

INTRODUCING

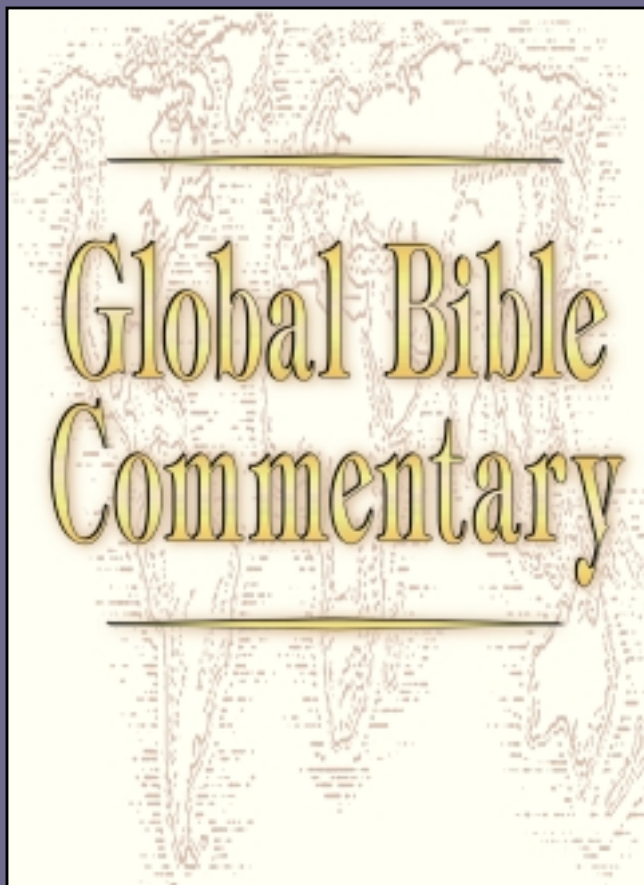
Global Bible Commentary

Biblical Interpretation from Worldwide Perspectives

*The Global Bible
Commentary
is receiving
overwhelming
critical acclaim!*

See page 2 to find
out what's being said.

General Editor:
Daniel M. Patte;
Associate Editors:
L. Severino Croatto,
Nicole Wilkinson Duran,
Teresa Okure,
and Archie Chi Chung Lee



Published by



Acclaim for the *Global Bible Commentary*

If any book demonstrates the value of cultural criticism and the importance of particularity in interpretation, this is it! Scholars from diverse social locations in every continent bring their distinctive context to bear on the act of interpreting. In so doing, they shed eye-opening light on the biblical texts. The resulting critical dialogue with the Bible exposes the oppressive as well as the liberating dynamics of the texts while at the same time showing how the Bible might address the social, political, cultural, and economic dynamics of our world today. This collection can change the way you read the Bible—scholars and students, clergy and laity alike.

—David Rhoads, Professor of New Testament
Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, Illinois

For someone with a long-standing suspicion of and critical attitude about the project that is the commentary, I must nonetheless admit fascination with and support for the Global Bible Commentary. The conceptualization, organization, and agenda are not merely defensibly interesting but compelling. And the lineup of contributors is most impressive. In many respects—its commitments to multiplicity of readings; its abandonment of the quest for the correct reading; and its encouragement of and facilitation of culturalist and self-reflexive work—this project is the un-commentary. I can recommend it with enthusiasm, especially to those students who have wondered how critical, disciplined work can be engaged and even made compelling without hiding the self and its worlds.

—Vincent L. Wimbush, Professor of New Testament
Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California

Biblical scholarship, methodologically and ideologically monolingual for so long, now speaks in other tongues, as this commentary eloquently attests. As a seminary professor privileged to teach and learn from an international and multi-ethnic student body, I welcome the advent of this one-of-a-kind textbook.

—Stephen D. Moore
The Theological School, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

The new Abingdon's Global Bible Commentary is a treasure. Not only have the editors brought together interpretative articles from such countries as Nigeria, Argentina, and Costa Rica, it has solicited manuscripts from a multiplicity of ethnic backgrounds and religious traditions. Abingdon's commentary recognizes that the Bible has historical roots but it also is alive and well in all sorts of communities around the globe. I applaud their efforts of bringing the diverse and timely voices into our professional lives, perhaps our classrooms, and to the scholarly discussions of biblical issues.

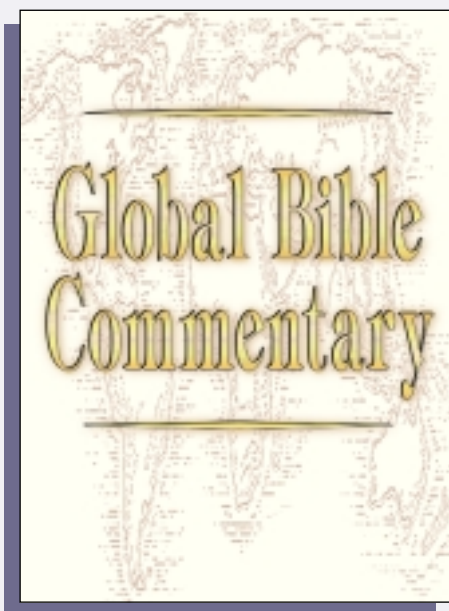
—Marla J. Selvidge, Professor and Director
Center for Religious Studies, Central Missouri State University

The publication of A Global Bible Commentary marks an epoch in the history of the interpretation of Scripture. The presupposition of this visionary work is the maturation of a global community of interpreters in understanding the hermeneutical task. The priority given to the contextual character of interpretation transforms the work from an academic compendium to a cultural kaleidoscope of readings. Students and scholars in Western Europe and North America will be astonished at the novelty of the interpretations that emerge from its pages. The voices of the commentators in this book are sometimes insistent, sometimes poignant, exuberant, provocative, but always inviting. One emerges from the reading of this rich and complex commentary with a new sense of humility and profound gratitude.

—Professor Laurence L. Welborn
United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio

ABINGDON PRESS INTRODUCES THE Global Bible Commentary

This new commentary invites users to expand their horizons by reading the Bible with scholars from all over the world and from different religious persuasions. The commentators do not hide their religious or ideological convictions. They readily disclose them in order to clarify the reasons for their empathy in one or another



theological feature of the biblical text. By making explicit the specific context and the concerns from which he or she reads the Bible, each scholar points out significant aspects of the biblical text that we may have taken for granted or overlooked. Although these scholars have approaches and concerns that often are poles apart, they share two basic convictions: biblical interpretation always matters and reading the Bible “with others” is highly rewarding.

Each of the 72 short commentaries in the *Global Bible Commentary* is an accessible guide for biblical study for groups and the academic classroom. Written for undergraduate and seminary students and their teachers, as well as for pastors and adult Sunday school classes, it introduces readers to the life context of each interpreter, the main features of the biblical book in its original context, and a contextual conclusion from the interpreter’s perspective. It also brings us a precious gift, namely the opportunity of reading each biblical book as if for the first time.

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Key Features of the *Global Bible Commentary*

EXODUS

Jorge Pixley
Seminario Teológico Bautista, Managua, Nicaragua

LIFE CONTEXT OF THE INTERPRETATION

I have spent almost all of my professional life teaching in theological schools in Mesoamérica, or Middle America, which, as I understand it, includes Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. It is out of this context that I share with the readers of this commentary the way Exodus reads to us in Mesoamérica. Let me add a further word about this *us*. The context for Bible reading over the forty years of my ministry has been the people's groups, both Catholic and evangelical; that are devoted to what we call the *lectura popular de la Biblia*, a people's reading of the Bible.

The empirical fact of our situation is countries with formal democracies and dramatically declining lifestyles for the majority of the people. It is a situation dominated by a global market in an era when capitalism is no longer a growing productive force. The achievement of financial transactions, mainly a matter of very little increase in which means there is very little increase in the production of goods, and the principal source of capital accumulation is the redistribution of wealth through banks and stock exchanges. It does not take much reflection to see that this kind of accumulation must take away from many in order for some to enrich themselves. This is possible in large measure by a merciless extraction of wealth from impoverished countries, an extraction that is only possible through a policing network of financial organizations controlled by U.S. financial interests: principally, the

International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank (WB). In our Bible study groups and church reflections, these mechanisms are understood by ordinary people. Let me add a word about our formal democracy as well. There was a period from about 1959 to 1989 when we lived in a condition of more or less open warfare between the dominant sectors of society and the poor. The means of control were military, and no households were barred. Whole villages in countries like Guatemala experienced massacres like Guatemala experienced massacres, and countries like Mexico and El Salvador witnessed extensive torture and repressive actions. The U.S. government supported war in Nicaragua, a war whose illegal character was confirmed by the World Court in The Hague but not recognized by the U.S. government. Today, though, the military repression has decreased in our area. There is the possibility of electing officials, a contingent control from the U.S. empire, a control exercised by allowing very limited options for elected governments, so that it makes little difference which party is elect-

Jorge (George) Pixley, now retired in Claremont, California, taught biblical studies for twelve years, Argentina for one year, Mexico for ten years, and Nicaragua for six years. His known books are *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, with Clodovis Boff, 1989; *People's History* (1992), both translated into several languages, as well as *On Perspective* (1987).

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Short biography of interpreter.

Insightful and provocative analysis of the biblical text from the interpreter's own perspective.

The *Global Bible Commentary* provides an excellent incentive for individuals and groups to study the entire Bible in new and perceptive ways.

Each of us who contributed to the *Global Bible Commentary* made the contextual character of our interpretations as explicit as we could so as to signal that we were not reading for others, but inviting others to read with us.

—Daniel Patte, General Editor,
From the Introduction

EXODUS

remember that it had already been announced that the struggle would have to become violent before Pharaoh yielded, and a reaffirmation of divine commitment to this struggle as a fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (6:2-8).

When Moses and Aaron speak anew to the people, nobody wants to listen (6:9). Here is a weakening of solidarity, which is the nemesis of all struggles for liberation and with which only true leaders can cope. Moses and Aaron are going to prove themselves to be such. But for the moment they must return to Pharaoh with their weakened position (6:10-13). We will now have a brief parenthesis (6:14-7:7) before we pick up the story again.

Excurses: The Credentials of Moses and Aaron (Exod 6:14-7:7)

This parenthesis in the story places Moses and Aaron in their appropriate line among the children of Israel, the presumed father of all Israelites. Moses and Aaron are grandsons of Levi. The genealogy is interested in them specifically, so it only includes the first three sons of Israel (Reuben, Simeon, and Levi) in the order of the list found in Exodus 1:1-4.

YHWH the Terrorist Softens Pharaoh to Release the Children of Israel (Exod 7:8-11:10)

In Exodus 7:3 YHWH announced to Moses his intention of performing his signs and wonders (*otot v'et-mofot*) before and in the land of Egypt. And the Pharaoh and in the land of Egypt. In this long passage we are now commenting on, in fact, the performance of these signs and wonders, which have the triple purpose of 1) showing that YHWH, the God of the Hebrews, is a powerful God; 2) softening the heart of Pharaoh; and 3) terrorizing the population to demand the Hebrews' expulsion from the land of Egypt. After the prison show of wonders before the king (7:10-13) comes a series of nine wonders plus the announcement of a tenth yet to come. Some of these are public nuisances, like the frogs (8:1-15), the lice (or gnats, vermin, *kinnim*,

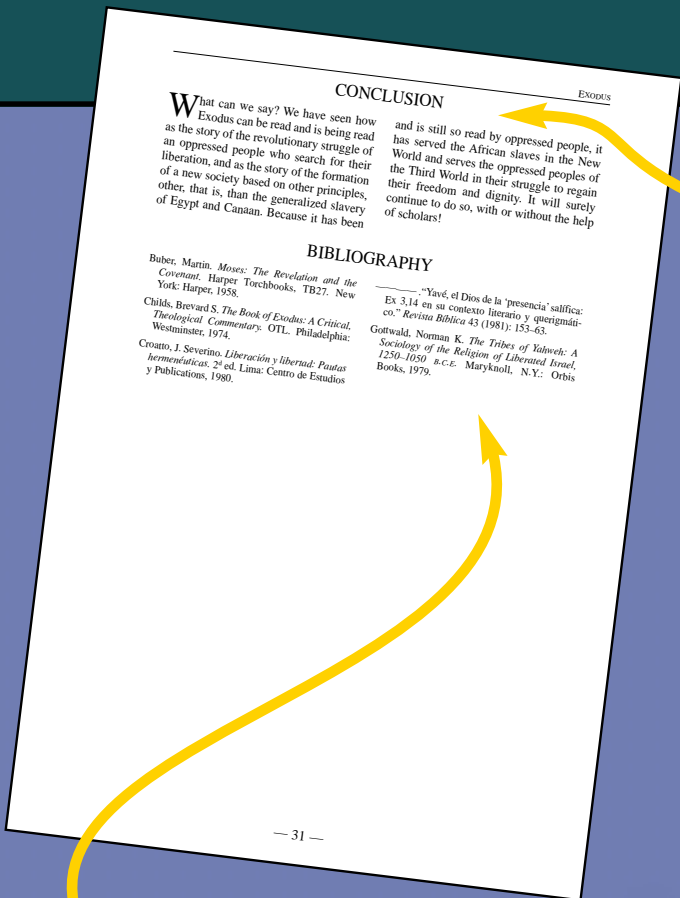
8:16-19), and the swarms of diverse insects (*arov*, 8:20-32). Other wonders are real plagues—diseases in livestock and humans—like the great plague (*deber kabad mead*), or "deadly pestilence," on all cattle small and large (9:1-7) and the ulcers on humans (*ishchin*), or "festering boils," on humans and cattle (9:8-12). We would call these plagues biological warfare today.

The next category of wonders are attacks on the sustenance of the general population—the conversion of the river water to blood (7:14-25), the great hailstorm (9:13-35), and the locusts that destroy those crops left standing by the hail (10:1-20). As one would expect, these are the wonders that would have the strongest effect on the people of Egypt and even on the ministers of the king (see 9:20-21 and 10:7). These sorts of actions would create desperation in any population. We would call them sabotage today. The ministers even recognize that the land has been destroyed and the king has not yet taken note (10:7).

The next to the last wonder, the three days of darkness, coming as it does after the nuisances, the plagues, and the sabotage of the vital supplies of the king, who makes the effect even on the king, for the first time, threatens to kill Moses (10:28). It is surprising the king has not tried to kill him before. The last and decisive wonder, the death of all the firstborn of Egypt, is only announced in Exodus 11:1-9 and its execution is left until later (12:29-36), after the instructions for the celebration of Passover and the feast of unleavened bread (12:1-28).

Looked at as a whole, this is a series of terrorist actions. They first cause pressure on the population and finally on the king himself, who, like all rulers, is insulated from the calamities that affect ordinary people. Was it Moses and his followers or was it God who carried out these terrorist actions? Our text supposes that YHWH, the God of the Israelites, is the terrorist. This terror is used with a purpose, but then the creation of terror among any population usually is, of them, Brazilian, the Uruguayan, the Guatemalan.

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CONCLUSION

What can we say? We have seen how Exodus can be read and is being read as the story of the revolutionary struggle of an oppressed people who search for their liberation, and as the story of the formation of a new society based on other principles, other, that is, than the generalized slavery of Egypt and Canaan. Because it has been and is still so read by oppressed people, it has served the African slaves in the New World and serves the oppressed peoples of the Third World in their struggle to regain their freedom and dignity. It will surely continue to do so, with or without the help of scholars!

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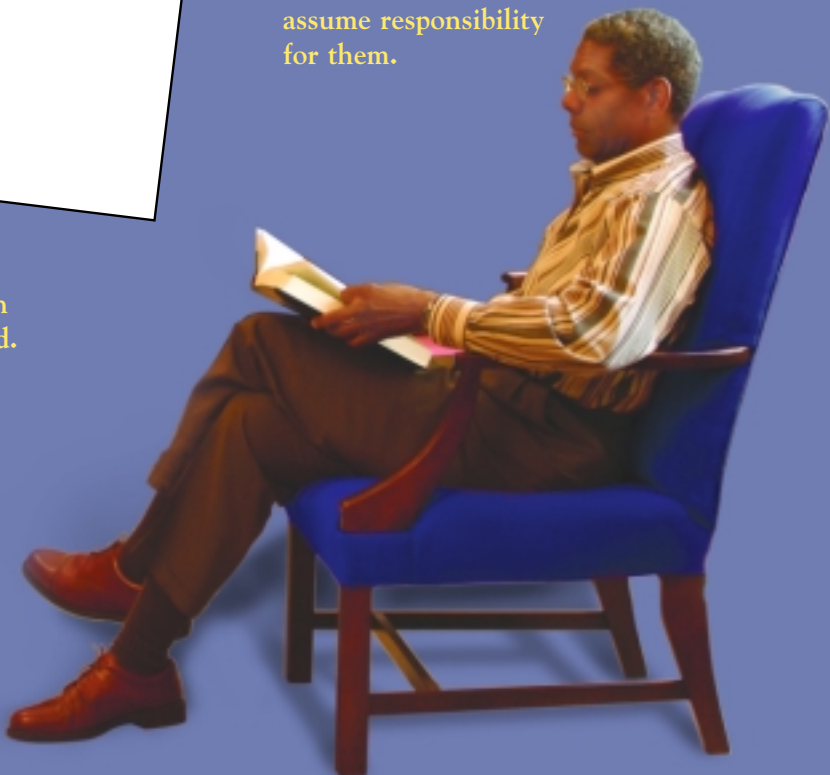
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Conclusions of the study as it relates to the cultural situation of the interpreter.

Through exposure to the different interpretations of others and by gaining respect for and understanding of those interpretations, users of the *Global Bible Commentary* can, in turn, become aware of the context of their own interpretations. From this position of heightened awareness, they can better assess how they formulated their choices and then assume responsibility for them.

Complete information on important resources cited.

Pastors may use the *Global Bible Commentary* to prepare their sermons as they seek to address their congregations' needs by taking into account their particular situations.



More Key Features...

MARK'S HEALING STORIES IN AN AIDS CONTEXT

Musa W. Dube
University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana and Scripps College, Claremont, Calif., USA

LIFE CONTEXT OF THE INTERPRETATION

Botswana: Healing Where There Is No Healing

As an activist and advocate for those living with HIV and AIDS in my home country of Botswana, and a professor of New Testament at the University of Botswana, I teach the gospels' healing narratives in a place where every student knows somebody—a relative, a friend, a neighbor, a colleague, a classmate—who is dying or has died of AIDS. The incurable nature of the disease, the prohibitive expense of treatment for it, and the devastation that it wreaks on even the most basic social interactions on even the framework from which I read these stories. When one meets a friend after some time apart, and reads in the text of that friend's body the clear indications of AIDS, there seems to be no appropriate response. To speak of the disease is to force the friend to choose between facing the social stigma of AIDS or denying it, while not speaking of the disease makes all other interaction—even a greeting as innocuous as "good morning, how are you?"—cruelly absurd. The moment of meeting a person living with HIV and AIDS becomes a moment of reading a social text written in the invisible air,

with a million conflicts. At the root of all these tough encounters is the social stigma that initially associated HIV and AIDS with sexual immorality, the fear of infection, and the ugly face of death. This stigma has led many AIDS patients to be closed away and secretly kept by relatives, a fact that adds psychological strain to their physical state. The general public, shielded from seeing the truth about AIDS, becomes increasingly unprepared to deal with their own context. Consequently, those with HIV and AIDS who dare to walk outside tend to shock the average person, leading to lies, fears, and sometimes flight. One conclusion is clear about reading the social text of HIV and AIDS: we may not be all infected but we are all affected.

Analysis of the Context

For regions like Botswana that are highly infected by HIV and AIDS, the contemporary reader of the Synoptic Gospels cannot help but be stunned to find a Jesus who

Musa W. Dube, formerly an associate professor at the University of Botswana, Botswana and the World Council of Churches in Africa, now HIV/AIDS and theology for the World Council of Churches in Africa, Scripps College. Her many publications include the following books: *Interpretations of the Bible* (2000); *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods and Theological Programs* (WCC 2003); *Africa Praying: A Handbook of HIV/AIDS and Liturgical Programs* (WCC 2004); and the forthcoming *Grant Me Justice: HIV/AIDS and the Theology of African Women*. The present article has been published longer in the collection *Reading Scripture: Essays in African Hermeneutics* (Gary A. Phillips and Nicole Wilkinson Duran, eds., Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2004).

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The Global Bible Commentary is specially designed for Bible study groups and classes that look for a constructive and critical way of reading large portions of the Bible, if not the entire Bible, and of promoting active participation of their members.

Social, political, religious, and cultural context of the interpreter.

MARK'S HEALING STORIES IN AN AIDS CONTEXT

AIDS context? Such methods of reading and teaching are not clearly articulated in our textbooks or in the reference books in the library, for they were not written to directly address our HIV and AIDS context.

To meet this challenge, my approach was that of "reading with" (see West and Dube 2000). Instead of just reading the library references and textbooks, I assigned stories of Jesus' healing miracles to students and asked them to design questionnaires from the passage in the light of HIV and AIDS and take them to the community outside the academic halls—that is, to read the miracles of healing in the frontlines of the battle with HIV and AIDS. Students brought their findings and we shared them in class. Although I would not say this approach provides "the answer" to teaching the healing miracles of Jesus in an HIV and AIDS context, it does provide a space of social gathering. The academic community meets in search of answers toward the sick, and possibly to encounter new models of living. The classroom presentations become a social space of sharing and learning to talk openly about a problem that we can only regard as one too big to hide. In this conversational process, we participate in our own healing as we come to define ourselves as "all affected" by the HIV and AIDS in our country, region, and continent. The

classroom becomes a social space for those tough encounters as we take a moment to talk about what is really happening and how best we can bring ourselves to live with each other with our situation.

What follows is one example of this process, the results of a questionnaire on Mark 1:40-44 (par. Matt 8:1-4 Luke 5:12-15), in which Jesus heals a leper through touch. This group of respondents, interviewed in Gaborone by my research assistant, Thato Ratsobe, were largely church leaders, partly to assess the view of the church toward people living with HIV and AIDS—to ascertain whether the church is on the condemnation or caring side. At the same time, the research earnestly sought the leaders' views on the significance of the healing miracles of Jesus in an HIV and AIDS context. Of the thirteen people interviewed, eight were men, ranging in age from twenty-eight to forty-five years, of whom five are church leaders. The remaining five were women, ages twenty-four to fifty-eight, of whom one is a church minister and working others are theologically trained and working for church-related organizations. One woman did not identify herself as a church leader. Their responses are presented here in their own words, not only to make their words available to those affected by HIV and AIDS and provide the healing that is desperately needed, but also to allow readers to carry out their own analysis.

CONTEXTUAL COMMENT

Mark 1:40-44: "I Desire it, Be Cleansed"

Our questionnaire asked four questions concerning the healing of the leper. They were as follows: (1) How is leprosy comparable to AIDS?; (2) If leprosy was an incurable disease, what is the significance of the leper's request; namely, "If you wish, cleanse me." Can Jesus make us clean in AIDS-ridden Botswana?; (3) If leprosy was a contagious disease, what is the significance of Jesus' act of touching him, when

he could have cured the leper without touching him? and; (4) How is this story significant for Botswana AIDS patients?

The response of the two younger women was pessimistic. To the first question, they both said leprosy is similar to AIDS, for it is incurable. Responding to the second question, Ketso said, "Since Jesus does not exist, AIDS cannot be cured." Mpho acknowledged that "Jesus could heal leprosy while he was in the physical form," but she did not seem to have much hope.

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Commentary on the biblical book from the perspective of the interpreter

Global Bible Commentary Contributors

DANIEL M. PATTE,

Dr. Patte, General Editor of *Global Bible Commentary*, is a professor of New Testament and early Christianity at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Patte was general editor of *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism*, of the Society of Biblical Literature (1992–98). He is now on the editorial boards of *The Bulletin of Contextual Theology in Southern Africa* and of *Chinese Christianity: An Experimental Journal of Bible, Theology and Culture*.

Associate Editors:

J. Severino Croatto (deceased) was professor of exegesis, Hebrew, and religious studies at Instituto Superior Evangelélico de Estudio Teológicos, Buenos Aires.

Nicole Wilkinson Duran is currently teaching part-time at Rosemont College and Villanova University.

Teresa Okure, SHCJ, is professor of New Testament and gender hermeneutics at the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Archie Chi Chung Lee is professor of Hebrew Bible, Department of Cultural and Religious Studies at Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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