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# PARTICIPATORY APPRECIATIVE DIALOGUE APPROACH FOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: A MISSION STRATEGY IN AN ERA OF CULTURAL RENAISSANCE IN AFRICA

Stephen Zahiop YASHIM

## INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the metanarrative that conveys God's universal message for all people in their respective historical contexts. It is the revelation of God's universal message for all people.<sup>1</sup> God is the author. God's universal message is the subject matter which the metanarrative conveys. People in their historical contexts are the recipients of God's universal message.<sup>2</sup> God's universal message requires interpretation in local contexts in order for it to be meaningful and relevant in those contexts. An appropriate approach that can facilitate the contextual and relevant interpretation of God's universal message and facilitate the biblical transformation of the worldview of rural communities can serve as a tool for the development of African Christians growing as authentic biblical, not syncretistic, Christians in culturally meaningful and relevant ways.

Biblical interpretation or hermeneutics in African contexts is the principle of Bible interpretation "for the

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in this article the Bible is often referred to as God's universal message.

<sup>2</sup> Manfred Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, translated by Joachim F. Vette, (Hants, England and Vermont, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 7.

transformation of Africa.”<sup>3</sup> Biblical interpretation is assumed to be the subjective comprehension of the objective divine universal message conveyed in the biblical metanarrative for functional application in the human context or situation. African Christians are in a quest for principles of interpreting the universal biblical message in a manner that is contextually meaningful and relevant to meet their contextual needs. The universal biblical message is of value to every human community and it is to be brought in interaction with human communities to see what emerges.<sup>4</sup>

Since the introduction of the gospel into Africa, very little has emerged “in the way of genuine African Christian thinking.”<sup>5</sup> The quest for principles that facilitate the interpretation and comprehension and the transformative application of God’s universal message in African contexts is still on. This article describes a participatory appreciative dialogue approach (PADA) for biblical interpretation in rural communities in Africa as a supplementary approach to African biblical hermeneutics.

The PADA for biblical interpretation is an approach that aims at engaging the biblical worldview and the worldview of rural communities in Africa in appreciative dialogical interactions. The dialogical interactions focus on the “good” present in the community. This is based on the notion that the good of God’s creation was not completely obliterated

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<sup>3</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, “The task and distinctiveness of African biblical hermeneutic(s)” in *Old Testament Essays* 28:1, 2015, in <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n1a4> accessed March 23, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 1.

<sup>5</sup> John Parratt, “Introduction” in *Reader in African Christian Theology*, New Edition, edited by John Parratt, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1997), 1.

as a result of the introduction of sin upon the fall of man.<sup>6</sup> A worldview is the subconscious conceptual understanding of reality within the context of the person or community that holds the worldview.<sup>7</sup> The biblical worldview is drawn from the analysis of the biblical metanarrative, whereas the worldview of rural communities is drawn from the analysis of the communities' narratives in their historical contexts.

#### PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE

There are two primary purposes of this article. First, it is to argue for the application of a participatory appreciative dialogue approach (PADA) as a supplementary approach to African biblical hermeneutics. It is never to denigrate previous approaches to African biblical hermeneutics. The approach is to serve as a means for contextual interpretation of God's universal message revealed in different historical and socio-cultural contexts other than the recipient African contexts.

There have been different approaches concerning where the meaning of the biblical text can be found. Some argue that the meaning of God's universal message can be found only in the biblical text. Others argue that it is from the biblical author's intended meaning. Still, others argue that it is from the readers of the text.<sup>8</sup> However, the question is: have the approaches applied for the development of contextually

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:31 describes everything God created as very good.

<sup>7</sup> Hiebert, defines worldview as "the foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives," Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics*, 9-27. Oeming, discusses each approach in detail in four chapters.

relevant interpretation of God's universal message in response to African contextual questions been wholly fruitful?

John Parratt classifies approaches to African theology into two broad categories: political theology and cultural theology.<sup>9</sup> Theology consists of committed acts aimed at discerning God's universal message from the biblical metanarrative in order to facilitate the engagement of relevant strategic action(s) to live life in accord with God's intention for life. Jürgens Hendriks argues that theology is about the missional praxis of the triune God, the Church, the Church in its contextual situation, community involvement in "a vocationally based, critical and constructive interpretation of their present reality" in the light of the normative sources of Scriptures and tradition to discern God's will for their present situation while obediently participating in transformative action and serving as a sign of God's kingdom on earth that is "moving forward with an eschatological faith-based reality in view."<sup>10</sup> According to Parratt, "The main concern of political theology is the relationship of the Church to the state and society."<sup>11</sup> The main concern of cultural theology "is the relationship between the Christian faith and African culture and tradition."<sup>12</sup> Are there approaches to biblical interpretation that are concerned with the relationship between the worldview of God's universal message and the worldview of African Christians held before becoming Christians? The African worldview is not lost when Africans become

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<sup>9</sup>John Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, New Edition, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1987, 1997), 5.

<sup>10</sup>H. Jürgens Hendriks, *Studying Congregations in Africa*, (Cape Town: Lux Verbi, 2004), 24.

<sup>11</sup>Parratt, *A Reader in African*, 5.

<sup>12</sup>Parratt, *A Reader in African*, 6.

Christians.<sup>13</sup> Therefore this article is concerned about the relationship between the worldview of God's universal message and the worldview of African Christians living in African rural communities in the process of biblical interpretation.

It is assumed that the consistent application of the PADA for biblical interpretation in rural communities can facilitate the ability of African Christians living in rural communities to develop sustainable skills for contextual interpretation of the Bible. It can be a means for African Christians living in rural communities to develop skills for articulating their understanding of the holistic transformative gospel of the biblical universal message. The approach can engage the biblical metanarrative in dialogical interactions with the current quest for cultural renaissance in Africa today. The communication of God's universal message is the task of the Church. The objective of the task is to interpret the universal message in a manner that makes the message contextually meaningful, relevant, and culturally live-able. The purpose of a PADA for biblical interpretation in African rural communities therefore is to facilitate the articulation of "a theology that originates from an authentic search for the meaning of Scripture in order to apply it to African life today."<sup>14</sup>

The second purpose for this article is to contribute the concept of PADA for biblical interpretation for African Christians living in rural African communities to the conversation on biblical interpretation in Africa. It is to contribute to the search for biblical interpretation from an

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, (Nairobi, Jos, and Grand Rapids: Hippo Books, 2012), xv. Kunhiyop, writes that African "religious beliefs and the African world view are not lost when Africans become Christians.

<sup>14</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, xiii.

African perspective. The search for biblical interpretation from an African perspective aims for the cultivation of the Christian faith that is genuinely African and consistent with the divine intention for God's universal message for humankind. The cultivation of a Christian faith that is not schizophrenic but contextually African; a Christian faith that is the product of the divinely transformative universal message.

#### **LIMITATION, DELIMITATION, AND METHODOLOGY**

This article is limited to concerns about a sustainable approach that can facilitate the ability of African Christians living in rural communities to interpret God's universal message and to address experiences in their historical context through appreciative dialogical interactions or conversations. Therefore, the article is limited to an approach for interpreting God's universal message that can also serve as a mission strategy for the church in African rural communities.

It is beyond the space permitted for this article to undertake a comprehensive review of the different approaches proposed by different African Bible interpretation or hermeneutics scholars. However, the PADA for biblical interpretation by Christians in African rural communities engage some, not all, of the distinctive of biblical hermeneutics of African Bible interpretation scholars identified by David Tuesday Adamo.<sup>15</sup>

This article is a descriptive analysis of participatory appreciative dialogue as a means of contextual interpretation of God's universal message and as a strategy for mission

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<sup>15</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, "The task and distinctiveness of African biblical hermeneutic(s)" in *Old Testament Essays* 28:1, 2015, in <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n1a4> accessed March 23, 2019.

practice in African rural communities. Richard R. Osmer's method of doing theology provides the framework for the descriptive analysis of the PADA.<sup>16</sup> The PADA also draws from David Cooperrider's principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI).<sup>17</sup> The PADA engages Adamo's identified distinctive of biblical interpretation in Africa.<sup>18</sup> The distinctive engaged are those related to cultural theology.

### THE BIBLICAL METANARRATIVE

The content of the Bible is the metanarrative or the overarching story of God's acts in creation from its original state through its present state up to its future state.<sup>19</sup> The biblical metanarrative describes the world as consisting of persons with social relationships, a world in which both the physical and spiritual realms of creation are seamlessly related. It is the story of a "good" but distorted world which God is actively sustaining. God is sustaining the world until its final renewal at the eschatological return of Jesus Christ. God applied the contingency of the historical context of different people at different times and at different locations to reveal Himself, His actions, and His will. Consequently, though God's message is universal, yet it is to be locally and contextually understood so as to be found relevant. Its interpretation must occur in relation to local and contemporary

<sup>16</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

<sup>17</sup> David L. Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, and Jacqueline M. Stavros, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook for Leaders of Change*, (Second Edition; Brunswick, OH: Crown Custom Publishing, Inc. and San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2008), xxvii.

<sup>18</sup> Adamo, "The task and distinctiveness of African biblical hermeneutic(s)", accessed March 23, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Revised and Expanded Edition, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 200.

socio-cultural experiences to be contextually understood and found relevant.

God caused the revelation of His universal message to be an inspired record which the Church has assembled and put together as the Bible.<sup>20</sup> The mission of the Church is to transmit God's universal message for people in their historical and socio-cultural context. The African continent and its different peoples are significant contexts into which God's universal message has been and is being transmitted and interpreted to achieve God's purposes for the message. Biblical interpretation or hermeneutics in Africa is "for the transformation of Africa."<sup>21</sup>

#### **BIBLE INTERPRETATION IN AFRICA**

African Christians living in Africa have the responsibility of interpreting God's universal message in a manner that makes the message contextually meaningful and relevant. Christians during different eras in the history of the Church have examined the Christian faith. They did this through the process of examining the content of the Bible in ideological interaction with contemporary thought.<sup>22</sup> African and non-African Christian theologians have been striving to develop principles that can provide a framework for interpreting the Bible in the African multiple contexts.<sup>23</sup> Hendriks posits that the application of the "old missionary or

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<sup>20</sup>Note for example that it is recorded in 2 Peter 1:21 that God the Holy Spirit inspired men to record God's prophecy.

<sup>21</sup> Adamo, "The task and distinctiveness of," accessed March 23, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Wage Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, (Nairobi, Jos, and Grand Rapids: Hippo Books, 2012), 2.

<sup>23</sup>John Parratt, has put together articles from different African Christian Theology describing their methodologies for African Bible hermeneutics in John Parratt, *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, New Edition, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1987, 1997).

clerical paradigm of a deductive theology"<sup>24</sup> constitutes a problem for Bible interpretation in the African context from an African perspective. Therefore, African Christians are in a quest for principles of interpreting the biblical message in a manner that is contextually meaningful and relevant to meet their contextual needs.

The interpretation of the biblical message in response to the questions raised in particular contexts makes the biblical message more readily understood and its message relevant. The quest for cultural renaissance does raise questions. The questions cultural renaissance asks are based on a quest for identifying old ideas that may prove effective agents for generating a new culture and a new attitude towards solving Africa's problems.<sup>25</sup> The assumption in this article is that God's universal message can be more easily comprehended by Africans through the process of dialogical interaction between the universal biblical message and the contemporary questions in the African context. In this article the concept of dialogue is used to mean a conversation between two or more people. The conversation is to facilitate the ability of those involved in it to be able to comprehend one another. The comprehension is to enhance progressive and harmonious living and partnership for the common good of those involved.

Biblical interpretation as used herein refers to principles and processes for the contextual comprehension of God's universal message communicated through the biblical texts. In other words, it is arriving at a subjective comprehension of and discerning the relevance of God's universal message in a given historical context. Subjective

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<sup>24</sup> Hendriks, *Studying Congregations*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Adoyi Onoja, "Renaissance Africa or the Quest for Immortality? The NEPAD and African Union in Perspective" in *NEPAD and the Challenges of Development in Nigeria*, edited by Dennis Ityavyar and Zacharys Anger Gundu, (Jos: International Centre for Gender and Social Research, 2006), 222.

comprehension of God's universal message is aided by the Holy Spirit as Jesus Christ predicts.<sup>26</sup> So dialogues for biblical interpretation are aimed at facilitating the ability of the people to engage God's objective universal message in dialogue. It makes it possible for the people to subjectively comprehend its message, its relevance, and offer them the opportunity to make volitional decisions on how to respond.

### CULTURAL RENAISSANCE IN AFRICA

Cultural renaissance in Africa is a quest for the renewal of the social, cultural, political, technological, and economic perception and approaches for African people and African nations. It is probably an attempt to be liberated from the pervasive hold of Western worldview with its pervasive hold on the intellect, molding and shaping the thought process that stripped the dignity, identity, and independence of Africa and Africans.<sup>27</sup> It is a search for comprehending "life's heritage and baggage which Africans employ to craft their identities, sustain flourishing human sociality, and actualize their potentials."<sup>28</sup> Looking at the concept of cultural renaissance from a political perspective it is "a philosophical and political movement to end violence, elitism, corruption, and poverty, that seem to plague the African continent and replace them with a more just and equitable order."<sup>29</sup> The political perspective emphasizes solving perennial problems in Africa.

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<sup>26</sup> Jesus Christ states, as recorded in John 16:13, that the Spirit of truth guides believers into all truth.

<sup>27</sup> Onoja, "Renaissance Africa, 223.

<sup>28</sup> Nimi Wariboko, "Foreword" in Randee Ijatuyi-Morphe, *Africa's Social and Religious Quest: A Comprehensive Survey and Analysis of the African Situation*, (Jos: Hokma House, 2011), xi.

<sup>29</sup> Yahaya Ezeemoo Ndu, "Cultural Renaissance: A Priority Challenge for Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," A paper presented at the occasion of the Badagry Folk Festival at the Badagry Town Hall on Monday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, 2010.

Cultural renaissance is considered as a means to facilitate the promotion of a state of equilibrium for the total well-being of African people from African perspectives.

The foregoing descriptions do not highlight, nor deny, the spiritual aspect of the life of the African people. The Church can however take advantage of the contemporary quest for cultural renaissance in Africa. The Church can take advantage by engaging God's universal message in the conversations. It is to engage biblical worldview and the African worldview in discussions with the aim of liberating Africans from that which has a pervasive hold on the intellect, molding and shaping the thought process of the people and strips them of their dignity, identity, and interdependence as God intends for all human beings.

It is imperative for the Church in Africa to transmit God's universal message for people in Africa in their present historical and socio-cultural context. The Church has been (and still is) actively involved in facilitating the total well-being of Africans in Africa, which includes their spiritual well-being. The Church is involved through facilitating biblical mediation. Biblical mediation implies the contextual interpretation of God's universal message in different historical and socio-cultural contexts. Hence God's universal message which was revealed in contexts different from those of the different African rural communities needs to be mediated in African rural contexts. Through the process of biblical mediation, God's universal message revealed in different historical contexts can engage its recipients in contemporary African rural contexts to address the real issues Africans in rural communities experience. Since there is a quest for cultural renaissance in Africa today, this article considers how the church in Africa can take advantage of this quest in order to facilitate the contextual interpretation of the

biblical message by African Christians in rural African communities.

### **PARTICIPATORY APPRECIATIVE APPROACH (PADA)**

This section describes the participatory appreciative approach (PADA) for application in the contextual interpretation of God's universal message. The section presents brief descriptions of the principle of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Practical Theology as a framework for the development of the PADA process. Then, it describes how PADA is applicable for the contextual interpretation of God's universal message.

The participatory appreciative dialogue approach (PADA) engages members of a community in dialogical interactions that are focused on the strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams of a community. The hermeneutical process to interpret God's universal message using the PADA begins from analyzing and interpreting positive subjective experiences conveyed in the people's narrative. The recipients of the objective universal message bring their understanding of their positive subjective experience(s) into dialogical engagement with the objective expression of a similar or antithetical experience(s) in the biblical metanarrative. Subjective experience(s) as analyzed and interpreted by the recipients apply the primary tool of Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

The AI method was developed by David L. Cooperrider in 1980.<sup>30</sup> The method is applied to examine factors that inspire people in an organization to be at their best

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<sup>30</sup> David Cooperrider, was then a doctoral student at the Case Western Reserve University. Cooperrider was guided in his study by Suresh Srivastava. See David L. Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, and Jacqueline M. Stavros, *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook for Leaders of Change*, (Second Edition; Brunswick, OH: Crown Custom Publishing, Inc. and San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2008), xxvii

and to bring about a lively and productive progress in the organization they belong to.<sup>31</sup> The AI is characterized by appreciative interviews that apply appreciative questions to generate conversations that focus on strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams of an organization.<sup>32</sup> AI is improvisational, meaning that it can be approached in a variety of ways though it begins with a clear purpose.<sup>33</sup> Hence a whole local congregation in a rural community, depending on its size, or an inclusive focus group selected from the community, is guided through appreciative questions to participate in discussions. The purpose is to interpret the universal biblical message for functional application in the historical context of the interpreters.

The AI approach is guided by four guiding principles that serve as its conceptual framework. AI scholars and practitioners describe the four principles as the 4-D Cycle. The 4-D Cycle includes Discovery, Dream, Design, and Delivery principles. The Discovery principle is characterized by appreciation. The principle guides stakeholders in an extensive, corporate search to understand the best of the present and the past of an organization.<sup>34</sup> The principle further brings to the fore in the minds of the people involved a conscious consideration of the things to be proud of. The Dream principle stimulates imagination. It helps people to envision possibilities for a more valuable and vital future.

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<sup>31</sup> Gervase R. Bushe, "Advances in Appreciative Inquiry as an Organization Development Intervention" in *Organization Development Journal*, Fall 1995 13(3):14-22. Bushe, adds that AI has generated excitement and experimentation.

<sup>32</sup> Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide To Positive Change*, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2010), 1, 6, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*, 7-8

Innovation is the characteristic of the Design principle. The Design principle draws on the insight gained from the application of the Discovery and Dream principles to select the best elements that can be put in place to design a plan of action. Finally, the application of innovative ideas towards the realization of the imagined better future characterizes the Destiny principle.

Osmer's method of doing theology provides the theological framework for the seamless process of applying the PADA for African Christians' contextual interpretation of God's universal message. Practical theology can be described as a way of helping people to examine their contemporary experiences in the light of biblical revelation.<sup>35</sup> Practical theology provides a foundation for stimulating theological reflection on contextual problems holistically.

Osmer's framework consists of four primary tasks. The tasks are: descriptive-empirical task; interpretative task; normative task; and pragmatic task. The descriptive-empirical task is concerned with describing the experiences or situation of a particular social and historical context. The task attempts to answer the question: "What is going on?" The interpretative task is concerned with identifying the cause(s) of the experience(s) of a community in its particular and historical situation. "What is going on?" is the question the interpretative task seeks to answer. "What ought to be going on?" is the question the normative task seeks to answer. The

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<sup>35</sup>Neil Darragh, "The Practice of Practical Theology: Key Decisions and Abiding Hazards in Doing Practical Theology" in *Australian eJournal of Theology* 9 (March 2007), 3 in [aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/395736/AEJT\\_9.9\\_Darragh\\_Practice.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/395736/AEJT_9.9_Darragh_Practice.pdf) accessed October 3, 2016; Kevin G. Smith, "Review of Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*" in [www.sats.edu.za/userfiles/Smith\\_ReviewOsmer.pdf](http://www.sats.edu.za/userfiles/Smith_ReviewOsmer.pdf) accessed October 4, 2016.

normative task is focused on what a community should consider to be the ideal experience. The pragmatic task aims at determining the choice of action that a community will take to build on its present experience.<sup>36</sup>

The foregoing described both the principles of AI and Osmer's method of doing theology which have been incorporated to develop the PADA for biblical interpretation. We turn to a description of how the PADA can be applied for the contextual interpretation of God's universal message by African Christians living in rural communities in Africa. It has been stated that in applying the PADA for biblical interpretation a whole local congregation in a rural community, depending on its size, or an inclusive focus group selected from the community is guided, by a facilitator, through appreciative questions to participate in discussions. Five interrelated steps are undertaken in the process.

First, the discussants identify positive experiences in the history of the community. The narrative of each community provides the data the community interprets in the light of its previous or historical experiences and knowledge. Like the AI discovery principle, the discussion deliberately brings to the fore in the minds of the people involved a conscious consideration of the things to be proud of. Like the descriptive-empirical task of practical theology the discussions are aimed at describing the experiences or situation of the community in their social and historical contexts.

Second, the discussants identify the factors responsible for those positive experiences. The discussions seek to help the people to analyze and make sense of the stories they recounted in the first set of discussions. Humans find meaning in life through integrating piecemeal and disconnected stories of experiences. Human "narratives combine rationality and

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<sup>36</sup>Smith, "Review of Richard Osmer, accessed October 4, 2016.

imagination and the cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of life in a single whole."<sup>37</sup> Therefore the analysis and interpretation of the community's narrative culminates in the community's present cognitive explanation, affective commitment, and evaluative definition of reality.

Third, the discussants identify and analyze similar experiences, factors responsible for the experiences, divine actions or commands related to such experiences, from the biblical metanarrative. The biblical metanarrative consists of several narratives of human experiences – both positive and negative, explanations for human experiences, and commands to guide human behavior. The discussants can then draw insight from the analysis. In this step, discussions focus the minds of the discussants to the norm revealed in God's universal message. The outcome can help the people to envision the ideal, the valuable and the vital state towards which God's mission seeks to establish in the lives of His people. Like the normative task of practical theology, this aspect of the process seeks to focus the people's minds on what a community should consider to be the ideal experience according to God's plan.

Fourth, the discussants identify similarities and differences between insight from their experiences and insight from the biblical metanarrative. The PADA can be applied to bring similar narratives from both the biblical metanarrative and the community's narrative in dialogue.<sup>38</sup> The dialogue provides basis for comparison to determine similarities and differences. It provides the basis for comparing the biblical ideal or reality with the contextual perceived reality. Thus, it

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<sup>37</sup> Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews* 66.

<sup>38</sup> This is based on the biblical principle that there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10) and the Apostle Paul's assertion that the experiences of the Old Testament saints were object lessons for saints in the last days (1 Corinthians 10:6).

gives the opportunity for the modification of the community's cognitive perception, shift in affective commitment, and transformation of values concerning the reality being considered. An expansion of the interpreter's conceptual horizon is thus broadened. Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory<sup>39</sup> for expanding conceptual horizons provides explanation for the possibility of the participatory appreciative dialogues, facilitating biblical transformation of the worldview of rural communities. Gadamer's theory posits that a conceptual horizon or perceptual vision includes everything that can be visualized from any particular vantage point. And that a conceptual horizon can be expanded and transformed through a fusion of one conceptual horizon with another through the process of dialogical interaction.<sup>40</sup> This step in the process seeks to stimulate innovative considerations. It aims at inspiring the people to draw on the insight gained from the discussions on what is going on, what is responsible, and what the ideal is. The process gives the people the opportunity to select the best elements that can either be introduced or modified in the present.

While the community's worldview provides the perceptual vision from the vantage point of human experiences, the biblical worldview provides the perceptual vision of reality from a divinely revealed vantage point. The engagement of the biblical worldview and a community's worldview in a participatory appreciative dialogue can facilitate the biblical transformation of the community's worldview.<sup>41</sup> A biblically transformed worldview of a

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<sup>39</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second, Revised Edition, Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (London; New York: Continuum, 1975, 1989, 2004),

<sup>40</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301

<sup>41</sup> Note that Scripture serves as the catalyst and the norm for the transformation. It can facilitate change or transformation without being

community can be described as a Holy Spirit aided subconscious conceptual understanding of reality which is consistent with the underlying givens of Scripture. Therefore, the outcome is the contextual conceptual understanding of God's universal message for the experiences of the people in their historical context. Thus, this subjective conceptual comprehension of the universal message, as is applicable to the people's historical context, is the community's contextual interpretation of the biblical text(s) that engaged the community's narrative.

Fifth, the discussants may thereafter consider options concerning the application of their conceptual understanding of God's universal message. A biblically transformed worldview inspires affective commitment to the values upheld in Scriptures, and spurs decisions and creative actions consistent with identified norm in accord with God's universal message. The application of the contextual interpretation of the biblical text(s) may lead to the volitional abandonment of the community's pre-dialogue presuppositions or to its modification to align with the contextual interpretation of the universal message or reaffirmation of their pre-dialogue presuppositions which may have been in accord with their conceptual understanding of God's universal message. Hence the application of the contextual interpretation of the universal message may result in modified approaches to life in the light of the subjective conceptual understanding of God's universal message. Ultimately, the end results are decisions and actions taken in culturally meaningful and acceptable ways, yet biblically informed. Therefore, since a community's worldview provides the conceptual blue print for decisions and actions, a community's biblically transformed worldview

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changed. It is the norm and ultimate standard by which all worldviews are evaluated.

can provide biblically modified conceptual blueprint for culturally and biblically consistent actions or inactions.

In view of the foregoing, it is argued that there is the need for the biblical worldview to engage the African worldview in a dialogical interaction for the purpose of critical evaluation and transformation of the African worldview. It is further argued that the PADA for biblical interpretation can facilitate the progressive transformation of the African worldview in the process of Christian discipleship. Finally, it is suggested that the PADA for biblical interpretation can be applied to a whole congregation in a rural community, depending on the size, or to an inclusive focus group, to develop contextually meaningful and relevant interpretation of God's universal message for the community in its historical context. Where an inclusive focus group is used to develop the contextually meaningful and relevant interpretation of the universal message, the group can use the community's social networks for transmitting information, knowledge, and values discerned from the interpretation.

#### **EVALUATING PARTICIPATORY APPRECIATIVE DIALOGUE APPROACH FOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN AFRICA**

Adamo discusses the task of African biblical hermeneutics and the methodological distinctive of approaches to African biblical hermeneutics. This section evaluates the PADA in the light of the methodological distinctive Adamo highlights. These distinctive include: communal reading and interpretation, Bible power, Africa and Africans in the Bible, African comparative, African evaluative, using Africa to interpret the Bible and using the Bible to interpret Africa, the promotion of distinctive life interest, and African identity. The evaluation is limited to distinctive related to cultural theology since the focus is on

engaging the approach as part of the processes of cultural renaissance in Africa today.

Participatory appreciative approach for biblical interpretation is an approach that facilitates communal reading and interpretation of the universal biblical message. Adamo states that one of the main distinctiveness of African biblical interpretation "is the communal approach, that is, reading with the community."<sup>42</sup> It is a process where the people are involved in a "vocationally based, critical and constructive interpretation of their present reality" as they draw upon insight drawn from the analysis of the normative biblical metanarrative.<sup>43</sup> This resonates with the African culture of community and communal living, therefore culturally acceptable.

God's universal message has transformative power which Africans can easily identify with. The PADA for biblical interpretation aims for the firsthand experience of the transformative power of the universal message of God. Hence the PADA is also an existential and reflective approach that recognizes the Bible as power. However, while the PADA acknowledges the indispensable need to depend on the Holy Spirit for divine assistance in the process of interpretation, it does not facilitate the "talismanic" use of the Bible as means of protection where the fear of witches and wizards and other forms of perceived spiritual antagonisms is the order of the day.

God used different people in different historical contexts to reveal His universal message. Bible interpretation using the PADA is focused on interpreting the universal message drawn from the metanarrative in dialogue with the interpreter's narrative in their historical context. It does not

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<sup>42</sup> Adamo, "The task and distinctiveness, accessed March 23, 2019

<sup>43</sup> Hendriks, *Studying Congregations*, 24.

focus on, without denying the value of, the presence and contribution of Africa and Africans in the process of biblical revelation.

The PADA for biblical interpretation provides for the comparison and evaluation of appreciative elements in both the biblical metanarrative and the narrative of rural communities. This approach presupposes the relevance of the communities' culture to the study of the Bible. Therefore, it engages the biblical metanarrative in dialogue with the communities' narrative as one of many types of the African comparative approach to identify similarities or parallels or differences to better comprehend the universal message for contextual application. The African comparative approach compares the Bible text, religion and culture with the African text, religion and culture to bring out the relevance of African culture in academic biblical scholarship. The African evaluative approach focuses on the place and value of criticisms, negative, constructive, or both. The PADA, like the African evaluative approach, considers the criticisms to be of value for progress, correction and adjustment in African biblical studies. The PADA for biblical interpretation does not ignore the value of academic scholarship but its emphasis is on the subjective comprehension of the universal message of the Bible for transformative African Christian living. African Christian living that is based on biblically transformed worldview. The biblically transformed worldview has a biblically transformed blueprint that guides a community's culture. Therefore, the PADA aims beyond cognitive and intellectual scholarship to holistic life transformation generated by biblically informed transformative actions.

The PADA is also an approach that uses Africans to interpret the Bible as well as using the Bible to interpret Africans. It is an approach that applies insights from related fields like biblical theology, hermeneutics, anthropology, and

organizational development for the purpose of understanding the biblical metanarrative in the light of the pre-conversion worldview of African Christians developing authentic Christianity that is genuinely African and in consonance with God's universal message and intent.

The PADA for biblical interpretation facilitates the engagement of African existential life interests in the process of biblical interpretation. That is, it facilitates the engagement of concerns and commitments African Christians have from their pre-conversion worldview in order to align these with God's universal message and intent. The PADA is not limited to just cognitive and intellectual interpretation of the universal message.

The PADA for biblical interpretation gives readers and interpreters the opportunity of self-awareness and self-identity. It helps African Christians discover their worth and intrinsic relationship with God in Christ as a result of God's mission through Christ. The sustained application of the PADA for biblical interpretation can facilitate the development of character and instilling as well as cultivating values that accord God's intent for His people. This is due to the transformative power of God's universal message.

Syncretism is a main scare-crow when the contextualization of the biblical universal message is in view.<sup>44</sup> The loss or misappropriation of critical and basic elements of the gospel message in the process of communicating and applying the message in receiving culture constitutes syncretism. When such occurs the form of Christianity that may develop in the receiving culture is what

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<sup>44</sup> Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1984), 176.

Hiebert, describes as “a syncretistic Christo-paganism.”<sup>45</sup> Biblical transformation of a community’s worldview in the process of biblical interpretation promises a useful means of overcoming the danger of developing syncretistic Christo-paganism and promotes the contextual development of biblical orthodoxy in their cultural setting. Christo-paganism is the consequence of attempting to contextualize biblical interpretation in a different context, for example in Europe, in an African context. The PADA for biblical interpretation facilitates the development of authentic contextual Christianity that is culturally meaningful and relevant. Thus, African Christians can be authentically biblical Christians and culturally African rather than Euro-American photocopy Christians. The PADA for biblical interpretation is an approach that promises a means of overcoming syncretism. The outcome of contextual theologies or biblical interpretations can be compared with other contextual theologies. Kunhiyop states that “An African Christian theology therefore needs to interact with truths that apply to all peoples, tribes and nations (because) an African Christian theology does not stand alone but is part of the larger context of the Christian story.”<sup>46</sup> Contextual Christian theology must also be comprehensible to all Christians, not just the group in which the theology is developed, because the source of Christian theology, regardless of the context in which it is developed is God’s universal message.

In the different African rural communities, the people communicate through, and interpret messages conveyed in narratives, proverbs, songs, dance or drama and other artifacts. The biblical metanarrative consists of these different forms of communication as means of conveying God’s universal

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<sup>45</sup> Hiebert, *Transforming Worldview*, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, xiv-xv.



message. The PADA can be applied to interpret the different forms of communication in the biblical metanarrative. There is nothing new under the sun and the different human experiences through time serve as object lessons for African Christians, like every other Christians in other contexts.<sup>47</sup> Therefore the PADA for biblical interpretation can be used by African Christians in different African rural communities regardless of the form of communication in the biblical metanarrative that conveys the biblical worldview and the African Christians pre-conversion worldview.

#### **PARTICIPATORY APPRECIATIVE APPROACH AS A MISSION STRATEGY**

It has been stated earlier that the goal for contextual interpretation of God's universal message in African rural communities' contexts is beyond mere cognitive and academic understanding. It includes affective commitment as well as volitional and practical facilitation of holistic transformational development of the African rural communities. The PADA is a method the Church in Africa can apply to participate with God in His mission for God's creation. The biblical metanarrative shows that God chose to engage His chosen people to participate with God in His mission to re-establish God's *shalom* in God's creation.<sup>48</sup> Therefore the proposed application of a PADA to engage the biblical metanarrative in

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<sup>47</sup> This is based on the biblical principle that there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10) and the Apostle Paul's assertion that the experiences of the Old Testament saints were object lessons for saints in the last days (1 Corinthians 10:6).

<sup>48</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006), 22-23; Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 13.

dialogue with the quest for cultural renaissance in Africa today can be a mission strategy. Since cultural renaissance asks questions in a quest for identifying old ideas that may prove effective agents for generating a new culture and a new attitude toward solving Africa's problems. The PADA for biblical interpretation can be a mission strategy for the Church in rural communities to seek biblical answers to the questions raised. Hence the application of PADA for biblical interpretation in the context of cultural renaissance in Africa should aim at facilitating a biblically informed creative reflection by the people concerning the past, the present, and the future of the rural communities in Africa in the light of the mission of God. This assertion is made based on the following five assumptions.

First, it is assumed that the progressive biblical transformation of a rural community can be achieved through a sustained engagement of the biblical worldview<sup>49</sup> and the community's worldview in dialogical interactions. A community's worldview provides the community a sense of emotional security and psychological reassurance of their reality. Second, it is assumed that dialogical interactions that respect the community's interpretation of their legitimate experiences do not threaten or disrupt the community's emotional security. Third, it is also assumed that the dialogical interactions do not disrupt the community's psychological reassurance of their perceived reality. Fourth, it is further assumed that a PADA can lead to the progressive biblical transformation of the people's worldview and consequently their culture. Fifth, it is also assumed that by the sustainable application of the PADA for biblical interpretation African Christians in rural communities can experience the power of

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<sup>49</sup> Hiebert, describes the biblical worldview "as the human understandings of the underlying givens in scripture," Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 265.

God and live in culturally meaningful lifestyles. They can live biblically transformed and culturally meaningful lifestyles that do not contradict the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### CONCLUSION

This article argues for the application of a participatory appreciative dialogue approach (PADA) as a supplementary approach to African biblical hermeneutics. The mission of the Church in the African continent and its different peoples, like any other continent, is to communicate and facilitate the interpretation of God's universal message and God's purposes for the message to fulfill God's mission. The PADA for biblical hermeneutics has been described as a means for contextual interpretation of God's universal message by African Christians living in African rural communities. It is an approach that can facilitate the biblical transformation of the worldview of rural communities. This can facilitate the development of African Christians growing as authentic biblical, not syncretistic, Christians in culturally meaningful and relevant ways. It is an approach that can join the conversation for cultural renaissance in Africa today to provide biblical answers to questions raised in the quest for identifying old ideas that may prove effective agents for generating a new culture and a new attitude toward solving Africa's problems.

The application of PADA for biblical interpretation in Africa incorporates most of the distinctive of biblical hermeneutics of African Bible interpretation scholars Adamo identified. The approach promotes communal reading and interpretation of the universal biblical message for contextual application to fulfill God's mission. Hence the approach can facilitate the impact of the transformative power of God's universal message in African Christian rural communities.

The Church in Africa can apply the PADA for biblical interpretation in the context of cultural renaissance in Africa as a strategy to participate with God in His mission for the redemption, transformation, and later the establishment of the state of *shalom* in the eschatological new heaven and new earth which Jesus Christ is preparing. The PADA can facilitate the contextual and relevant interpretation of God's universal message. It is a means by which to facilitate the biblical transformation of the worldview of rural communities. It can serve as a tool for the development of African Christians growing as authentic biblical, not syncretistic, Christians in culturally meaningful and relevant ways.