THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Syncretism in African Christian Mission: Assessing the Role of Historical-critical Method of Hermeneutics

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Abstract:

Christianity in Africa is experiencing significant exponential growth. Its vastness in terms of numbers is indeed broadening yet its actual spiritual depth remains illusory and elusive. While Africa is rapidly becoming one of the world regions for benchmarking Christianity, syncretism is among its major threats. Syncretism calls into question the authenticity of African Christian identity in the light of the historic Christian faith and hinders its spirituality. Although a degree of syncretism is unavoidable in Christian mission it has the propensity to confuse and mar God's agenda in His mission. There is need, not only to decry its negative effects but also dig it up to its roots and deal with situations that motivate it. African Christian mission apparently still grapples with some of the errors caused by methods of hermeneutics that occupied the Western worldview at the time of missionary expedition. This study is library based and uses secondary data gleaned from archival print and electronic media sources. Due to the vastness of African Christian landscape, purposeful data collection procedure was used to gather relevant data and, because of their exponential growth, only Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have been surveyed. The study traces syncretism in African Christian mission to the historical-critical method of hermeneutics which in itself was a product of a major shift that occurred in the West especially from around the 18th century, the age of Enlightenment, and which was popularized at the time when European missionaries were gaining foothold into the African mission field. It shows that historical-critical method of hermeneutics has furthered the cause of philosophical approach to biblical interpretation and attempted to silence God, the Author, from speaking through the Scripture, His written Word. Subsequently, a kind of gospel has been presented to Africa deprived of its transforming power and denied opportunity to confront and interrogate African cultural milieu so as to manifest meaningfully in the lives of its recipients. This paper thus, suggests a dialogical approach to the prevailing syncretic situation with a view to engaging the following tools; 1) seeking to understand a foreign mission front through cultural relativism, 2) evaluating it through biblical theology, and 3) discerning it through prayer. This will contribute significantly not only to dealing with the ensuing syncretism in the African Christian landscape but also benefit those who intend to do mission cross-culturally.

Keywords: Syncretism, historical-critical hermeneutics, enlightenment, pentecostal/charismatic

1. Introduction

A survey into the history of Christianity in Africa shows that prior to the era of missionaries, Africa did not exist in a religious vacuum. African Traditional Religions shaped the core of its worldview almost solely before other religious constructs crept into the limelight. From the 1st century A.D, Christianity had broken that monopoly and was already rife in northern Africa however, it was not long until Islam virtually displaced the faith of Christ from the continent around the 7th century AD. Islamic *jihad* was launched in a big way and in '697, Carthage fell to the Arabs...won friendship of their chiefs who in turn accepted Islam' (Baur2009:29). That notwithstanding, African Traditional Religion maintained stake in Africa South of the Sahara. But the story of the faith of Christ was not to disappear like that, during the period around the close of 18th century, the era of European missionary expedition to Africa, Christianity made a major comeback to the African soil and has since risen gradually to the topmost rank in the religious landscape.

The arrival of Christian missionaries then found a continent in religious scramble and with shifting and syncretic worldviews in which major players were the African Traditional Religions, Islam and Christianity. According to Pew Research Center the growth of Christianity and Islam since 1900 paints a picture of a century of religious tolerance and tension between the two religions especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Pew Research Center, 2010). The scramble then was to scoop as much as possible from the plate of African religious landscape that had until then predominantly for African Traditional Religion. The speed at which Christianity came to exchange ranks with the traditional religion is a matter that can only be attributed to the hand of God alone. This upsurge does not singularly belong to one family of Christian movements but a contribution of all denominations. However, Pentecostal and charismatic Christians are taking the lead. A report on the size and distribution of the world's Christian population shows that of all Christian movements and denominations, Pentecostals and Charismatics put together command the biggest share of upto about 27% worldwide and that, of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa, Pentecostals amount to 15% (Pew Research Center, 2011). Impact of such a movement that is already posting leading figures in terms of affiliation in Africa cannot be underestimated in

defining African Christian identity. That is why this study finds it fitting a critique that is fairly representative. A few select voices from Africa will be highlighted in the succeeding segments to help substantiate the level of syncretism in the African Christian mission story.

The kind of growth witnessed in African Christianity has been a point of discussion with mixed reactions from leaders and scholars alike. Theologians and missiologists have equally shared their concerns, some taking a positive view of it while others preferring to taken a negative stand brushing it aside and simply comparing it to a broad but shallow river that is only an inch deep yet a mile wide, in other words, a river that can easily be waded through, implying that it is not grounded in the deep things of God. It has been said to been said to be a situation in which, 'numbers are celebrated and quality is compromised' (Para-Mallam, 2008:31). However, these viewpoints are not farfetched; African Christianity is of a unique blend having been nurtured by traditions, western culture, and biblical theology. Of the three top religions i.e., African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam which are competing for the African space, traditional cultures continue to sway a significant following. Pew report further shows that large numbers of Africans, despite being active participants in Christianity or Islam, also incorporate tenets of African traditional religions like evil spirits, witchcraft, sacrifices to ancestors, traditional religious healers, and reincarnation, to mention but a few. It indicates that much of the daily life of an African, Christian or Muslim, is still steered by the African worldview, for instance, the report shows in part that 'in four countries (Tanzania, Mali, Senegal and South Africa) more than half the people surveyed believe that sacrifices to ancestors or spirits can protect them from harm'(Pew Research Center, 2010).In essence, a glance from the surface makes this exponential growth appear as if it is a success story of Christian mission accomplishedbut, when subjected to missiologiscrutiny, it turns out that it is not yet a celebration, African traditional religions have resisted change and Christianity is riding on a syncretic identity.

Thus, this study is built upon three premises that form major segments of this piece of work.

- Firstly, that Christianity as brought by European missionaries to Africa came with elements of syncretism traceable to the influence of the era of Enlightenment in the West when biblical hermeneutics took a rational philosophical twist. This situation marred appropriate interpretation of Scripture and weakened its authority such that, in its dealings with the African worldview, certain norms were not accorded appropriate opportunity to interact with the Gospel; consequently, the error of syncretism was perpetuated.
- Secondly, that historical-critical method of hermeneutics is a product of a rationalistic theory of biblical interpretation that was developed and popularized during the Enlightenment and subsequently travelled to Africa in the bark of some of the missionaries, mostly unintentionally, but continues to impact negatively on Africa presenting mixed signals of, in one hand, the faith of Christ to which they have been introduced, embraced, and confess while, on the other hand, the in-built and entrenched traditional worldview that has not been dislodged or transformed by their new-found Christian faith.
- Thirdly, that it is possible to overcome the negative effects impinged upon biblical interpretation by historical-critical hermeneutics and free the divine voice of God, the Author to speak to Africans through the Scripture. This study, therefore recommends the use of a dialogical hermeneutical model in dealing with foreign mission frontiers. 'Dialogical' here is used in the sense that cultures, for instance; of Bible times, of the missionary, as well as of the recipient, are given appropriate chances to interact with each other. The suggested model engages the use of tools of understanding foreign mission field and its cultures through cultural relativism, evaluating it through biblical theology, and discerning it through prayer. This will contribute significantly to dealing with the ensuing syncretism in the African Christian landscape.

2. Syncretism in the West

Syncretism has been defined variously in Christian theological circles especially from the beginning of the 21st century although it is not necessarily a Christian term. It is an imperative topic in missiological discourse since it often accompanies any attempt to venture into a cross-cultural domain. Scott Moreau rightly depicts it as the, 'blending of one idea, practice or attitude with another' (Moreau 2000:924). In reference to the blend of Christianity and folk religion at the close of the 20th century, Paul Hiebert and others have expounded the same sense of the meaning in the African context and defined it as 'combining elements of Christianity with folk beliefs and practices in such a way that the gospel loses its integrity and message' (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, 1999, 16, 177). But at this juncture, it is worth mentioning that syncretism can be a product of intentional endeavor to exert change or meaning, that it can be either positive or negative, and that it often occurs unintentionally. This is what William J. Larkin alludes to as having occurred while dealing with the early Christian witness. He states that it was 'unintended but unavoidable consequence' (Larkin, 2004, September 23-25, 1-3). For that reason, it is unnecessary to exhibit a prejudicial attitude towards the West before attempting to understand the context in which those European missionaries found themselves as they heeded the call to break virgin ground for the Gospel in the continent.

This piece of work neither intends to censure nor apportion blames to the Western missionaries for their work in the continent. It takes the position that their syncretic tendencies were but consequences of good intentions. Further, it does not mean to say that syncretism can only be traced to the age of Enlightenment but rather that the mindset of the era in terms of methods of hermeneutics is directly linked to intentions. Further role of the West especially through its pioneering missionary work in propagating and shaping the historic Christian faith in Africa can in no way be refuted- Africa owes its holistic development to western missionaries who sacrificed the comfort of their homeland, strained family bonds, and risked dear lives not only to plant the seed of the gospel in a foreign and often hostile soil but also to bring with it formal education, advancement in medicine and health sciences, as well as socio-economic achievements as can be seen

today. The phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa is directly attributed to the vision and resolve of European missionaries who saw their mission field not only in Africa but the entire globe. In 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference they envisioned 'completing the evangelization of the non-Christian world within a generation' (David B. Barret 1970:39). But looking at the methods used by some of the missionaries in interpreting Scripture and applying it the Africans some linkages to syncretism become evident and the most significant link under scrutiny here is of a clearer understanding of what hermeneutics entails.

Hermeneutics is a term that generally refers to interpretation. It is a derivative from the Greek *hermeneuo* which is rendered 'translate, interpret' (Klein, 2000:344). The importance of hermeneutics cannot be over-emphasized, all of life involves some kind of interpretation, the biblical message would be meaningless without hermeneutics yet, if handled inappropriately, it has the propensity to distort meaning and mar the historic Christian faith. How Scripture is perceived and presented to an audience determines how it impacts them. Anthony C. Thiselton, expounding the definition of hermeneutics rightly puts it that, 'biblical hermeneutics investigates more specifically how we read, understand, apply, and respond to biblical texts' (Thiselton, 2009:1). Pursuing this train of thought leads to the fact that how African people have responded to the Bible is directly proportionate to the way these pioneer missionaries responded and dealt with it. It can thus be seen that hermeneutics is not a trivial subject. No wonder, the task of handling the Word of God has not merely been of concern to theologians of modern times; hermeneutics have often exhibited a level of keenness in handling the biblical text. David I. Brewer, in his published dissertation, challenges some popular opinion that the New Testament writers might have followed Jewish rabbinic approaches that were not true to the biblical text. He asserts,

The predecessors of the rabbis before 70 CE did not interpret Scripture out of context, did not look for any meaning in Scripture other than the plain sense, and did not change the text to fit their interpretation, though the later rabbis did all these things (Brewer, 1992:1).

Concerned about contemporary hermeneutics in the light of the early church, David S. Dockery casts a gaze back to the very first century of Christianity and observes that critical to biblical interpretation then was a strong conviction that the Scripture was not merely the word of man but of divine origin and that human task of interpretation was to translate it into life (Dockery, 1992:27). It is something worth noting that all the way from that early period up to sometime in the 18th century, the work of biblical interpretation was mainly confined within the theological domain under which there were set rules. Hermeneutic concern was then on methodologies for particular kinds of Scriptural texts and philosophy played a minimal role. However, it was soon after the widespread influence of the Enlightenment that a new shift pushed hermeneutics to the realm of human sciences; it was no longer singly within the ranks of theologians. Gathering from his work, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Paul Ricoeur, one of the 20th century philosophers upon whom the shift is attributed, hermeneutics took a general bent towards epistemology and moved further to embrace ontological inclination with theories of a philosophical orientation (Ricoeur, 1981:43-62).

The Enlightenment brought a major shift in the approach of hermeneutics towards philosophy under the influence of Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, the founder of modern hermeneutics who, Thiselton declares, 'remains one of the greatest philosophical theologians of the nineteenth century' (Thiselton, 2009:148). Whether Schleiermacher was aware of the damage his motivation towards philosophical interpretation would cost the missionary vision to evangelize the entire world is unclear but it is in record that he 'delighted in the scholarship of the Enlightenment [and] neglected the Old Testament but read widely in philosophical theology and philosophy, especially Kant, Lessing, and Hume' (Thiselton, 2009:148). What concerns this paper much is the neglect of biblical text for an inclination towards theories of human reasoning. The Enlightenment, occurring coincidentally during the time of Christian missionary explosion into Africa can hence be presumably called to responsibility for affecting hermeneutics and subsequently opening a major door for syncretism that has continued to confuse Christian mission in Africa.

It is so because, as already mentioned, the shift towards a philosophical interpretation drifted the perspective of biblical hermeneutics from the traditional pre-modern methods that upheld the role of divinity, to that of modernity under the influence of human reason. In essence, as human thought was maximized in probing Scripture, the divine nature of the text was minimized such that when it was brought face-to-face with African traditional tenets, it was apparent that a situation of dilution of the gospel would occur and it did, resulting into a syncretic construct. Making reference to syncretism, Scott Moreau rightly explains, 'Traditionally among Christians it has been used of the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements' (Moreau, 2000:924). He further correctly observes that, 'syncretism of some form has been seen everywhere the church has existed' (Moreau, 2000:924). Thus, the meaning of syncretism has been broadened and neutralized beyond the confines of the West to all the lands where the gospel has ever been preached including right from the West to the continent of Africa. But its linkage with the Enlightenment calls for a deeper scrutiny of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation for its role in secularizing the whole process and having been the bark through which syncretism sailed to Africa. Shawn B. Redford, an expert in biblical theology of mission and missiological hermeneutics who is abreast with the experience of doing mission in Africa, succinctly drives the point home in no better terms. He affirms, 'Western hermeneutics in the modern era have been guided predominantly by scientific reason. This has not only secularized the hermeneutical process, but it has opened the doors for secular biblical interpretation' (Redford, 2012:1). Among those secular biblical interpretations that was ushered into hermeneutics is the historical-critical method.

3. Historical-Critical Method of Hermeneutics

Apart from being a method motivated by scientific reason that introduce secularization in attempt to understand sacred Scripture, the role played by historical-critical method of hermeneutics was that of a vehicle through which

syncretism was transported to Africa. It is so because as an approach to biblical interpretation that focuses on human reason and denies divine inspiration, it is only obvious that the product would be a blend of human ideas arbitrarily patched up with the Word of God. Edgar V. McKnight, pointing at historical-critical method, out rightly observes that the 'basic postulate is that of human reason and the supremacy of reason as the ultimate criterion for truth' (McKnight, 1988:45). This method of interpretation was born during the Enlightenment, at a time when there was search for, according to Larkin, 'a fixed and permanent ahistorical matrix which could be appealed to in determining what is true, real, rational, right, and good' (Larkin, 1988:29; Bernstein, 1983:8-15). It is such a noble idea to make advancements in any sphere of learning especially if it is geared towards improving levels of understanding, so the domain of theology should not appear naïve when subjected to critical analysis because the end product of such discourses would be shed brighter light especially on what God is doing in His world. But when it becomes evident that the path taken towards the search for that highly needed clarity is only determined to dethrone the Author from His Word then something must be fundamentally wrong with that path. The clamor then, was to abandon the role of divine inspiration for a procedure that was purely open to human manipulation and subject finite reasoning. It is recorded that during the time, J. S. Semler, 'the real founder of biblical criticism...argued that the text and canon of the Bible owed their origin entirely to historical factors and conditions, and disregarded arguments about divine inspiration or doctrine' (Thiselton, 2009:139). Semler's criticism that implied disregard of divinity and doctrine was a groundbreaking assumption that fanned the fire of human effort to replace divine signature from the written Word. This is further demonstrated by the principles that drive historical-critical hermeneutics.

Having removed divine inspiration from the Scripture, the historical-critical hermeneut remains with a collection of data that is bound to be perceived merely as historical and therefore launches humanly into the task of interpretation using purely human reason as is laid bare in its undergirding principles. Under this rational method are enunciated three basic principles endorsed by John J. Collins, one of its proponents, 1) the principle of criticism which indicates that all knowledge relies upon the judgment of historical science therefore subjecting every assertion to rigorous testing and verification before acceptance is necessitated, 2) the principle of analogy which presupposes similarity of events hence indicating that what goes on presently is the criteria for understanding that which took place in the past, and 3) the principle of correlation which assumes that historical phenomena being related to one another lie upon a chain of cause and effect. These principles were endorsed by John J. Collins who is one of the strict proponents of historical-critical method (Propp, Halpern, and Freedman, 1990:2, 7).

These principles illustrate a degree of disconnect from the source of the text and inclination towards syncretism. They are based on human hypotheses and assumptions thus pointing to a conspicuous absence of the role of God the Inspirer and the ultimate authority upon whom all human knowledge and wisdom derive. Therefore, when through the principle of criticism, for example, the Holy Writ is subjected to finite rationalism and denied its capacity to judge human cultures, the possibility of syncretism becomes unchallengeable. Gerhard Maier, who broke ranks with the historical-critical method, made his points eloquently when he refuted it declaring that,

Acritical method must fail, because it represents an inner impossibility. For the correlative or counterpoint to revelation is not critique, but obedience; it is not correction of the text--not even on the basis of a partially recognized an applied revelation--but it is a let-me-be-corrected' (Maier, 1977:23).

Historical-critical principles in essence show that they have no place for God in biblical interpretation and interestingly make no sense of the sin problem. When missionaries inclined to this method presented the gospel to Africa the message, they preached failed to fully penetrate the very core of the African worldview within which was deeply entrenched a network of supernatural hierarchy of beings that ascribed meaning to life. Arguably, some of the issues that Christianity has had to deal with, especially in relation to African Christian theology, have a close connection to the historical-critical method of hermeneutics whose proponents brought with them a Bible stripped off its divine authority and which exhibited a disconnect from the supernatural which was a key factor in the African traditional religions. Pentecostals/Charismatics especially in Africa serve as good examples of what rational historical-critical hermeneutics has done to Christianity. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, analyzing the teaching of being born of water and the spirit among Pentecostal/Charismatic movements of Christianity in Africa, succinctly states,

What people consider important in theology are the things that address their religious needs. Encounters with the spiritual worlds, either as malevolent powers seeking to destroy people, marine spirits negating efforts at public morality, or as the performance of ritual in order to solicit help from the powers of beneficence, are important elements in African religiosity (Kalu, 2005, 3, 406).

Asamoah-Gyadu's sentiments echo a problematic situation that continues to bedevil African Christianity- a problem of spirituality that manifests itself in many forms of human behavior. It can be rightly argued that the gospel as was presented by some of the missionaries did not tackle what the African people deemed important to their religiosity. These Africans eagerly received the Word but, due to the method of its interpretation, found in it a weakened instrument perceived as a type of human literature that did not ignite flames of transformation from within where lay a deep connectivity to the supernatural world. For various reasons, Africans felt compelled to accept a new religious system without having dealt with the original issues of their old system, thus syncretism crept into their Christian identity from inception. Discussing critical contextualization as a means of tackling the prevalent situation, Paul Hiebert illustrates of how syncretism occurs by painting a picture of what befits the case of African interaction with the narrative of some of the missionaries. He demonstrates two factors that often possibly lead to syncretism; firstly, the denial of the old beliefs and practices- a situation that leads people to either view the gospel as foreign and reject it or slip the old cultural tenets underground where they continue to be practiced silently but concurrently with the gospel, and secondly, a situation of

uncritical acceptance of the old (Hiebert, 1984, VII, 3, 288-290). A casual engagement with any Christian movement in Africa is likely to portray the same picture, but for the scope of this paper only a study of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christian movement in Africa suffices as one of the religious forms that shed light on how historical-critical hermeneutics has participated in importing syncretism to Africa.

Voices from African scholarship have sounded serious alarm over what this hermeneutical method has done to biblical interpretation in Africa. The works of scholars like Justin S. Upkong and David Tuesday Adamovis-à-vis the historical-critical method of hermeneutics express discontent with the prevailing identity of Christianity. Adamo, for instance, faults seminaries and universities in Africa for neglecting African cultural milieu and perpetuating Eurocentric approach which was a construct of the colonial master. He calls for decolonization of the teaching of the Old Testament in Africa, suggesting instead African cultural hermeneutics, that is, 'rereading the Old Testament scripture from a premeditatedly Afrocentric perspective' (Adamo, 2005, 19, 3). Indeed, he is resoundingly right in reprimanding African academic centers for neglecting African culture. Surely that neglect alone would be equal to perpetuating syncretism by failure to tackle realities fronted by culture. The challenge of Adamo's train of thought lies squarely on the feeling of revenge. Justin Upkong also finds fault on the developments in biblical interpretations in the continent for having taken historical and hermeneutical directions, in his contribution to *The Bible in Africa* edited by Gerald O. West and Musa Dube, he accurately traces historical-critical method of hermeneutics to the Enlightenment, and affirms the fact that Biblical scholarship in Africa is to an extent, 'a child of these modern methods of Western biblical scholarship' (Upkong, 2000:11-28). The only bit of his assertion that raises curiosity is to hear him echo the voices of those who have observed African scholarship develop 'a parallel method of their own' (Upkong, 2000:11-28). This idea of 'parallel' sounds akin to syncretism and by it, Upkong can be construed to be making a call for a dualistic kind of *Christianities* within one in which allegiance is owed to Eurocentric approaches on one hand while on another Afrocentric domain reigns, just as given situations may demand. There are reactive polemics and prejudices leaning towards Afrocentric theology. But constraint ought to be exercised in dealing with errors that have already been committed, for by choosing such extreme stands, they only show that they too have drank from the same pot in which attempts to mute God from His text was brewed. Their fight against Eurocentric Christianity and call to an Afrocentric one is like jumping from one end of a continuum to another without paying attention to the damage it is bound to cause to the faith of Christ particularly in Africa.

It is possible to follow up syncretism and find its contribution to the African thirst for methods of their own and it is such a desire that has produced revivalist and African-oriented church movements in the likes of neo-propheticism whose birth is traced to an urge to 'serve the needs of those whose orientation to issues of life is rooted in the [African] primal worldview' (Omenyo and Atiemo, 2013, 19.1, 56). But why would they think of looking for an alternative orientation that appeals to their primal worldview? The answer to this question lies close to expressing discontent with the message that had been presented to them. It did not launch deep to scratch what itched them. Although these voices appear to express a level of discontent with the consequences of the philosophical methods of biblical interpretation brought by the West, a keener look at their proposed shift points to the fact that they too are bent towards philosophy, at least an African one now. At this juncture, one is left to wonder whether such movements are truly neo-prophetic as they are identified or *neo-enlightenment* in the light of exerting a philosophical shift to hermeneutics. Omenyo and Arthur, discussing the African biblical hermeneutical paradigm, affirm that it 'takes the African philosophy and worldview very seriously and desires to achieve an African expression of Pentecostalism' (Omenyo and Arthur, 2013, 19.1, 56). The desire to speak to the African worldview is a sound idea but the method employed can be faulted for being the same human reason that had opened doors for syncretism. As the 18th century age of Enlightenment propelled hermeneutics towards philosophy so seems the neo-prophetic movement and as the historical-critical hermeneutics progressed to more literal methods so appears to be the case in Africa among the neo-prophetic Pentecostal movement. In fact, voices have been raised against the hermeneutical trend of such movements which Omenyo and Arthur summarize in the following assertion: 'charges of literal interpretation and over-spiritualization have been leveled against Pentecostal hermeneutics, particularly neo-prophetic preachers in Africa' (Omenyo and Arthur, 2013, 19.1, 52). Such literalism has deepened syncretistic tendencies by gagging God and stripping Him off His text. Many Africans therefore seem to have taken the name of Christ but never had opportunity to engage with His Word and for that matter the continent has posted an exploding numerical growth yet their level of spiritual maturity remains questionable. Christianity to them is largely a religion of the lip but lacking the power to help them deal with real issues of life.

The list of occurrences in the negative trend of African Christian identity continues to build. Some of the examples that lead to questioning of its spiritual maturity and depict it shamefully include the Rwanda genocide of 1994 in which about 800,000 lives perished in a country that was then predominantly Christian. Timothy Longman tries to reconcile this unfortunate occurrence with the overwhelming Christian population of about 90% in the country. He observes, 'Not only were the vast majority of those who participated in the killings Christians, but the church buildings themselves also served as Rwanda's primary killing fields' (Longman, 2011:4). Kenya's 2007/8 post-election violence that destroyed over 1000 lives, maimed thousand and displaced hundreds of thousands is another hard question for Christianity to answer. It should be of concern to Christian mission that this again occurred in a nation that was mainly Christian. During that time, it was noted thus, 'Approximately 80 percent of the country practices Christianity; Protestants represent 58 percent of the Christian majority, Roman Catholics represent 42 percent.' (United States Department of State, 2007). The persistent question here is whether those referred to here as Christians are truly what they claim to be. Responding to the violent post-election eruption, Susan Kilonzo recognizes the viability of religious institutions to act as mobilizing agents for peace-building processes but in a quick rejoinder casts doubt on their willingness to rise above partisan politics (Kilonzo, 2009:100-101). She takes cognizance of the critical-historical role of the church in post-colonial Africa as of perpetuating

injustices right from the colonial era by failing to condemn them. About Kenya's post-election violence in 2007/8, she rightly observes, 'These injustices took place as religious groups and their leaders watched in silence' (Kilonzo, 2009:101).

Far from being the paradise envisaged at independence, Africa has been variously and negatively described. It has been called a bleeding continent by former Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya, a lost continent in economic terms by the International Monetary Fund and as a retarded continent by the late Professor Ali Mazrui. Tokunboh Adeyemo's search for what might have happened to Africa points towards different possibilities one of which is a culture of superstition and primitive or traditional worldviews (Adeyemo, 2009:3). The African worldview of old beliefs must have slipped underground in the presence of the gospel presented by European missionaries and the product can easily be seen in such cited incidents.

This paper considers Pentecostal movement however, it is not to imply that Pentecostal churches and their affiliates are necessarily syncretistic but rather because of their impact on Africa. Asamoah-Gyadu's resounding assertion that 'Pentecostalism is the fastest growing stream of Christianity in the world today' (Kalu, 2005, 3, 388) substantiates the validity of subjecting it to scrutiny. Indeed, according to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 'there are about 279 million Pentecostal Christians and 305 million charismatic Christians worldwide (Pew Research Centre, 2011). Thus, the Pentecostal stream cannot be ignored in discussing African Christianity.

In terms of hermeneutics, Kenneth J. Archer observes that Pentecostals, by the period of inception, inherited 'the popularistic 'Bible Reading Method'... an adaptation of the inductive approach which was already in use by the various holiness groups' (Archer, 2004:41). He further affirms the fact that Pentecostals experienced a hermeneutic shift stating that as they 'entered the universities and academic seminaries they abandoned the early Pentecostal 'Bible Reading Method' and adopted the Historical Critical approaches of Modernity' (Archer, 2004:131). Pentecostals' role in reshaping the African Christian landscape has therefore since been of significance. Asamoah-Gyadu's historical account states that 'Classical Pentecostal denominations, some of which have roots in the 1901 Charles Parham and 1906 William Seymour Azusa Street revivals of North America, have gained much prominence in Africa' (Kalu, 2005, 3, 390-1).

An assessment of the relationship that has existed between these Pentecostal movements and the churches that were established by the missionary's points to a situation of tension due to the African dissatisfaction of the missionary expression of Christianity. In other words, the Africans through the Pentecostal/Charismatic leaders found in the missionary churches nothing but 'dry denominationalism' (Kalu, 2005, 3, 390) and called people to God who alone was deemed 'able to rescue people from the fear of witchcraft, medicines, and principalities and powers before which inimical forces inherited mainline Western theologies just cringed' (Kalu, 2005, 3, 390). As to whether these accusations levied against the missionaries' theologies are true and whether the direction taken by these movements is right, syncretism ensues and the root is traceable to hermeneutical methods applied, for this case, the historical-critical hermeneutics. The last part of this paper suggests a solution.

4. Dialogical Hermeneutical Model

The noetic effects of sin are a reality to endure in this dispensation of life. However, tensions that arise due to hermeneutics can be overcome. They can be corrected through a dialogical approach to hermeneutics, that is, an interdisciplinary approach. This approach works with the following tools:

- Understanding through cultural relativism- postpone personal prejudices that and seek to understand yourself and you before attempting to engage in hermeneutics. Seek to understand the Author, the text as well as the reader.
- Evaluation through theology so as understand biblical absolutes, principles as well as variables
- Discernment through prayer

5. Conclusion

This paper has endeavored to trace the roots syncretism in the West to the age of Enlightenment when philosophical shift on hermeneutics occurred and bred historical-critical method of hermeneutics. It has also attempted to picture the possibility of its travel to Africa in the bark of some of the missionaries, a thing that might had been unintentional, but continues to impact negatively on Africa, citing some examples. In the last segment, this study has made a suggestion of a dialogical hermeneutics as a model that will not only deal with the past but also curb similar mistakes in the future.

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