

**Review of Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa:
A Christian Theological Method**

Reviewer: Philemon Ibrahim¹ (PhDc) 

¹ECWA Theological Seminary, Karu, Abuja, Nigeria

Bibliographic details of book

Author: Yusufu Turaki
ISBN: 9781783687596
Publisher: Langham Publishing
Number of pages: 510
Published: 2020
Price: £27.99

Publication History

Date received: 09-06-2025
Date accepted: 01-08-2025
Date published: 05-09-2025

Correspondence

Philemon Ibrahim
scholarmoon6666@gmail.com

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Reverend Professor Yusufu Turaki was Provost of Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS); General Secretary of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA); National Vice-President of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN); Language Consultant, International Bible Society (IBS); Executive Secretary of Ethics, Peace and Justice Commission of the Association of the Evangelicals of Africa (AEA) and presently a Professor of Theology and Social Ethics at JETS, Jos, Nigeria and Chief Executive Director of the Yusuf Turaki Foundation. He holds a Ph.D. in Social Ethics (Boston University), a Double Major Master's in Theology and Ethics (Gordon-Conwell), Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Yale Divinity School. He is married to Deborah with 4 children. Prof. Turaki is the author of several books, book chapters, articles, papers, and manuscripts in ethics, theology, missions, development, colonialism, Islam, African contemporary socio-political issues, African Traditional Religion, and culture. Therefore, he is a well-qualified person to write for African theologians on biblical reflections in the African context with African heritage in mind. A rich resource to help Christians in Africa understand how to relate to Africa's Traditional Religious heritage. *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa: A Christian Theological Method* is one of the insightful works of Yusufu Turaki, compressed into about 500 pages, which I will first reflect on his initial remarks and his general introduction. I am privileged to review such a distinguished African scholar.

2.0 SUMMARY AND CRITIQUE

The writer acknowledges that scholarship in Africa is either highly Western or African (xxvii). This is very true to every African theologian or every theologian in the African context, as the author acknowledges that in the formation of scholarship in Africa is no longer the gospel and the bible that confront Africa, but African now confronts the gospel and the bible through their religious scholars to show how they differ from the western missionaries (Xxviii). Turaki postulates, it is extreme for Africans to use their ideology to interpret the

scripture (xxviii). Therefore, if it is extreme, then contextualization should be avoided in their scholarship because it gives birth to the extreme. However, using a biblical worldview to interact or engage with the underlying mindset and thought, the world of African Traditional Religion was not a new approach among African scholars (xxviii-xxix).

According to Turaki, two terms are the guiding principles of this research (xxxiv), which are Bibliocentric and Christocentric. Therefore, for employing the two terms in his work, he argues in the explanation for the purposeful usage of the term that the Bible and Christ must be the center of our theological method (xxxv). The dilemma is often how to use those terms in our reflection in the African context. He explains further that "in emphasizing Jesus Christ and the bible does not mean that other major doctrinal themes can be ignored. No doctrinal theme must be given any lesser position than it was accorded in the scripture and in Christian teachings" (xxxvi).

The author divided the Book into three parts; this part focuses on understanding the Legacy of Western Christianity in Africa and the Need for an African Christian Theology (3-26), Reactions to Missionary Christianity (27-42), Approaches and Typologies of African Theology (43-60) and African Theological Issues (61-79). On the legacy of Western Christianity in Africa and the need for an African Christian theology (3), argues that two forms of Christianity influenced Africa: "the older Palestinian, Mediterranean or Hellenistic Christianity which came directly from Jesus and his apostles who lived in Palestine; and the later western missionary Christianity" (3). Notwithstanding, his focus on the western missionary Christianity in both colonial and post-colonial Africa, he affirms that the worldviews of European and North American societies shaped both the theories and practices of Christianity in Africa (4). Almost every African theologian agreed with such influence of the Western worldview in African Christianity.

The second part is the chapter of reflection, articulation, and imagination of Turaki's perception towards an Understanding

of African Traditional Religion (80). He stresses the ways of relating the Bible and the Gospel of Christ to the study of African religion and culture (81). The chapter emphasizes mainly on some of the methods from different theologians (81). Turaki expounds on the following for the understanding of African religion through the methodologies and approaches to the Study of Religion and Culture (81-108), Defining Religion (81-108), On Studying African Traditional Religion (117-120), Fundamental Theological Beliefs (121-134), fundamental Psychological Beliefs (135-138), Fundamental Philosophical Beliefs (121-134), Fundamental Moral and Ethical Laws (135-138), Ethical and Moral Principles (159-172), The Supreme Being (173-178), Gods, Divinities and Spirits: Monotheism or Polytheism (179-188), Communication with and from the Spirit World (189-200), The Acquisition of Power (201-208), The Exercise of Power (209-216), Being Human (217-224) and lastly he looks at the Meaning of Life (225-229), in the context of Africa. He is trying to build the understanding of the reader toward having holistic knowledge of African Traditional Religion.

This last Part looks at the Engagement and Interaction between Christianity and the African Traditional Religion and Worldview in the following outstanding and persuasive ways (231): Engaging with the Traditional Belief in Impersonal (Mystical) Powers (233-246), The Power of God's Sovereignty (247-252), Engaging with the Traditional Belief in Spirit Beings (253-260), Engaging with the Traditional Belief about the Origin of Spirit Beings (261-268), Engaging with the Traditional Belief and Good and Evil (269-278), Engaging with the Traditional Belief in Gods and Divinities (279-284), Engaging with the Traditional Belief in Ancestors (285-294) (295-298), The Mediator: Jesus the Messiah (295-298), Engaging with the Traditional Belief in the Supreme Being (299-302), The Doctrine of God (303-316), Engaging with the Traditional Roots of Spiritual Idolatry (317-328), Engaging with the African Holistic Worldview (329-334), The Power and Authority of Jesus the Messiah (335-342), Engaging with the Traditional Communal Worldview (343-350), Engaging with

Traditional Moral and Ethical Beliefs (351-358), Engaging with the Traditional Concept of Leadership (359-376), Engaging with Governance, Management and Administration (377-382), Engaging with the Need to Create a Responsible and Just Society (383-392), Engaging with Traditional Human Values (393-404), Engaging with the Doctrine of Man (405-416), Engaging with the Doctrine of Sin (417-422), Engaging with the Concept of Covenants (423-432), Biblical Theology (433-438), A Theological Framework of Religions and Cultures (439-444) and lastly he sum up the whole discussion and engagement (445-451).

In *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa: A Christian Theological Method*, the author avoids the discussion of early Christianity (older Palestinian, Mediterranean, or Hellenistic Christianity) and Africa before Western invaders even though they are issues that Africans need to address in their communities instead of allowing their children to assume Christianity is a western religion. The story deserves to be told only to the African child bringing the Bible at home to the African person, because the challenge of always starting the story of Christianity in Africa with western missionaries is the continuous portrayal of Christianity as a western religion as observed in this Book. The reality is that neither Jews nor Christians are new to Africa. So, Christianity is not a foreign to Africans in Africa, as Turaki asserts that "Christianity in Africa has 'come of age'; it is no longer foreign, but indeed an African religion" (54). Both covenant peoples remember a history of salvation that had its earliest beginnings in the crossroads of two continents: Asia and Africa (Oden 2007, 12-14). Reading through the book, one may say that his Western education influenced his understanding of Africa and the Bible. This is not surprising because his Western theologians and supervisors ought to influence.

Another academic quandary with the Book is the obverse and improper citations within the Book's footnotes. The Book has confused and enigmatic footnotes. The first quotation of the Book looks like the second time the author is citing the person. For example, the first footnote has no full citation (Michael,

"Foundation Biblical Principles,") (xxxiv) instead of (Matthew Michael, "Foundation Biblical Principles for Doing African Theology: The Place of Bibliocentric and Christocentric," *Class Term Paper* (Jos, Nigeria: ECWA Theological Seminary, 2006). Apart from the problematic halfway footnotes, there are many footnotes that he puts the page numbers and the other times, he dismisses the page numbers of the same Book. This is rigorously problematic for academic work because the unclear footnote can lead to plagiarism. Moreover, here is the most intractable issue with the footnotes, in the sense of quoting another scholar and citing a different person in the footnote; he quoted B.C Ray, *African Religions*, and then cited J. Morgan, *Religion and Culture as Meaning System* (112; footnote 6). This is a severe academic misdemeanor that is plagiarism or equivalent as plagiarism.

Notwithstanding, this Book is an exceptional scholarly work that is very important when addressing the issues relating to the collision of religions and cultural worldviews of Africans with African Traditional Religion and worldviews. Therefore, the author offers a theological and philosophical framework for engaging these problematic issues surrounding the problem of presenting Christ in the African context without destroying the excellent aspect of African worldviews, which the western missionaries successfully did that has left a lasting impact on the contemporary age.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Turaki systematically analyzes the nature of African Traditional Religion and its conflicting dialogue with Christianity and the need for African scholars who are doing African Christian theology to address the roots of cultural and historical understanding of Christianity in Africa. Therefore, the submission of Turaki is worth applauding, especially his understanding toward providing a holistic and practical guide for engaging the culture and Religion in Africa with scriptural truth. It is an unavoidable book for seminarians and university students interested in discussing

continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and traditional African Religion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Oden, Thomas C. 2007. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

About the Author

Philemon Ibrahim is an African biblical researcher. He spent two years as an Adjunct Lecturer at the ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro; and Three years as an Adjunct Lecturer at Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) and presently a full-time Lecturer and acting Director of Graduate Studies (ADGS) at ECWA Theological Seminary Karu (KETS), Abuja, Nigeria. My ORCID: 0009-0008-9801-8458