Johannine research in Africa, part 2: An annotated bibliography

No annotated bibliography on the research on Johannine literature in Africa exists. This means that no proper overview of Johannine research in Africa is available. This article (as part 2 of a broader analysis) fills that lacuna by presenting a comprehensive bibliography of research done on John in Africa (combined with a proper analysis in part 1). It classifies the available research according to major topics and presents the publications in chronological order under each topic.

Introduction

This annotated bibliography forms the second part of the research regarding results on Johannine research in Africa. The first part is an analytical survey of the research. This survey of the current publications in the field of Johannine studies in Africa is an effort to ‘take stock’ of the research activities in this field. This is imperative for future research and responsible research planning in this field.

The information presented here is not readily available and this is the only comprehensive list of available research on John in Africa, making it a key research tool. The aim of the annotations is to determine where Johannine scholars stand, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and what still needs to be done in this field. The importance of this information for research is that it serves as an indication for Johannine researchers of what was already done (so that the wheel does not have to be rediscovered again), and what should be addressed in future to strengthen Johannine research in Africa. In order to ‘plot’ the development of themes and interests in the research it was decided to follow a chronological rather than an alphabetical listing of the articles. Obviously there are also a large number of ‘popular publications’ on John. These are not covered in this bibliography, neither are PhD dissertations, except if they are published as books.

The advantage of such classification is that it offers a comprehensive overview of the foci of Johannine research in Africa. The lacunae become evident and challenge researchers to address the areas that still lack attention. Obviously, every form of classification has its problems. Some articles deal with more than one theme, in which case the same article is classified under different categories. In many cases the arguments within a particular article deal with several topics – the question is whether (and when) one should mention the particular article under all the categories it touches upon. It was decided against such a detailed classification, since the aim of this annotated bibliography is rather to plot the major areas of Johannine research in Africa. Classification is therefore restricted to the major themes addressed by the respective articles.

Publications with Johannine Christology as a central theme

Christology forms the heart of Johannine theology. The centrality of the Johannine Christology is also evident in African Johannine research. The range of topics and themes that are addressed
varies, focusing both on general Christological themes as well as articles focusing on specific aspects of Christology that form part of the African ‘oeuvre’. This is one of the more fruitful areas of African Johannine research.


**Publications predominantly dealing with pneumatology in John**

Without a clear understanding of how spirits and powers work within a holistic worldview, African Christianity cannot be understood. Survival in this world implies proper control and manipulation of the influence of spirits on one’s personal and social life. It is therefore surprising that so little African research is available on the Spirit in John. The majority of research is done by southern (white) scholars. African Johannine scholars across the continent need to pay more attention to this aspect of the Johannine material if they want to explore the impact the text could have on African Christianity in any significant depth. In particular, the imagery of the Paraclete that concretises the presence of Jesus amongst the Johannine Christians should not be overlooked.


Publications focusing on salvation (soteriology) in John

Christology and soteriology overlap in John – Jesus is the one who brings life to those who are dead and light to those who are in the darkness. Since this is a significant characteristic of the Gospel it is to be expected that this topic will receive due attention. This is obviously a wide theme in John and the variety of topics vouch for this, such as life, birth, faith, atonement, the cross-events, etc. are also addressed in African Johannine research.


Dube, M.W., 1996, Saviour of the world but not of this world: A post-colonial reading of spatial construction in John, Scholars, Atlanta.


Publications on ecclesiology in African Johannine research

Although several articles deal with ecclesiological issues in Johannine literature, there is no clear unity of interest. The articles cover a variety of texts and themes. The church in Africa was, and is, discovering and establishing its ecclesiological nature over the last couple of decades. Therefore it is a pity that the Johannine ecclesiology with its strong focus on community, fellowship, sharing and unity is not explored in more detail, since these are all aspects that are important to African life. John could offer many valuable insights to the African Christian communities. Research in this area is dearly needed.


Johannine eschatology in African research

Eschatology as a specific theme has played a minimal role in African Johannine studies up to this point, except for two articles that were published as the result of a conference held in Pretoria on the eschatology of the New Testament. There are, however, some articles that deal with issues that could be described as expressions of realised eschatology, but the aim of these articles is not to deal with eschatology as such.


Publications on the ethics of John

Over the last three decades there was an evergreen interest in the ethics of John, mainly in the South. Some of the leading work on the ethics of John was done by Africans, who were also largely responsible for the current revival of interest in Johannine ethics. The publications range from general articles that explore the ethical structure of John, to publications on detailed ethical issues.


Publications focusing on mission in John

African Christianity is the result of missionary activities. Thus it is no wonder that the topic of mission remained of importance, also to Johannine scholars. The best-known work in this field is that of Okure. More recently mission was redefined with the aid of Johannine material as the movement of the Christianity towards those people who left the church (missional church movement).


Publications on women in Johannine material

Africa is blessed with some strong woman theologians who made an impact on Johannine research. No wonder that women issues are one of the stronger points of focus in the Johannine research in Africa as a whole. In discussing woman issues, the women in the Gospel (the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene, and the mother of Jesus) are of course major themes for study and discussion.


Publications related to experience, worship and spirituality in Johannine material

Concreteness is an important element within the spiritual experience of African spirituality. Since the presence of God within the lives of people should, and is, experienced in a concrete way, the importance of themes like life in abundance is a point of interest. Within a holistic worldview spiritual activities form an important part of reality. Mystical experiences and expression within liturgical frameworks are all important within African Christianity. Again the reflection on these aspects of Johannine theology is underexplored within African Johannine research.

Worship and liturgy


Spirituality and experience


Abundant life


Discipleship and Johannine research

Although the frequency of publications on Johannine discipleship is relatively low, the spread of the articles (both geographically as well as chronologically) shows that it is a theme that receives constant attention.


Leadership in Johannine research

Leadership remains a major and controversial issue in Africa and as time goes by it grows in importance. Again, relatively little research has been done in this regard. It is interesting that two of the three articles deal with the Samaritan woman as a leader. This is consistent with the important role of woman in Africa. This area of research still offers a lot of challenges for Johannine scholars.


Different topics related to Johannine research

Individual researchers also have individual interests which have resulted in articles that are difficult to classify. The focus usually falls on a verse or pericope, or on a specific topic.


Van der Merwe, D.G., 2000, ‘The historical and theological significance of John the Baptist as he is portrayed in John 1’, *Neotestamentica* 33(2), 267–292.


Methods, grammar, structure and style

One of the characteristics of New Testament scholarship in South Africa is the strong emphasis on ancient languages, especially Greek. Although the picture is wider than this, the major influence came from Prof. J.P. Louw, professor of Greek, initially at the University of the Orange Free State and later at the University of Pretoria. The methodological reflection on John initially focused on structuralism, including discourse analysis and narratology, then moved to the area of metaphors and imagery and resulted in a much wider appreciation for different methods applied to the Johannine texts. This interest in method was limited to the South. In my view this could be a fruitful area where Johannine scholars across Africa could join forces in their research, not least because there is considerable expertise on methodology in the South, which could be of value in the hermeneutical quests of understanding and applying the biblical text to concrete African situations, something that has received a great deal of attention in the North.

Narratology


Metaphorics, symbolism and imagery


Van der Watt, J.G., 2000, Family of the King: Dynamics of metaphor in the Gospel according to John, Brill, Leiden.


**Style and style related issues**


**Other methodological approaches**


**Publications consciously applying Johannine exegetical material to African situations**

What is evident from the articles listed here is the strong conviction within African scholarship that the Bible is important, and should therefore address the respective situations not only of academic readers but also of the ordinary grass roots Christians. How that should be done is, of course, a matter of much debate. Most articles offer some attempt to apply or interpret the exegetical material for the (their) current African situation. This is usually evident from the titles of these articles.


Okure, T., 1993, ‘“AFES AYTHN” (Jn 12:7): The challenge of the anointing at Bethany (Jn 12:1–8 and parallels) for the contemporary church’, in S. Sempore (ed.), *Universalisme


**John and interreligious discussions**

Reflection on the role of Johannine literature within the current interreligious debates (predominantly between African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam) is one-sided. When emphasising inculturation the relationship between African traditional religions and Christianity should be noted. Little is however done on the area of the relationship between Christianity and Islam. This issue will become more of a challenge in Africa in the future, especially in the light of clear developments in this direction within international debates. John, with its strong emphasis on Christology, emphasising Jesus as the true way to life (John 14:6), will offer its own challenges based on its exclusive claims about Christ.


**John and the other gospels**

Although the relation between John and the other Gospels is one of the major points of discussion in traditional Johannine research on historical critical issues, this is not an area of research that was or is of interest to African Johannine scholars. Attention is nevertheless given to this problem in some of the introductions.


**Commentaries and introductory material related to the Johannine literature**

Africans have written several commentaries on John, but none of these can be called a standard or major commentary. There was also limited interest in introductory questions, and both the introductions to John by Du Rand and Van der Watt were and are prescribed internationally. The African Bible Commentary should also be noted, although the project largely excluded Johannine scholars from South Africa.


Publications related to the letters of John

Although there are a number of publications on the letters of John, the majority were written by Du Rand and Van der Watt, both from South Africa. It cannot really be claimed that the letters are a topic of major interest in Africa. Johannine scholars in Africa should be encouraged to study these short but powerful letters in more detail. Since Christology and ethics, and their interrelatedness, are focus points in the letters, the content of the letters is especially relevant to African reflections on inculturation.


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Concluding remarks

This survey led to several important insights of which only three are going to be mentioned here. Firstly, certain areas of research that need more attention were identified, especially in the light of what African Christianity appears to need. These include the areas of pneumatology, ecclesiology, and even interreligious discussions. Secondly, the ‘distances’ (not only geographically but also otherwise) should be overcome so that Africa can pool its Johannine expertise in order to strengthen efforts to develop a true African approach to the Johannine Scriptures. Thirdly, in spite of several monographs, African Johannine research is not well represented when it comes to longer detailed studies in the form of books. This need should also be addressed.