

Biblia Africana Proposal*

V e r s i o n 2 . 0

1.0 Overview

Culture and life circumstances affect the manner in which people read, interpret, and apply sacred texts. The Bible has shaped, circumscribed, and destabilized the lives of peoples of African descent, from the days when and the places where the books were written to the present. For the past two decades, African and African-Diasporan scholars have explored and articulated various ways of engaging the Bible particular to their communities in monographs, articles, and edited collections. However, there remains a significant and discernible gap. To date, no commentary written from these perspectives has been produced on the order of the *Women's Bible Commentary*, the *Feminist Companion to the Bible* series, and the *Global Bible Commentary*. Awareness of this need within Christian communities in Africa and the African Diaspora in Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas, has been longstanding.

Bible scholars have long considered the merit of preparing a Bible commentary expressly suited to the needs of Black constituents – i.e., one that is rigorous in its use of critical exegetical methods and renders the text accessible to a broad spectrum of Black readers. The absence of a sufficient cohort of scholars has stood in the way of this endeavor. Today, the number of scholars interested in these hermeneutical approaches to the Bible has reached a level sufficient for this major undertaking.

2.0 Project Conception

Biblia Africana (BA) – a one-volume, interdisciplinary, and multicultural commentary – will examine First Testament, apocryphal, and pseudepigraphic texts. This commentary will explore: (1) the issues, theological perspectives, and cultural challenges within Scripture; (2) the lives, cultures, and faith traditions of persons of African descent globally; and (3) the points of intersection and divergence that exist between Scripture and contemporary readers.

Biblia Africana will open a window onto the world of interpretive strategies and perspectives employed on the African continent and within the multiple Diasporas of African peoples by: featuring the work of scholars familiar with – and willing to read the biblical text through – the lenses provided by Africana history, literature, and culture; focusing on issues of concern (e.g., globalization, immigration, discrimination, identity construction, etc.) within the Black community worldwide; and both foregrounding and problematizing the role that the Bible has played in African and African-Diasporan intellectual history. In contrast to other commentaries that have privileged the Protestant canon, *Biblia Africana* will include treatments of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, since many in the African and African-Diasporan communities belong to faith traditions that consider these texts authoritative.

The commentary envisioned will be approximately 400 - 500 pages in length. It will consist of chapters devoted to individual books and topical articles devoted to:

- The intersection of the Bible and issues of race, ethnicity, nationalism, class, gender, and sexuality
- The continuity and discontinuity of biblical lore with the life experiences of peoples of African descent
- Issues of canon formation and acceptance within African and Black Diasporan contexts

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- African and Black Diasporan backgrounds for understanding biblical literature
- Methodological norms and conventions employed in African and African-Diasporan readings of the Bible
- The (use of the) Bible as oppressive and liberative force
- The appropriation of the Bible in modes of discourse that are not expressly religious in nature
- Christian appropriation of First Testament Texts in Africa and the African Diaspora
- Issues of historical and contemporary currency bearing directly or obliquely on the lives of peoples of African descent

The project is fundamentally critical and exegetical – i.e., engaging varieties of critical methodologies. *Biblia Africa* will be cutting edge – i.e., making use of the full range of hermeneutical approaches. It also seeks to encourage responsible *academic transgression* – i.e., the "blurring" of traditional *genre* boundaries when needed and appropriate to explore the potential meaning of a text.

In line with this, authors will be encouraged to employ: (1) the full range of biblical scholarship (pre- and post-Enlightenment); and (2) an array of African and African and African-Diasporan expressive genres (e.g., narrative, poetry, dance, photography, music, etc.) as *dialogue partners* and interpretive resources. Contributors will also be encouraged to stress the role of the Bible as a sacred text situated within a larger *economy* of sacred texts and traditions within African and Black Diasporan settings.

Biblia Africana will be a tool that helps to increase awareness of Black experiences worldwide to facilitate a creative intellectual exchange about the history, current challenges, and future prospects of the peoples of Africa and the Black Diaspora worldwide. The commentary will enable those who use it to think about the nature of Black experiences today. In sum, it will be a literary medium that promotes *convergence* and *community building*.

3.0 Audience

This book will be of interest to Bible scholars and their students, seminary faculty and students, those with an interest in the study of the Bible as literature, non-Western historians, clergy, Christian educators, laity, and church study groups. Aimed primarily at Black Churches which are intent on exploring the "racial" and cultural dimensions of faith, *Biblia Africana* will have broad and deep appeal within a variety of specialist and non-specialist settings.

The success of many recent theme Bibles – e.g., the *African American Jubilee Edition* (American Bible Society, 1999), the *Women of Color Study Bible* (Nia Publishing, 1999), and the *Men of Color Study Bible* (Nia Publishing, 2001) – and at least two one-volume topical commentaries – *The Postmodern Bible* (Yale University Press, 1995) and the *Global Bible Commentary* (Abingdon, 2004) – augur well for the potential marketability of *Biblia Africana*. In addition, the fact that it will be the first commentary of its kind suggests that it will have broad appeal.

4.0 Timeframe for Completion

The projected due date for submissions is 15 December 2006. Final submission of the edited text to press is 15 June 2007.

5.0 Editorial Committee

The editorial team for *Biblia Africana* consists of a diverse and interdisciplinary team including: Randall Bailey (Interdenominational Theological Center), Cheryl Kirk-Duggan (Shaw University Divinity School), Stacy Davis (Saint Mary's College), Rodney Sadler (Union Seminary – PSCE at Charlotte), Valerie Bridgeman-Davis (Memphis Theological Seminary), Samuel Murrell (University of North Carolina, Wilmington), Madipoane Masenya (Spelman College), and Hugh R. Page, Jr. (University of Notre Dame).