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## Violence in the “Holy” Scriptures: Perspectives from the Old Testament

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This article examines one of the key challenges of modern-day use of the Bible and the consequences that manifest. With the continued sprouting of new religious movements and independent churches, the media is awash with reports about self-styled prophets who base their teachings on literalistic understanding of scriptures. Consequently, such readings have been found to support violence in some instances. Citing examples of texts with a violent message in the Old Testament, this article calls for the need to face the reality that such texts are part of the “holy” scriptures and they have the potential to support and, in some cases, justify violence. The article argues that when confronted with such texts, readers and interpreters should desist from literalistic readings and instead lay emphasis on the consequences that come with such readings in order to determine whether they are acceptable in a specific community.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Africa and elsewhere, the Bible is read from both a critical and popular perspective. An interaction between today's readers and the biblical text is inevitable. It is hard for an interpreter to find the original author's intention, and in order to prevent the dangers of an author fallacy, it is better to pay attention to the text as it is rather than lay emphasis of unearthing the author's intention.<sup>1</sup> However, it must be observed that there is no innocent eye when it comes to reading texts and, in this case, the Old Testament texts. Every reader is not affected by the texts in the same way. So, there is the danger of projecting one's own concerns onto the text in the sense that a reader's interpretation can be a platform for echoing his/her unexamined assumptions and presuppositions and missing out on the message of the text.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, in more recent times, various interpretations by the people have had negative consequences.

In recent times, the continued sprouting of new religious movements and independent churches have not made matters easier. The media is full of reports about self-styled prophets whose biggest emphasis is laid on the gospel of healing and financial break promises or normally put as the prosperity gospel. The leaders of these churches who many a time claim that they were chosen by God and anointed by the holy spirit to start churches have no theological training at all. Therefore, without doubt they many a time base their teachings on literalistic understanding of scriptures. The end result has always been reports of conning or the faithful's being ripped of their riches and property in the name of serving God (<https://bit.ly/3JxE0af>).

## VIOLENCE IN OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

From an ethical perspective, texts with a tone of divine violence generate severe problems, as they serve as references to justify violence – a situation that has created difficulties for readers and users of the Old Testament through time and space.<sup>3</sup> Old Testament texts have been used to justify problematic practices that have had adverse effects on the people such as apartheid in South Africa, slavery, and colonialism to mention but a few. It is for such reasons that some scholars portray the Old Testament as dangerous. Important to mention is the fact that issues surrounding the OT as a dangerous text have for centuries puzzled scholars, readers, and adherents. Among them is Räsänen who explains that the effective history of Old Testament interpretation, especially in post reformation Christendom, shows how dangerous the book has been as part of the Christian canon.<sup>4</sup> Some Old Testament texts contain particular violence embedded within them and these have inspired violence, by serving as a model of and model for persecution, subjugation and extermination.<sup>5</sup> For example, in some Old Testament texts, we see a God who presents himself as one who kills and wounds or permits the killing of others. In Psalm 137:8-9 the person who smashes the babies' head on the rock is described as "happy" or "blessed", and this psalm – in the form of a prayer – therefore seems to permit the killing of babies.<sup>6</sup> In Nahum 1:2, in an oracle concerning Nineveh, God is presented as one who takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. Other scenes of violence initiated by divine action is the Genesis flood accounts in chapters 6-9 and the Sodom/Gomorrah accounts in Genesis 18-19. In both incidents, God is

<sup>1</sup> Taylor, C., "Interpretation and the sciences of man", E.D. Klemke & al. (eds.): *Introductory Readings in the Philosophy of Science*. New York: Amherst, Prometheus (Books. 3. edition, 1998) pp. 110-127.

<sup>2</sup> Spohn Klimke, W.C., *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2. Edition, 1995) 8. Masenya, M.J., *How Worthy Is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African-South Africa*. New York: Peter Lang (Bible and Theology in Africa, 4, 2004). 22.

<sup>3</sup> Baumann, G., "Hermeneutical perspectives on violence against women and on divine violence in German-speaking Old Testament exegesis", K. Holter & L.C. Jonker (eds.): *Global Hermeneutics? Reflections and Consequences*. (Atlanta:

Society of Biblical Literature 2010) 18; 22. Davies, E.W., *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics*. (New York: T&T Clark International 2010) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Räsänen Raisanen, H., *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation: Collected Essays 1991 2000*. Leiden: Brill (Biblical Interpretation Series, 59, 2001) 201.

<sup>5</sup> Niditch, S., *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Lavik, M.H., "Killing children with God's permission? The rhetoric of retaliation in Psalm 137", B. Mæland (ed.): *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing (Bible and Theology in Africa Series, 10, 2010) 202.

presented as one who practically destroys the nations because of sin, and only saves a few.

Concerning texts that justify violence against women, consider the ones discussed in Tribble's book on *Texts of Terror*. These include Hagar, the slave used, abused, and rejected (Gen 16; 21), Tamar, the princess raped and discarded (2 Sam 13:1-22), an unnamed woman, a concubine raped, murdered, and dismembered (Jgs 19:1-30), and the daughter of Jephthah, a virgin was slain and sacrificed, in Judges 11:29-40.<sup>7</sup> These women are mistreated and abandoned yet their voice is not heard at all. Tribble insists that other than dismissing the stories as tales of an ancient and primitive time, we should let the text speak for itself in the sense that through these stories we hear many voices of contemporary women with similar experiences. Some contemporary cases of this nature in Uganda include the killing of women in Kampala such as Magara and Nalule among others. Therefore, we come to the stories with new eyes and read it closely and ask for its meaning. Tribble bases herself on the idea that: "If art imitates life, scripture likewise reflects it in both holiness and horror".<sup>8</sup> From the book *Texts of Terror*, we see a clear indication of terror by the suffering that often goes unnoticed in the texts because not many religious leaders want to face them. The intensity of the terror is further represented by the responsibility and actions of those who are apparently favoured by God. The fact that those believed to be favoured by God commit brutality and cause suffering to these women before the eyes of God and nothing is done about it, suggests that divine violence is sanctioned through the use of human agents.

In addition to that, there are instances which show that even when the Old Testament text itself does not give much evidence of violence, violence is sometimes a consequence of the interpretation. For example, in dominant patriarchal contexts of Africa, the biblical text has been read from a male

perspective and as a result male interpretations are embraced without question, and as Masenya argues, "... such [male] interpretations in most cases only help to keep the patriarchal status quo intact".<sup>9</sup> Women, and more so the African women, are kept at the lowest level of the patriarchal ladder in the sense that even though they make the highest number of church attendants, they are in most cases not allowed to interpret the Bible. Their humanity is defined for them, and similarly the Bible is interpreted to them.<sup>10</sup> Such a practice in my view tends to malign the woman's image, thus creating a challenge to biblical interpretation.

Then, even when the texts do not demand that Africa should be colonized, the Bible was seen to be the basis and justification for oppressive tendencies such as apartheid and colonialism. For example, the colonialists are said to have oppressed the Africans and taken away their lands in exchange for the Bible. This is summarized in the famous adage "when the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible".<sup>11</sup> The Bible had been used by the white man to facilitate and justify imperialism tendencies which were exploitative, and unethical. Such tendencies caused a great deal of suffering to the Africans, consequently, they felt betrayed by the Bible yet they had followed it faithfully.<sup>12</sup>

### What Then Should Be Considered as An Acceptable Interpretation of The Text?

McCullagh<sup>13</sup> tends to ignore the interpretative community as important players in interpretation of biblical texts. Unfortunately, in the present times, Africa is facing an increase of the use of scriptures especially the Old Testament texts that causes misery in society. Moreover, McCullagh's concept of a "correct" interpretation" also leaves a lot to be desired. The question would be: After Schüssler

<sup>7</sup> Tribble, P., *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 1.

<sup>8</sup> Tribble, Milind of *Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 2.

<sup>9</sup> Masenya, M.J., How Worthy Is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African-South Africa. New York: Peter Lang (Bible and Theology in Africa, 4, 2004) 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Dube, M.W.: *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000) 3.

<sup>12</sup> Dube, *Ibid.*, 4-5, Njoroge, N.J., "The Bible and African Christianity: A curse or a blessing?", M.W. Dube (ed.): *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2001) 214.

<sup>13</sup> McCullagh, C.B., "Can our understanding of old texts be objective?", (*History and Theory* 30, 1991) 302-323.

Fiorenza – can we talk about a “correct” interpretation? In light of reader-response approaches and Schüssler Fiorenza’s views I would argue that the question about a “correct” interpretation of the Bible is insignificant especially in the present times. I therefore argue that Biblical scholarship must rather include the elucidation of the ethical consequences and political functions of biblical texts in their historical as well as in their contemporary social political contexts.<sup>14</sup>

At a time when the influence of the Bible in cultures and societies wherever it is used cannot be ignored, the view that biblical scholarship must include the elucidation of the ethical consequences and political functions of biblical texts in their historical as well as in their contemporary social, political contexts should not be taken lightly.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the need for a paradigm shift becomes even more valid and valued at this time. Thus, Biblical studies should move beyond the limits of educational or pastoral trainings towards opening up to the public/society so as to foster the opportunity of a critical biblical culture and a pluralistic historical consciousness.<sup>16</sup> What can be changed and has long been in a process of change is the attitude of people to the sacred texts, and one has to be critical and conscious when dealing with the sacred texts.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, rather than take texts with a violent tone wholly, a reader of the Old Testament has a duty to stop, think and suggest options as far as reading such texts is concerned.<sup>18</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza has rightly emphasized the need for an ethics of accountability and an ethics of interpretation, whereby the validity of every interpretation, be it scholarly or literal, is assessed basing on its effects on society.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, the validity of any interpretation and use of the Old Testament texts should be assessed in view of its consequences to a particular society and surrounding communities. A reading which diminishes life, destroys relationships, and denies people of their human dignity is neither acceptable, nor recommendable. It does not promote the common good, and it is against the universal declaration of human rights and global responsibilities.<sup>20</sup> Interpretations that lead to disastrous and oppressive actions that deny people an opportunity to live in freedom and enjoy their rights are not acceptable because they deny people an opportunity to live to their full potential.

It should be observed that the African’s reading of the Old Testament is influenced by a number of factors. For example, the Bible was used to oppress Africans by colonial masters so that negative use of it still lingers around and, Africa also faces the problem of rampant increase of new religious movements where members normally claim that they get their knowledge of the Bible and interpretation directly from God. Amidst all this, it is worth noting that Africans make up a society of people who attach much of their respect to the scriptures and the Bible is treated as a sacred book which cannot be questioned, and when scripture is quoted, many tend not to question the texts they are reading and quoting.<sup>21</sup> Yet, most readings and interpretations of the blooming new religious movements have proved to be detrimental to the African society. In many cases their readings and interpretations have led to a negative use of the Bible and violation of Human Rights. In such a complex situation, as a way forward, biblical scholars should find ways of how to facilitate and

<sup>14</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, E., “The ethics of biblical interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship”, (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 107,1988) 15.

<sup>15</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, E., “The ethics of biblical interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship”, (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 107,1988) 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 16

<sup>17</sup> Räisänen, H.: *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation: Collected Essays 1991 2000*. Leiden: Brill (Biblical Interpretation Series, 59, 2001) 23.

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, W.: *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, E., “The ethics of biblical interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship”, (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 107,1988) 15.; Schüssler, Fiorenza, E., *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 67.

<sup>20</sup> Reference to the human rights is here made with the view that they are balanced with responsibilities. This is because I am aware of the fact that human rights are sometimes used selectively in accordance with economic and strategic interests (Küng, H. & Schmidt, H. eds., *A Global Ethics and Global Responsibilities: Two Declarations*. (London: SCM Press 1993) 76.

<sup>21</sup> Masenya, M.J., How Worthy Is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African-South Africa. New York: Peter Lang (Bible and Theology in Africa, 4, 2004).

empower the ordinary Africans and more particularly women to read and interpret the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

### Responses to the Question of Violence in the Scriptures?

Other than accept divine violence as belonging to the very fabric of faith, scholars, and readers have devised different ways of dealing with the violent texts within the Old Testament. From the early days of the church, Marcion is known to have questioned the status of the Old Testament, and he is remembered for his struggle to radically separate Christianity from Judaism.<sup>23</sup> Marcion was a renowned second century theologian born before 100 A.D. Even though Marcion is labelled a Gnostic by many scholars and treated with contempt in many circles, there are some scholars who have been attracted to him. Marcion is remembered for subjecting the text to rigorous criticism basing on a thought world of a literal understanding of the Bible.<sup>24</sup> Even though allegorical explanations were the order of the day in Marcion's age, Marcion abhorred explaining away difficulties of the problematic parts of the Old Testament in such an easy way.<sup>25</sup> According to Marcion, the Old Testament God is different from the New Testament God, who is also the father of Jesus Christ. He argues that many of the teachings of Christ are incompatible with the actions of Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. In his view the God of the Old Testament is a God of retaliation – an eye for an eye – as opposed to the New Testament God who is full of love and mercy.<sup>26</sup> To solve the problem of the texts with a violent message in the Old Testament,

Marcion called for a total separation between the two testaments which in his view do not make one whole. In more recent time, similar positions have been advocated by Adolf von Harnack and Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>27</sup> Harnack, a father of liberal theology and key contributor to the field, considers Marcion as a reformer comparable to Paul and Luther.<sup>28</sup> Bultmann also argues that there is an irreconcilable historical distance, and the particularities of the past separate the New Testament religion from the Old Testament. Like Marcion, Bultmann is of the view that the God of the Old Testament – whose grace is a matter of belonging to a particular people: the Israelites – cannot be identified with the God who speaks through the New Testament.<sup>29</sup>

Commenting on the genocidal approach of the phenomenon of “ban”, mandated by Yahweh to the occupants of Canaan (Joshua 6:21), Smith-Christopher suggests that such violent language should simply be examined as rhetoric.<sup>30</sup> This is in line with Fanon's argument that texts which are seemingly in support of violence “are only angry fantasies which are only graphic”.<sup>31</sup> In agreement with Fanon and Smith, Anderson also argues for a metaphorical reading of texts with a violent message. Making reference to the conquest narratives, Anderson suggests that these should be read in light of the symbolic world of the literature.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, some scholars have defended the violent conquest texts in the Bible arguing that God employed Israelites to remove dangerous malignancies from human society just as a wise surgeon would use his scalpel to remove a

<sup>22</sup> Mbiti, J.S., *Introduction to African Religion*. (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1977) 1. West, G. O., “Mapping African Biblical Interpretation: A Tentative Sketch”, G. O. West & M.W. Dube (eds.): *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*. (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 43.

<sup>23</sup> Räisänen, H., *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation: Collected Essays 1991 2000*. Leiden: Brill (Biblical Interpretation Series, 59, 2001) 191.

<sup>24</sup> Räisänen, H., *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation: Collected Essays 1991 2000*. Leiden: Brill (Biblical Interpretation Series, 59, 2001) 192.

<sup>25</sup> Efraymson, D. P., “The Patristic connection”, A. Davies (ed.): *Anti-Semitism and the Foundation of Christianity*. (New York: Paulist Press 1979) 108.

<sup>26</sup> Räisänen, H., *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation: Collected Essays 1991 2000*. Leiden: Brill (Biblical Interpretation Series, 59, 2001) 192.

<sup>27</sup> Leifeld, W.L., “Unity and diversity in the two testaments”, (*Christian Brethren Review*, 31, 32, 1982) 84.

<sup>28</sup> Harnack, A. von, “Marcion”, translated by J.R. Harris & G. Schwab. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985) 202-203.

<sup>29</sup> Bultmann, R., *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*. Ed. by S. Ogden. (London: S.C.M., 1964) 163-165.

<sup>30</sup> Smith-Christopher, D. L., *Jonah, Jesus, and Other Good Coyotes: Speaking Peace to Power in the Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007) 169-170.

<sup>31</sup> Fanon as cited in Smith-Christopher, D. L., *Jonah, Jesus, and Other Good Coyotes: Speaking Peace to Power in the Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007) 171.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, B.W., *Contours of Old Testament Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 171-180.

dangerous cancer from his patient's body.<sup>33</sup> However, the idea that God would be so ruthless to Israel's enemies and even at times order Israel to totally destroy her enemies is an act which tends to betray the human element in the Bible.<sup>34</sup>

Responding to a question by one of her first-year students as to why God fights on behalf of the Israelites against the occupants of Canaan, Schwartz argues that because of the violence embedded in it, the Bible is not of much use today and must be rewritten and retold.<sup>35</sup> Thus for Schwartz, a new Bible should be written to neutralise the existing visions of violence. A similar position is articulated by Banana who argues that the Bible must be rewritten if it is to remain relevant in our times. Banana explains: "This would include revision and editing to what is already there, but would also involve adding that which is not included".<sup>36</sup> This suggestion by Banana in my view would invoke questions of authority and authenticity? Should it be agreed upon that the Bible should be re-written, who will be given the mandate to that and by who?

Schüssler Fiorenza also tries to compose a solution to the problem of reading the Old Testament texts where she calls for double ethics: thus, the ethics of historical reading and ethics of accountability.<sup>37</sup> In a later publication, Schüssler Fiorenza continues to argue that biblical interpretations and historical reconstructions require an ethics of accountability that stands responsible not only for the choice of theoretical interpretative models but also for ethical consequences of the biblical text and its subsequent interpretation.<sup>38</sup> The main task of biblical studies is

to make available to society the moral resources and ethical directives from the Bible as a way of counteracting the violence that comes as a result of reading it. The main concern of Bible interpreters should be the effects of whatever interpretation they come up with on the community around them. This position has been affirmed by Barton who argues that the text makes better and more coherent sense if interpreted as resting on an idea of natural law than on any other model.<sup>39</sup> Barton uses the term natural law in reference to various moral principles and ethical considerations of different communities.<sup>40</sup>

In a recent study, Baumann systematically shows how scholars in German speaking Old Testament exegesis have encountered the problem of texts with a violent message in history.<sup>41</sup> She highlights twelve strategies, before suggesting a possible solution to the problem which is influenced by these strategies. In her solution, Baumann suggests that other than relegating the texts with divine violence to the marginal images, scholars should make the texts with divine violence central in Old Testament studies because they help people to express their experiences of violence and somehow provides the tools of living with the violence to people. She suggests five steps of dealing with such texts. These include: reading the texts in their historical contexts by paying attention to the kind of violence the actors in these texts experience.<sup>42</sup> Next, Baumann suggests a contextualisation of the texts.<sup>43</sup> Thirdly, she suggests a comparative approach whereby these texts should be compared with older texts in the Old

<sup>33</sup> Archer, G.L., *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 121.

<sup>34</sup> Martens, E.A., "Toward shalom: Absorbing the violence", R. Hess & E.A. Martens (eds.): *War in the Bible and Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century*. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008) 44.

<sup>35</sup> Schwartz, R. M., *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 176.

<sup>36</sup> Banana, C., "The case for a new Bible", I. Mukonyora, J. L. Cox & F.J. Verstraelen, eds., *Rewriting the Bible: The Real Issues*. (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1993) 30. Banana is not only critical to violent texts but also to the view that the Bible contains experiences of one group to the exclusion of others

<sup>37</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, E., "The ethics of biblical interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship", (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 107,1988) 14.

<sup>38</sup> Schüssler, Fiorenza, E., *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 28.

<sup>39</sup> Barton, J., *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003) 39.

<sup>40</sup> Barton, J., *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003) 38.

<sup>41</sup> Baumann, G., "Hermeneutical perspectives on violence against women and on divine violence in German-speaking Old Testament exegesis", K. Holter & L.C. Jonker (eds.): *Global Hermeneutics? Reflections and Consequences*. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2010)17-24.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

Testament so as to show how traditions developed and consequently establish contexts where the violent images emerge.<sup>44</sup> Baumann then proceeds to ask questions about the texts' current literary context. Finally, she attempts to interpret the texts by asking how the texts helped the ancient writers to give expression to their experiences of violence.<sup>45</sup>

In their suggestion that texts with a violent message should be viewed as mere rhetoric or as ways to help ancient writers express their experiences.<sup>46</sup> The scholars seem to be of the view that such violence as it is depicted in the texts should be viewed as though it never took place at all, but the writers of the Bible were only using them as imaginary images. However, I find this argument to be a denial of the reality. As Barr observes – and I agree with him – texts with a violent message are morally offensive and must be faced as such.<sup>47</sup> This is because the texts with a violent tone have been used as justifications for various atrocities by those who consider themselves as fighters of a religious cause, and we cannot afford to simply view them as only imaginary graphics or symbolic images. As biblical scholars, we must acknowledge that the words of violence in the Old Testament texts had the possibility to create what they said for the first readers of the texts – and for many, they still do in the present times. For that matter, the problem of texts with a violent message in the Old Testament cannot be glossed, but must be faced with honesty.<sup>48</sup> In my view there should be constructive

engagement with texts that tend to implicitly or explicitly justify violence.

As already seen, some scholars have called upon the need to rewrite the Bible or simply separate the Old Testament from the New Testament.<sup>49</sup> The suggestion is thought-provoking but may not provide a solution to the problem. Such a position is not likely to work because it creates more complications of authenticity and authority.<sup>50</sup> Putting emphasis on texts that promote good and ignoring the violent texts is not without problems especially where there are no guiding hermeneutical principles.<sup>51</sup> Without proper hermeneutical principles, people tend to only choose texts which only justify what they wish to do.<sup>52</sup> As an example, selective reading was the case when seeking justifications for slavery and colonialism. Therefore, in my view, biblical scholars must admit that texts with a violent tone are in all aspects morally offensive and must be faced as such.<sup>53</sup> This also calls for the need for an urgent response to the challenges that come with the interpretation of such texts.

## CONCLUSION

This article has observed that the problem of violence in the Bible is a dilemma for biblical studies and interpreters. This problem is even made worse in Africa with the new Religious Movements which have most of the time presented with self-pronounced prophets. It is therefore not only

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Smith-Christopher, D. L., *Jonah, Jesus, and Other Good Coyotes: Speaking Peace to Power in the Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), and Anderson, B.W., *Contours of Old Testament Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 171-180.

<sup>47</sup> Barr, J., *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 218.

<sup>48</sup> Collins, J.J., *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) 30.

<sup>49</sup> Bultmann, R., *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*. Ed. by S. Ogden. (London: S.C.M, 1964), Schwartz, R. M., *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), Banana, C., "The case for a new Bible", I. Mukonyora, J. L. Cox & F.J. Verstraelen, eds., *Rewriting the Bible: The Real Issues*. (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> Reed, S.A., "Critique of Canaan Banana's call to rewrite the Bible", (*Religion & Theology* 3, 1996) 288. Masenya, M.J., *How Worthy Is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African-South Africa*. (New York: Peter Lang Bible and Theology in Africa, 4, 2004) 23.

<sup>51</sup> Pallmeyer, N. J., *Saving Christianity from Empire*. (New York & London: Continuum. 2005), Johnson, L.T. "Lessons from pre-modern Biblical Scholarship", (*Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology Conference*. Princeton, 2001), Collins, J.J., *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), and Bauckham, R., *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2. Edition, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Bauckham, R., *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2. Edition, 2011) 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> Barr, J., *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 218.

imperative but also very urgent for scholars to address the challenges that are presented of reading and interpreting difficult texts as presented in this article.