

# African biblical studies and the question of methodology: A focus on New Testament scholarship in Nigeria

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African biblical studies (ABS) focus on biblical interpretation in Africa. Although new, it has gained massive recognition among African biblical scholars as the biblical interpretation focus that best suits the peculiar challenges that face African Christians. Its emergence, of course, was reactionary to the Western approach to the interpretation of the Bible in Africa and the practice of Christianity as well, which failed to take into cognisance the peculiar needs of African Christians. In New Testament scholarship in Nigeria, ABS has come to dominate biblical interpretation, being the most preferred by New Testament scholars. However, this article notices a persistent problem with regard to methodological rigour in ABS in Nigeria. This article aims to call the attention of New Testament scholars in Nigeria to methodological rigour while engaging in ABS as this is also part of the reasons breaking into mainstream New Testament scholarship has become a problem for many of these scholars. This equally leads to poor global visibility and competitiveness on the part of many Nigerian New Testament scholars. The approach to the discussion in the work is analytical and descriptive with a touch of personal observation.

**Contribution:** This article calls attention to the need for ABS scholars in Nigeria to emphasise methodological rigour in their research. While this will lead to recognition of the works of ABS practitioners in Nigeria and beyond, this article makes a case for academic excellence which is the hallmark of good biblical scholarship.

**Keywords:** African biblical studies; New Testament scholarship; African or Nigerian context; Western New Testament scholarship; methodology.

## Introduction

Sometime in 2018, the author ran into a friend who had just returned from South Africa where he bagged a doctorate at one of the universities. We met at a conference at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. During our interaction, he said that many Nigeria-based biblical scholars do not pay sufficient attention to methodological issues while writing academic articles and theses. While some other colleagues who were part of the discussion thought the young man was wrong, and was only trying to display an air of superiority, others had a deep reflection on what he said. It was from this encounter that the author began to take a very serious note of issues of methodology that are taken for granted by many scholars in New Testament scholarship in Nigeria, particularly those who focus on African biblical studies (ABS).<sup>1</sup> In 2018, the author began to take time to study the methodological processes in many of the ABS works the author came across in Nigeria. To the author's dismay, the findings were not far from the claim of a friend because many of these works lacked methodological rigour. Therefore, the author is going to discuss from the many encounters with New Testament or ABS works focused on Nigeria, which, in one way or the other, the author has read or reviewed for some African and foreign biblical journals. The author hopes that this article stirs the consciousness of many New Testament scholars in Nigeria on the critical need for adherence to methodological process while doing ABS.

African biblical studies have come a long way in biblical studies in Africa, even though Mbuvi's (2017:149–178) position is that it is 'an emerging discipline'. At present, ABS is the preferred focus of New Testament scholarship in Nigeria (Uwaegbute, Odo & Ugwu 2021). With the emergence

1. In this work, the author will use ABS interchangeably with African Bible Hermeneutics (ABH). Loosely understood, both terms mean the same thing.

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of ABS in Nigeria, many biblical texts have been interpreted to meet the yearning of Christians in the country. Therefore, Nigerian scholars on biblical studies owe a great deal of gratitude to ABS for giving them the platform to use the Bible to address their unique challenges, just as these scholars deserve praise for making biblical texts speak to Nigerians in a way that they understand. Yet, as stated earlier, for this quest to be effective and attract global competition in biblical studies, issues of methodology have to be taken seriously by Nigerians involved in ABS. Hence, there is a need for a critical reappraisal of the poor recognition of methodological rigour by many New Testament scholars in Nigeria engaged in ABS.

It is within this context that the aim of this work unfolds, which emphasises the need for methodological rigour to be recognised in New Testament or ABS in Nigeria. While doing this, it is hoped that issues relating to the history and definition of ABS will be discussed in the work. The features of ABS will also be discussed, including the current state of New Testament or ABS in Nigeria. A systematic approach towards achieving methodological excellence in New Testament or ABS in Nigeria will also come into focus just as the implications of such methodological excellence will be treated. My approach to the issues discussed in this article is analytical and descriptive. The data comes from some observations the author made while reading New Testament or ABS works with a focus on Nigeria including review(s) of Nigerian New Testament or ABS works for some African and foreign biblical studies journals. The author will bring to bear discussions, observations and interactions had over the years with fellow New Testament scholars in Nigeria, including those of undergraduate and postgraduate students. The many discussions and observations at conferences the author has attended, where articles on ABS were read, would also come into play. Data from journal articles and textbooks dealing with ABS in Nigeria will be drawn upon too. The article has five parts. Aside the introduction, there is a discussion on the history and definition of ABS. Following this is a discussion on the features of ABS, and then a discussion on the current challenges as regards mythological rigour in ABS in New Testament scholarship in Nigeria. Next is a discussion on systematic means of ensuring methodological rigour in New Testament or ABS in Nigeria. The implication of maintaining methodological excellence when doing ABS by New Testament scholars in Nigeria followed before the conclusion, which brings together all my thoughts.

## African biblical studies: A brief history and definition

While it is usually thought that ABS is a method of doing biblical interpretation, a closer look at it shows that it is a focus of biblical interpretation (Uwaegbute et al. 2021). The nature of ABS makes it a focus of biblical interpretation rather than a method of biblical interpretation. Of course, a scholar who is conversant with ABS knows that it makes use of many methodological approaches. The development of ABS is tied with the ways Western missionaries of the 19th century

introduced Christianity to Africans. Firstly, it is common knowledge that these Western missionaries believed that Africans did not have an idea of God (Ugwu & Ugwueye 2004). According to Chinwokwu (2015), Western missionaries taught Africans about 'a white God and a white Christ', thereby denigrating African ideas of God. Secondly, these missionaries believed that Christianity and the Bible must be taught to Africans through the Western lens, particularly, their worldview and understanding of God and Christ. This approach is partly seen in Achebe (1958) when Christianity came to Mbanta. The concern of the people of Mbanta was that abandoning their gods would attract their wrath on them. To their surprise, they were only told by the missionaries that their gods were not powerful and cannot harm them (Achebe 1958). This is part of the denigration of African ideas of God or gods that was mentioned earlier. Thirdly, although Ukpong (2006:129–147) argued that these missionaries did Africans some good by translating the Bible into their local languages, their reading of the Bible through a Western approach affected their understanding of it. In fact, to many Africans, it was double trouble because the translations did not factor in some cultural and contextual realities. Even when they tried applying their understanding of the Bible message in their context, it failed to satisfy their yearning for God. Fourthly, even when a new breed of Western-trained African biblical scholars emerged from the 1960s onwards, the problem did not abate. The problem persisted because many of these scholars saw Christianity through the lens of the West, having been trained in their theological institutions. Even those who tried different approach(es) of interpreting the Bible in Africa failed too because they used Western methods of interpreting the Bible to apply it to the African context. The result was the development of 'a visible gap between this academic reading of the Bible and the needs of African Christians' according to Ukpong (2006:130). In this sense, the problem persisted and was never resolved by the efforts of the African biblical scholars.

In all these, one gets the idea that the problems associated with the Western approach to Christianity in Africa led to the development of ABS. It was in the 1960s that ABS began to develop alongside what is generally referred to as African theology. Therefore, Uwaegbute et al. (2021) would be right in saying that the emergence of ABS was reactionary to the approach taken by the West when introducing Christianity and the Bible to Africans. It was during the 1960s that a scholar such as John Mbiti, mostly regarded as the father of modern African theology, made good use of his opportunity at the University of Cambridge while studying for his doctorate degree to interpret the New Testament idea of eschatology in the African context.<sup>2</sup> To me, Mbiti's doctoral thesis at Cambridge was revolutionary because his findings showed the difference between the Western understanding of eschatology in the New Testament and that of his native, the Akamba people of Kenya. Mbiti showed how the Western and biblical concept of time, in a linear fashion, does not make sense to Akamba Christians as long as eschatology is

<sup>2</sup>The title of the thesis is 'Christian Eschatology in Relation to the Evangelisation of Tribal Africa'.

concerned.<sup>3</sup> This work, the author believes, laid the foundation for serious engagement with the African cultural context while interpreting the Bible in Africa. Subsequent attempts after Mbiti's work have been made by African biblical scholars to interpret the Bible in the African cultural context.

We are not to forget, however, the role that the All-African Conference of Churches (AACC) played in trying to indigenise Christianity in Africa and how this was an inspiration to many African biblical scholars to interpret the Bible in their cultural context. As from 1968, according to Kato (1975:138–169), the AACC initiated a series of conferences during which issues related to the practice of Christianity in Africa were treated. The most famous of these conferences was that of Kinshasa in 1971, where a declaration was made regarding the place of the recovery of African history in the practice of Christianity in the continent (Kato 1975:156–157). Therefore, in its own way, the AACC conferences played a role in advocating for the practice of Christianity in Africa in a way that reflects the cultural practice of the people. This also entailed an interpretation of the Bible with particular attention to the African cultural context.

In the Nigerian context, it seemed it was within the New Testament context that ABS came to develop first. Scholars such as the late S.O. Abongurin, formerly of the University of Ibadan, E.N. Chinwokwu (formerly E.N. Onwu) of the University of Nigeria and Ukachukwu Chris Manus, formerly of Obafemi Awolowo University Ife, were all important figures in the development of the New Testament or ABS in Nigeria. Late J.S. Ukpong of the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt who West (2018:242) called the ancestor of ABS also made remarkable contributions to the development of ABS in Nigerian New Testament scholarship. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Ukpong did give ABS the needed direction it lacked through his works. Also in the list is Theresa Okure whose contributions towards the development of ABS in the New Testament context, particularly in Nigeria, came from the feminist perspective. These scholars, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, showed that the New Testament can be interpreted to account for the Nigerian or African cultural context, which in turn meets the needs of Nigerian or African Christians. Amidst criticism, their works touched on cultural, religious, economic, gender and political realities, which do not fall within the West's sphere of interest.

In present times, however, ABS has refocused its direction on postcolonial issues. Postcolonialism deals with the study of the sociocultural, sociopolitical and socioeconomic vestiges of colonialism. Its main focus is the effect of human control, including the exploitation of people who have been colonised. As an academic field of study, it began to emerge in the 1960s when many colonised states started to gain independence from their European colonial masters. Postcolonial theory has come to be associated with biblical studies today. According to Sugirtharajah (2006:17),

<sup>3</sup>This is not to say that Mbiti's work is not without criticisms. A scathing criticism of Mbiti's work can be read in Kato (1975).

postcolonial biblical interpretation recognises issues such as 'expansion, domination and imperialism', while constructing new methods and approaches of interpreting the Bible. Postcolonial biblical interpretation also re-appraises existing methods of interpreting the Bible in the light of issues that Sugirtharajah mentioned. Thus, it is not surprising that postcolonial biblical interpretation has become the focus of many ABS scholars. It is therefore the main concern of ABS at present.

Having given this background, what then is ABS? How can it be defined? The Nigerian New Testament scholar Ukpong (2000:11–28) defined ABS as 'an encounter between biblical texts and the African context'. This definition shows that ABS makes the African context the focus of biblical interpretation. It addresses the African context together with its myriads of problems, using biblical texts. It is in this sense that Ukpong (2000:11) say that ABS is not hesitant to address the African past, present and future in the light of the texts of the Bible. In a similar vein, Mbuvi (2017:152) says that 'ABS takes both the African and biblical realities as equal partners in dialogue, resulting in a distinctive juxtaposition of questions, approaches and interpretations'. The author defines ABS as a deliberate effort by African biblical scholars to interpret the Bible in the context of African Christians' cultural, political and economic realities, in the past, present and future. It is an exercise aimed at interpreting the Bible to reflect unique African realities, which are different from those of Western Christianity and its parameters of interpreting the Bible.

## Features of African biblical studies

The author begins the discussion on the features of ABS by following a recent discussion by one of the best exponents of ABS, G.O. West of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. After that, the author will add the thoughts of the late Nigerian Old Testament scholar David T. Adamo. West (2018) outlines about three important features of ABS. Firstly, he argues that ABS is a postcolonial focus of biblical interpretation. He further avers that it is a postcolonial focus of biblical interpretation because 'the Bible was brought to Africa as part of the missionary-colonial enterprise' (West 2018:246). The author concurs with the West, it has been shown here that it was the Western missionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries who introduced Christianity to Africans. Christianity, thus, has some connection with colonialism as long as its roots in Africa are concerned. African biblical studies as a postcolonial focus of biblical interpretation seeks to disentangle biblical interpretation in Africa from the shackles of colonialism and its associated baggage. This struggle has led to the development of a method of biblical interpretation in Africa called postcolonial biblical interpretation, which has been mentioned earlier.<sup>4</sup> An exponent of this type of biblical interpretation is the Botswanan biblical scholar M.W. Dube.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, West

<sup>4</sup>For post-colonial biblical interpretation in Africa, see Dube, Mbuvi and Dora (eds. 2013).

<sup>5</sup>On post-colonial interpretation of the Bible see Dube (2012).

argues that ABS is tripolar. By this, he means that ABS operates on three poles that are the Bible, the African context and appropriation (West 2018:247–248). Put differently, ABS emphasises the need for serious engagement with the Bible, the African context and appropriation.<sup>6</sup> Early exponents of ABS, of course, focused more on its bipolar nature where there was an emphasis on the Bible interpreting the African context. This bipolar approach is what Ukpong (2000:12) calls ‘the comparative method that enables the Bible and the African context to interpret each other’. Nevertheless, as West has rightly observed, in practice and in the contemporary art of biblical interpretation, we cannot neglect the tripolar nature of ABS. Thirdly, according to West, ABS is a site of struggle. As a site of struggle, ABS deals with the real-life struggles of African Christians. More importantly, as a site of struggle, ABS connects with the everyday struggles and challenges of African Christians in their peculiar context. This is what makes ABS special.

The Nigerian Old Testament scholar Adamo (2016:1–10) has argued that other features of ABS include fostering communal reading of the Bible and encouraging comparative reading of the Bible while also showing Africa’s distinct interest. It also helps to ‘blacken’ the Bible and encourages an African evaluative approach. We can now see what makes ABS unique and different from Western methods of interpretation of the Bible. Despite these, ABS has its own criticism. In fact, right from its developmental stage, ABS had drawn the ire of some of its detractors. The Nigerian theologian B. Kato was one of ABS’s earliest critics. He notes that overreliance of African theologians on African Traditional Religion as a source of Christian theology and interpreting the Bible is nothing but a call for a return to African Traditional Religion. This fails to capture the true message of the gospel in Africa according to Kato (1975:53–56). In a similar vein, Asaju (2005:120–129) said that detractors have labelled ABS ‘a return to African Traditional Religion’. While these criticisms may not be entirely correct, they show the downside of ABS.<sup>7</sup>

## The current state of methodological rigour in New Testament or African biblical studies scholarship in Nigeria

This section of the article discusses the state of methodological rigour in the New Testament or ABS in Nigeria. However, it is good to make certain clarifications. Firstly, by arguing that there is poor recognition of methodological rigour in New Testament or ABS in Nigeria, the author does not mean to take for granted the efforts of New Testament scholars in Nigeria committed to ABS. After all, the author is a product of a Nigerian religious department where ABS remains the focus of New Testament scholars. The author was ‘schooled’ in the ABS tradition and appreciates the efforts of those who taught and moulded him during the formative years in the

6. By appropriation, West (2018) means different ideo-theological approaches of interpreting the Bible in Africa.

7. On other criticisms of ABS, especially in the light of modern challenges in Nigeria, see Uwaegbute et al. (2021:2–3).

art of biblical interpretation. Secondly, and in alignment with remarks in the introduction of the article, what the author discusses here comes from some years of interaction with many New Testament works in Nigeria which focus on ABS and the struggle to identify concrete methodologies applied by the authors. Thirdly, for some time the author interacted with many up-and-coming New Testament scholars who in many cases seemed confused once the question of methodology in the New Testament is mentioned. At best, many of these students would simply identify their method of doing ABS as exegesis, as if exegesis, strictly speaking, is a methodology.

Having made these clarifications, it was observed that despite the inroads made by many New Testament scholars in Nigeria on ABS from the 1980s and 1990s, many of them did not pay critical attention to the issues of methodology while engaging in ABS. In this sense, it is not surprising that only a few pioneers of ABS in Nigeria paid critical attention to methodological issues and those who did include J.S. Ukpong and C.U. Manus. These scholars developed the inculturation biblical hermeneutics and intercultural hermeneutics, respectively (Uwaegbute et al. 2021:2). According to Ukpong (2006:131), inculturation biblical hermeneutics is ‘an approach to biblical interpretation which seeks to make the African, and for that matter any sociocultural context, the subject of interpretation’.<sup>8</sup> Through this methodology, Ukpong (1996:189–210) interpreted many New Testament texts. His reading of the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1–13 still stands out today. Like Ukpong, C.U. Manus has many works using his intercultural hermeneutics to interpret the Bible. He even wrote a book that explains what intercultural hermeneutics is (Manus 2003). However, as Uwaegbute et al. (2021) have argued, Manus’s intercultural hermeneutics is nothing more than Ukpong’s inculturation biblical hermeneutics dressed in another garb. By implication, Manus’s approach to interpreting the Bible deals with the African situation in its cultural, social, economic or political context; this is what Ukpong’s method deals with also.

Currently, a few New Testament scholars have followed the steps of Ukpong or Manus by mostly paying critical attention to methodological issues while carrying out ABS. The author will mention some of them here, beginning with O.A. Adewale and his contributions to ABS. The authors research on Adewale’s works shows that he has published considerable articles using mainly two methods of biblical interpretations: narratological and sociorhetorical criticisms. From Luke 12:13–21, 14:15–24, 16:19–31, 1 Corinthians 7:1–5, Acts of the Apostles to Ephesians 6:5–9, Adewale put these approaches to good effect, stringing together interpretations that mostly deal with the Nigerian situation.<sup>9</sup> These works also explain what each of these approaches is. They are examples

8. A clear methodological step to be taken while using inculturation biblical hermeneutics is also discussed by Ukpong (2006:138–142).

9. Some of Adewale’s work include Adewale and Oyekan (2021), Adewale (2021, 2022) among others.

of methodological rigour lacking among New Testament scholars engaged in ABS in Nigeria. Other Nigerian New Testament scholars, where the author has read their works on ABS, feel they deserve praise, including J.C. Madubuko (2015); B.O. Ukwuegbu; G. Etukumana; O. Agbiji; G.O. Forlarin (2008:94–106); Michael K. Okoye (2018) and D.I. Manomi (2019:114–129), among others.<sup>10</sup>

While there may be other works relating to the discussion here, those mentioned are works that the author has read and feels greatly endeared to because of their clear use and application of sound methodologies in interpreting New Testament texts in the Nigerian context. Hence, from social-scientific and psychological interpretations to inculturation and gender hermeneutics, these scholars incorporated methodological rigour while interpreting New Testament texts using ABS.

In all, the point the author wants to make here is that there is still a problem with methodology where New Testament scholarship is concerned in Nigeria. The few scholars mentioned earlier, and their works, are numerically poor compared with the number of New Testament scholars who engage in ABS in Nigeria. There is a need for improvement in terms of methodology as regards New Testament or ABS in Nigeria. Thus, the next section of the article is dedicated to discussing steps that ensure methodological rigour while engaging in New Testament or ABS in Nigeria.

## It is all in methodology: Methodological rigour as key to New Testament scholarship focusing on African biblical studies in Nigeria

The author discusses the definition of what (research) methodology is. This will help give direction to what will be discussed. According to Kothari (2004):

[R]esearch methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it we study, the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them. (p. 8)

While research methodology is contextual, which means that it varies from discipline to discipline, within biblical studies, it explains approaches, scientifically stated as well, adopted by a biblical scholar in interpreting biblical texts in relation to identified research problems. In the context of our discussion, a research problem could be any problem that affects Christians and their community in the African or Nigeria context, which biblical texts could be used to address.

The first step in establishing methodological excellence, while engaging in New Testament or ABS in the Nigerian context, is to identify a research problem. The research problem could be social, political, economic or cultural issues that affect Christians in Nigeria. The next task for the

New Testament scholar is to establish this problem as a real problem. In other words, the scholar will have to problematise the research problem. In order to do this, fieldwork will have to be involved. This will enable the scholar to interact with people affected by the said problem. This makes for confirmation of the existence of the identified problem. Therefore, at this stage, interviews, focus group discussions or questionnaires are needed to establish the research problem.

The second step is the identification of relevant text(s) that will be used to solve the identified problem. Hereby, there is a need for the New Testament scholar to identify a relevant text that will be interpreted in the context of the identified problem. It does not make sense for the New Testament scholar that has identified a cultural problem in Nigeria, for example, to use a New Testament text that deals with economics or politics to solve the problem. Of course, that will lead to what is called forced reading of a text. Its result will surely be forced and misleading as well. To illustrate how this should work, for some time now, the authors research has focused on the problem of materialism among Christians in Nigeria. As a New Testament scholar who focuses on ABS, it was (and still is) a job to find relevant New Testament texts that will efficiently address the problem. Hence, the author found texts in the gospel of Luke, which has a lot of insights into the dangers of wealth (see Uwaegbute 2022).

It is important to observe that finding a relevant text to be used in addressing one's identified research problem is as important as adopting a relevant interpretative approach to the text. Here, the Nigerian New Testament scholar is to choose a fitting interpretative approach from the myriads of those in existence. Therefore, this becomes the next step in the process. The Nigerian New Testament scholar is to bear in mind that there is a need for him or her to be conversant with the many existing approaches to interpreting texts. He or she is to be aware that the New Testament has many genres – gospel, epistle, parable, wisdom, narratives, allegory, hymn or poetry, apocalypse, wisdom sayings and Acts of the Apostles, are just a few of them.<sup>11</sup> Each of these genres has a fitting approach it can be interpreted with. From social-scientific, canonical, source, narrative, redaction and form criticisms to postcolonial, psychological, historical, feminist, reader-response, semiotic criticisms and tribal reading among others, the New Testament scholar in Nigeria is faced with many options with which the identified text could be interpreted. It will not make sense for the Nigerian New Testament scholar who is working with a text whose genre is an epistle to use form criticism as an interpretative approach. Equally, it may not be appropriate for a Nigerian New Testament scholar working with a hymn text to use redaction criticism as an interpretative approach. Texts must be interpreted with the right interpretative approach(es). Unfortunately, the author has read works on the New Testament or ABS where forced approaches were used as interpretative frameworks by the Nigerian New Testament scholars. Thus, having good knowledge of the genres that

10. Many Nigerian scholars I mentioned here, from my findings, were trained abroad. This may account for their excellence in methodology while doing ABS.

11. For a comprehensive discussion on biblical genres, see Raph (2003) and Schrein (2007).

we find in the New Testament will help the Nigerian New Testament or ABS scholar in choosing an appropriate interpretative approach to the texts he or she is working on.

After choosing an adequate interpretative approach to a text, data collection is the fourth step in our discussion. As stated earlier, a good New Testament or ABS work will have to include fieldwork. During the fieldwork, the New Testament scholar will not only have the opportunity to establish the research problem but also to ascertain varied perspectives of people about an identified problem. It helps the scholar to feel the pulse of the people whose issues he or she is working on. It is therefore during the fieldwork that data is collected by the New Testament scholar on issues that he or she is using New Testament texts to address. Apart from interviews, data collection methods here may include observation (both participant and non-participant), questionnaires and focus group discussion (FGD). It is also important that the Nigerian New Testament scholar adheres strictly to all ethical principles guiding these methods of data collection.<sup>12</sup>

While this study stresses the methods of collecting data, it also emphasises that indicating the method of data analysis is another thing to take seriously. This forms our fifth step in ensuring methodological rigour. As it is now, this is another methodological error seen in many New Testament or ABS works in Nigeria. Many New Testament or ABS works the author read did not pay any attention to the method of data analysis. Because there is little recognition of methodological rigour in New Testament or ABS scholarship in Nigeria, neglect of the method of data analysis is equally seen. The method of data analysis, in this regard, could be descriptive as it is mostly qualitative research that many Nigerian ABS scholars engage in. Data collected to be used for research must have a method by which it will be analysed. The Nigerian New Testament scholar involved in ABS must know that.

## Implications of lack of methodological rigour in New Testament or African biblical studies scholarship in Nigeria

While the concern of Nigerian New Testament scholars may be local (i.e. how to use New Testament texts to address local issues affecting Christians in Nigerian society), one cannot overlook the role that rigorous scholarship plays in attracting global attention to New Testament scholarship in the country. This forms the take-off point of the discussion in this section of the work. While agreeing with Mbuvi (2017) that it is only a few mainline Western journals that publish works on ABS, the author believes that one reason many Nigerian New Testament scholars' works are rejected by these mainline journals is a lack of methodological rigour. This is in addition

12. Ethical clearance has now become an issue while carrying out researches related to humans and animals participants as well. As New Testament scholars with a focus on ABS in Nigeria, we are to be aware of this, and incorporate it in our research process.

to the fact that local concerns addressed by ABS do not fall within the interest area of these journals. Using New Testament theological journals in South Africa as examples – *HTS Theological Studies*, *Neotestamentica*, *Acta Theologica*, *Scriptura*, *Verbum et Ecclesia*, among others – the author's experience whilst reviewing New Testament or ABS articles within the Nigerian context for some of these journals, reveals that many researchers pay no or little attention to methodological rigour. Of course, it is not even 'a walk in the park' to publish articles in these South African journals which emphasise methodological and other research rigours.

One implication of ignoring methodological rigour in Nigerian New Testament or ABS scholarship is that it will be difficult for many Nigerian New Testament scholars to publish in reputable Western journals, such as the *Journal for the Study of New Testament*, *Novum Testamentum*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, *New Testament Studies*, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Biblical Interpretation*, *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, among others, which emphasises methodological rigour in articles they publish. The stance is that as much as these journals are not interested in local issues, which is the focus of ABS, strict adherence to methodological process during research could provide a springboard for the Nigerian New Testament scholars to publish their research work in mainline journals. The author believes that it is the goal of serious-minded New Testament scholars in Nigeria to have their works published in mainstream journals where they will be highly recognised. This is not to say that some of our local journals are not standard or do not emphasise the need for their scholars to pay close attention to methodological issues. While we hope that someday, Western biblical scholarship will come to accept ABS-focused works, it is very important that Nigerian New Testament scholars, who engage in ABS, take seriously the methodological rigours in their approach to New Testament interpretation. This will be very helpful in attracting global attention to our research works.

## Conclusion

In this article, it was shown that ABS scholars downplay methodological issues in the Nigerian New Testament scholarship. The argument of this article is simple: As much as we may want to decolonise biblical studies in Nigeria (and Africa at large), there is a need for us to pay great attention to what is called methodological rigour. That ABS scholars in Nigeria use eclectic approaches in interpreting the Bible should not be a reason to jettison methodological rigour. Thus, decolonising biblical studies in Nigeria does not entail neglecting methodological rigour. This is the point the author has made in this work. It is high time New Testament scholars in Nigeria take good note of this in their various engagements with ABS.

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U.K.I. is the sole author of this research article.

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