

# The importation of western colonial Christianity and the performance of biblical discourse in Africa

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The articles published in this collection of *HTS Theological Studies* were subjected to a rigorous double-blind peer review process with respect to the required academic standard laid out in this journal and regulated by Department of Higher Education and Training. The contributors in this collection critically analyse and engage on the subject matter of the importation of western colonial Christianity and the performance of biblical discourse in Africa from different contexts, by applying different theoretical and hermeneutical lenses. African biblical scholars, especially those utilising various hermeneutical lenses as theoretical tools, have argued that the Christian corpus of literature that was produced during 'Christianisation', 'Colonisation' and civilisation through the technology of conversion and assimilation of the 'wretched' is a colonial product.

A closer analysis of the 19th century missionary literary genre provides us with the missionary rhetoric of the time. As agents of the empire the missionaries saw a need to 'Christianise', 'Civilise' and 'colonise' black bodies and the spaces they occupied by labelling them as 'wretched' in Fanonian term. Thus, reading such texts as forms of biblical discourses becomes important in contextualising what Kebede frames as the 'rise of arrogance in Europe' (2004:36). He argues that Europe's arrogance in their crusade of evangelisation and conversion of the 'Other'—an attitude based on the notion of evolutionism—'prevented the method of conversion to Christianity from being consonant with Christian love' (p. 36). Their insensibility to the anti-Christian nature of their approach was caused by their belief painting the disparagement of African beliefs as an exaltation of Christianity (p. 36).

Since the arrival of western colonial Christianity, biblical discourse in Africa has not only functioned as technology of power, but also continues to operate within the western hermeneutical lens informed by epistemic privilege. Wa Thiong'o (1981) in his book argues that:

The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance [of the colonised] is the cultural bomb. The effect of a bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. (p. 16)

Similarly, it is in the memoirs, biographies, letters, journals, and sermons that we are able to discern and identify how the missionaries performed biblical discourse by applying biblical imagery and figurative language to form in the consciousness of the receptor culture and those in Europe a distinct representation of what they have labelled and othered as the 'wretched'. An identification of such texts as a performance of discursive practices aimed at performing an act of erasure, they were exported from Europe embodying these forms of discursive practices and imported into the receptor culture not as equals, but rather as the master and the servant scenario. While scholars analysing the translated Christian corpus have, with the intention of decolonising or performing textual cleansing, such texts, they have argued that such texts not only continue to erode the indigenous linguistics heritages, but have also contributed to the performance of pneumacide through the normativisation of the western colonial Christian standards and spirituality. The translated texts functioned as forms of biblical discourse, and as instruments of identity deconstruction and reconstruction, performing the transmogrification of the indigenous religio-cultural practices into biblical imagery and language. The articles in this collection grapple with the notion of biblical discourse from various perspectives; they draw a scrutiny on the need for theology and biblical sciences to critically recognise the marginalised voices for the sole purpose of not only decolonising these disciplines but rather to advance a form of de-linking, border thinking with the aim of moving away from universalism to pluriversalism by critically engaging with the social and epistemic location of those in the margin.

## References

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Wa Thiong'o, N., 1981, *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*, Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare.