet the demand for Bible interpretation that will have a lasting effect in a religious pluralistic environment. Ekem’s view is fundamental to IBS in bringing the recipient’s worldview into the interpretative process. Some scholars refer to MTBH as African biblical hermeneutics. G. Ossom-Batsa<sup>22</sup> argues that until the 1960s, biblical interpretations in Ghana were influenced by Western cultural values. This assertion was limited to the main-line Churches that were founded by Euro-American missionary agencies/societies. In the attempts to wean themselves from foreign influences underlining biblical interpretation, African scholars began to interpret the Bible in dialogue with socio-cultural values of Africa, now known as ‘African biblical hermeneutics’. Interpretation must influence the lives of contemporary audience to make informed choices. African biblical hermeneutics does not necessarily mean that the interpreter must be an African or live in Africa, but should be any interpreter who takes into account the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political situations of Africa in his/her theologizing.

Deducing from White, Bauer states that “a deductive approach is practiced, in which students were spoon-fed information and told what

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21. John D. K. Ekem, “Biblical Exegesis in an African Pluralistic Context: Some Reflections,” *Journal of Africa Christian Thought* 6 (2003): 30-34.

22. George Ossom-Batsa, “African Interpretation of the Bible in Communicative Perspective” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 91-104.

to think over against an inductive approach that will give students the resources and encouragement to discover truth, and especially biblical truth, for themselves.”<sup>23</sup> The character of IBS is a canonical approach to the interpretation of the Bible that empowers faith and helps the audience own Christianity for themselves. It does not approach the biblical text with suspicion nor try to develop a canon within a canon by relying heavily on external sources. This will facilitate the translation and commentaries in a mother-tongue. Inductive refers to evidential and an open approach to biblical interpretation whilst deductive refers to conclusive theological presuppositions. The horizon of the text must communicate with the horizon of the reader as an individual encounter with the text.

Stating the importance of Bible translations and commentaries in African languages, Howell<sup>24</sup> argues that the contrast and gap that exists between the ancient *Sitz im Leben* of Palestine and that of contemporary African societies make the interpretation of the Bible very difficult; the reason being that many of the Bibles and commentaries in Africa were written in English. This is due to the overemphasis on the English language as the main language for instruction in schools and where speakers of the language were considered as being enlightened. According to Howell, as of 2010, “The whole Bible was available in thirteen Ghanaian languages. The New Testament is available in a further twenty-six languages.”<sup>25</sup> If Ghana is made-up of about 50 languages<sup>26</sup> besides many dialects, then it is woefully in adequate.

In an article titled “Biblical Exegesis in an African Pluralistic Context: Some Reflections”, Ekem discussed the importance of biblical interpretation for Africans and the use of mother-tongue for

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23. Bauer, “Inductive Biblical Study,” 11.

24. Howell, “Beyond Translating Western Commentaries,” 23.

25. Howell, “Beyond Translating Western Commentaries,” 21.

26. Kwesi Yankah, *Education, Literacy and Governance: A Linguistic Inquiry into Ghana's Burgeoning Democracy* (Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2006), 12.

exegesis in an African pluralistic setting.<sup>27</sup> He holds that the Bible is an indispensable document in the hands of African Christians which makes hermeneutics an important exercise. The religious climate of the compilers of the Bible resonates with that of many African societies and it is an added advantage for African biblical exegetes. Two issues face African biblical exegetes: either to interpret the Bible based on traditional religiosity or to interpret the Bible in the context of contemporary issues in African society. Ekem argues that biblical interpretation ought to have a dialogical relationship with African worldviews in order to determine the intent of the author and what the text means in an African context. Alternatively put, the “religio-cultural presuppositions” must be brought face to face with the Judeo-Christian scriptures in order to have an impact on the communities in Africa; this calls for dialogical exegesis.

Ossom-Batsa posits that there is the scholarly (or academic exegesis) and the popular or lay exegesis of the Bible. A popular or lay interpretation is the attempt by African Christians to understand and contextualize the message of the Bible – devotional studies of the Bible. For the African Christian, reading the Bible is seeing him/herself in a continuous dialogue with God to continue what He did with the biblical characters. Simply put, in African exegesis, scripture passages are chosen to directly benefit the contemporary audience.<sup>28</sup> Ossom-Batsa further explains that a communicative perspective is implied in both the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the biblical text. The biblical text and the environment of the audience lead to contextualization and will influence the choices that the reader will make concerning issues in life. The challenges are lack of funds by universities to fund research, globalization which is fast affecting the cultures of Africa and the inferiority complex by some African theologians.<sup>29</sup>

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27. Ekem, “Biblical Exegesis,” 34.

28. Ossom-Batsa, “African Interpretation,” 93-94.

29. Ossom-Batsa, “African Interpretation,” 99-100.

IBS involves observation, interpretation, appropriation or application and correlation: observation involves a general survey of a biblical book, a narrative, a sentence, a phrase etc. and the raising of relevant questions which the interpretation will answer. Interpretation involves answering questions raised during observation. Background study, literary context, word study etc. are necessary tools in this approach/component. Appropriation or application is to evaluate the biblical teaching to determine its relevance for the contemporary audience. Correlation is to relate or synchronize the biblical teachings to other books, narratives, sentences, phrases of the Bible to develop a theology. IBS has a rich historical culture and a future due to its approach to make the experience of the reader of the Bible relevant to its interpretation.<sup>30</sup>

Discussing the importance of MTBH to church growth and decline of African Independent Churches (AICs), F. M. Amevenku<sup>31</sup> suggests a theologically oriented mother-tongue theologizing as a solution to the challenges of the AICs in West Africa. The AICs were the forbearers of independent Christianity in many parts of West Africa after the missionary led Christianity. In other words, they are the African independent Pentecostal Christian denomination founded by indigenous Africans. One of the main challenges that caused the decline of AICs is poor biblical interpretation. Although they use the locally translated versions of the Bible, they interpret it literally. The AICs consider formal theological education as Westernization and rely mainly on charisma or the Spirit for the interpretation of the Bible. Popular or lay interpretation is dominant in the AICs. It does not consider the context of the biblical text; it only takes cognizance of the contemporary context of audience. This approach does not investigate the intended meaning of the text by the author when in fact, “the primary aim of biblical hermeneutics is to get to the intended meaning

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30. Bauer, “Inductive Biblical Study,” 14-25.

31. Frederick Mawusi Amevenku, “Mother-tongue Biblical Interpretation and the Future of African Instituted Christianity in Ghana,” *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 18 (2014): 133-48.

of an author of a biblical book and to delineate such a text for the benefit of contemporary audience.”<sup>32</sup>

M. S. Jamir<sup>33</sup> discusses the applicability of IBS to the Christian tribal communities of Northeast India. His examination of the issues is focused on the appropriation component of IBS. Tribal theology is the attempt to contextualize the Bible to tribal groups in Northeast India where there exists the belief that “God manifests himself in trees, stones, sand, water and other natural resources.”<sup>34</sup> Jamir contends that even though Seminaries and Bible Colleges abound in Northeast India, the understanding of the Bible is very shallow consequently; the Bible is regarded by many as if dropped from heaven without human involvement. There is no critical engagement in the context of the biblical text which would indicate its appropriation for contemporary audience. Jamir avers “The imperative need among Christians from Northeast India is a contextual theology that is biblically centered, one that will also enable them to weave their own cultural identity in light of Scriptures.”<sup>35</sup> The appropriation of IBS in Northeast India must depend on the knowledge of the facilitator, the background to biblical texts or narratives even if the information is written in English language, as long as it will help unearth the background of the text, it must be pursued. This will make contextualization balanced and appropriate in the context of Northeast India.

We can deduce from the above that biblical interpretation is forcefully drifting to the quest to make the message of the Bible relevant to contemporary audience without neglecting its historical context. Christians all over the world are yearning for the interpretation of the Bible in their respective context. This is a signal that the context

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32. Amevenku, “Mother-tongue Biblical Interpretation,” 138.

33. M. Sashi Jamir, “Inductive Bible Study: Contextual Appropriation in Northeast India,” *AsTJ* 68 (2013): 6-35.

34. Jamir, “Inductive Bible Study,” 44.

35. Jamir, “Inductive Bible Study,” 46.

of a missionary culture unconsciously accompanies the interpretation of the Bible to the receptor audience of a different context. Once the receptor becomes established in the faith; he/she would like to explore his/her environment in the light of the biblical text. This approach has the potential of helping communities own the Bible and become established in the faith.

## Scripture Interpretation by PCMs in Ghana Today

In view of the emphasis on the Spirit, some suggest that Pentecostalism has no human founder; its founder is the Spirit.<sup>36</sup> However, the Spirit did not work in a vacuum; it engaged William J. Seymour and others to begin the Pentecostal movement.<sup>37</sup> The AICs are similar to the Pentecostal movement in the unflinching emphasis on pneumatic experience. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu defines Pentecostalism as an experiential religion that lays emphasis on the possession of the Spirit<sup>38</sup> leading to the manifestations of the gifts as recorded in 1 Cor 12:1-11, particularly healing, prophecy, exorcism and speaking in tongues. The manifestations of the gifts were considered as in continuity to that of the apostles of Jesus recorded in the book of Acts, and it is part of the salvific package of God. Asamoah-Gyadu succinctly adds “What defines Pentecostalism is the experience of the Holy Spirit in transformation, radical discipleship and manifestations of acts of power that demonstrate the presence of the kingdom of God among his people.”<sup>39</sup> There can be some Pentecostal features in denominations that are not known to be

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36. Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 1.

37. William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 16.

38. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Pentecostalism and the Missiological Significance of Religious Experience in Africa Today: The Case of Ghana ‘Church of Pentecost,’” *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 12 (2002): 30-57.

39. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘The Promise in for you and your Children’: Pentecostal Spirituality, Mission and Discipleship in Africa” in *Mission Spirituality and*

Pentecostal. Pentecostalism attracts people of low educational and economic status.<sup>40</sup> According to K. Warrington, 87% of Pentecostals live in poverty stricken parts of the world <sup>41</sup> which includes Africa. Evaluating the effect of Pentecostalism on Historic Mission Churches and its spread, C. N. Omenyo argues that Pentecostalism is soon becoming a “main-line” Christian denomination in Africa and in Ghana in Particular.<sup>42</sup> The 2010 Population and Housing Census in Ghana states that the population of Pentecostal/Charismatics is the majority Christian denomination at 28.3%; followed by 18.4% Protestants.<sup>43</sup> This suggests that any scriptural interpretation by Pentecostals/Charismatics ministries will have a wider effect on Christians, more so than other denominations.

The Bible is central to the daily lives of the members of PCMs; consequently, they refer to themselves as ‘Bible-believing’ or ‘Full Gospel churches’ which reflects in the choice of naming their ministries.<sup>44</sup> As a sign of total belief in the Bible during preaching, instead of the Bible says, some pastors personalize it to say ‘my Bible’ says referring to the same Christian document. According to Asamoah-Gyadu, African Pentecostal Christianity prefers the archaic

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*Authentic Discipleship*, ed. Wonsuk Ma and Kenneth R. Ross (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 10.

40. Abamfo A. Atiemo, “The Evangelical Christian Fellowship and the Charismatization of Ghanaian Christianity” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007): 43-65.

41. Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 13-14.

42. Cephas Narh Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2002), 306.

43. 2010 Population & Housing Census, Summary Report of Final Results (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, May 2012), 40.

44. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Books international, 2013), 161.



KJV of the Bible over contemporary translations due to the weighty language of the KJV and because it is believed to be more authentic than newer translations. The KJV is usually preferred by the Classical Pentecostals such as the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Assemblies of God (AoG), The Apostolic Church (AC) among others. However, the AICs and contemporary Pentecostal/Charismatic preachers in market places use the *Akan* translations of the Bible due to the low levels of educational attainment by the preachers and their audiences.<sup>45</sup> Scripture interpretation is done at the popular or lay level where the environment, hopes and aspirations of a contemporary audience is a key factor in determining meaning.

For example, some PCMs in Ghana practice feet washing for various reasons and on special occasions, claiming that Jesus instructed it in John 13:1-20. Some Churches practice feet washing prior to Communion Service (Lord's Supper). J. Quayesi-Amakye observes that feet washing often take place in Watered Garden.<sup>46</sup> He explains that just as feet washing in oriental society were done to wash dirt from the feet of guests, feet washing is done for persons who might have soiled themselves spiritually. While washing the feet of a member of the Church, the Pastor says the prayer: "Today I wash your feet from setbacks, faulty foundations, and pray for your promotion, [I pray for you] to be lifted up. Any filth around you; any demonic spell you have trodden upon, we wash you of it, lift you from the pit to your glorious height."<sup>47</sup> It implies that feet washing is an alternative means of deliverance from the works of the devil and the restoration of one's fortunes, which is believed to have been stolen by the devil. P. Gifford writes that feet washing is

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45. Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, *Urban Public Space Evangelism: Evangelism in Market Places in Ghana* (Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2015), 65-70.

46. Watered Garden is a ministry founded by Prophet Atsu Manasseh located at Dansoman a suburb of Accra.

47. Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, *Prophetism in Ghana Today: A Study on Trends in Ghanaian Pentecostal Prophetism* (Scotts Valley: Create Space Publishing, 2013), 127-28.

done several times a year in Winners' Chapel in Ghana. It is done to bless the feet of members of the Church to possess what belongs to them (Josh 14:9).<sup>48</sup> At a Sunday Service at Alive Chapel International located at Tesano in Accra, Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako, Founder and General Overseer announced that there will be feet washing service for men for prosperity.<sup>49</sup> It is absolutely clear that feet washing is practiced by PCMs for members with the sole purpose of receiving a miracle or deliverance from the powers of the devil. Now, I argue that Jesus did not instruct physical feet washing but that the principle underlining feet washing which is humility and service was what Jesus emphasized. This is set in the context of a mission as service to humanity. Although there may be some testimonies of miracles after ones' feet is washed, it is imperative to state that Jesus performed many miracles and cast out many demons without washing the feet of their victims. The interpretation resonates with the belief in many African societies that spirits inhabit water which can be used to benefit humans.<sup>50</sup> It is obvious that there is no consideration of the historical background of the text of Josh 14:9 and John 13:1-20. There is always a present tense associated with the biblical text which suggests a reenactment of the biblical narrative with no historical background gap to be bridged.<sup>51</sup> This is dangerous because it does not lay a good scriptural foundation. Scripture must not always be interpreted to support traditional assertion but must be interpreted in the light of those beliefs. In Great Fire Pentecostal Ministry located at Bortianor in Accra, Luke 8: 26-39 was interpreted to mean that during a deliverance/exorcism service, the voice of demons must be heard

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48. Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 60.

49. Participant observation by authors March 15, 2015. The actual date for the feet washing was March 16, 2015.

50. John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to Africa Religion* (Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers Limited, 1975), 43, 151.

51. Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 190.

speaking through their victims before they can be cast out.<sup>52</sup> However, Jesus exorcized many demon spirits without engaging them in a conversation like the Gadarene demoniac (Matt 8:28-34). This interpretation resonates with the African belief and experience where evil spirits speak through persons possessed by them<sup>53</sup> in a hallucinated mood or state.

It is obvious that in the desire and attempt to make scripture passages speak to/with/for the African Christian environment, dialogical exegetical principles that engage the text with the experience of the interpreter is weakly done in favor of the context of the contemporary audience. IBS comprises: observation, interpretation, appropriation or application and correlation. During observation, PCMs observe the context of contemporary audience at the detriment of observing the text. Interpretation is largely dependent on happenings in the environment of the audience more than in the text. Application or appropriation seems to be the major emphasis of PCMs, but if observation and interpretation is incorrect, application or appropriation will limp painfully. Correlation is done at face value. Scripture passages are being chosen based on identical words which may have different themes, ideas and concepts. Simply put, they embark on biblicism rather than theological correlation.

## IBS and MTBH for PCMs in Ghana

PCMs in Ghana do not have strict instructions governing biblical interpretation and conduct of members as compared to mainline Historic Mission Churches. Therefore the adoption of IBS or MTBH, or the combination of both, will go a long way to maintain and improve on their membership base in Africa and in Ghana in particular. PCMs in Ghana do well to use various local language translations of the Bible,

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52. Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, "Exegetical Analysis of Luke 8:26-39 in the Light of Contemporary Deliverance ministry in Ghana's Christianity" *Journal of Applied Thought* 3 (2015): 115-37.

53. Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ: An Approach to Inculturation in Evangelism* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 95-104.

probably due to the low level of education of some of its leaders. It is significant to mention that there are a few who use English translations, preferably KJV to preach. However the use of the local language translated Bibles to preach suggests that the interpreter/preacher would have to think in that particular language of translation, thereby considering the context of the audience in the interpretive process. Since IBS and MTBH are flexible and context sensitive, they will positively coincide with the flexible nature of the worship services and scripture interpretation in PCMs.

A major challenge to biblical interpretation in PCMs in Ghana is the overreliance on the Spirit for scripture interpretation. The belief is that since the Spirit inspired the authors of the books of the Bible, and hence one does not need formal theological training to interpret the scriptures. Therefore formal theological education is considered as antithetical to spirituality.<sup>54</sup> Although some PCMs have found the need for formal theological education, there is quite a number that do not think that formal theological education is necessary. It is obviously correct that the Spirit that gave inspiration is needed to give illumination for the contemporary reader of the Bible, but the Spirit does not substitute theological education. The Spirit may sometimes reveal some scriptural interpretations, but we are yet to hear of the Spirit revealing an author of a biblical book or some genre to a pastor. Formal theological education that engages the principles of IBS and MTBH will be a sure way for a secure future for PCMs in Ghana and Africa at large.

## **Conclusion**

I have attempted to propose IBS and MTBH for contemporary PCMs in Ghana and Africa at large. The Bible has a unique place in the lives of many African Christians. It is not treated as a book of fiction or a textbook on such topics as law, economics, geography or finance. It is a book with sacred power to cause desired change. Interpretation of the Bible is a daunting task in biblical studies. For many African Christians, the Bible must be interpreted without losing its sacredness.

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54. Cephas N. Omenyo, "The Spirit-Filled Goes to School: Theological Education in African Pentecostalism," *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* 13 (2008): 41-55.

IBS is a form of interpretation that is flexible and upholds the canonicity of the biblical text and the environment of the reader or contemporary audiences. It involves observation, interpretation, application and correlation; MTBH emphasizes dialogical exegesis between African religio-cultural and social settings and the biblical text. Both approaches are directed towards contextualization of the text to different societies. In view of the flexible nature of PCMs in Ghana, the adoption of either of the approaches or the combination of both will go a long way to sustain and increase its membership base in Africa and Ghana in particular.