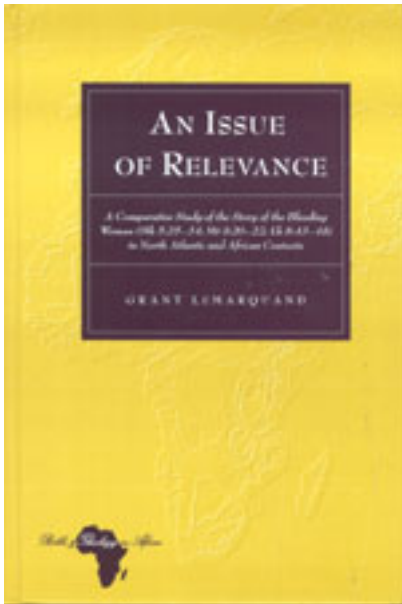


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Lemarquand, Grant

An Issue of Relevance: A Comparative Study of the Story of the Bleeding Woman (Mk 5:25–34; Mt 9:20–22; Lk 8:43–48) in North Atlantic and African Contexts

Bible and Theology in Africa 5

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The *Issue of Relevance* is built on a proposition that a scholar's location influences the interpretive task. The author identifies various aspects of location, including social, cultural, and religious/theological, and reaffirms this assertion throughout the book. The book is a survey of various perspectives (about the texts) according to their place in the North Atlantic and African interpretive traditions. In addition to the introduction in chapter 1, the book consists of three other chapters each comparing the North Atlantic and African interpretations of aspects of the text, namely, healing, women, and blood (6–7, 19).

Chapter 2 examines the texts from the perspective of healing. In this chapter, LeMarquand includes a sketch of the history of research, mostly focusing on the nineteenth-century concerns about the miraculous element in the Gospel accounts (e.g., G. Paulus; D. F. Strauss). Using methodological approaches as organizing factors, the author also identifies them within North Atlantic interpretation about healing, namely, source criticism (J. T. Cummings; B. H. Streeter), redaction criticism (H. J. Held; G. Theissen; V. Robbins), form criticism (M. Dibelius; W. Marxsen), and history of religion (F. Priesigke; J. M. Hull). The author notes that there is a tendency to deemphasize the supernatural in favor of naturalists explanations of healing or to attempt

distinctions between religion and magic and magic and miracle. He concludes that these “traditional historical critical” scholars “have obviously been influenced by their own culture and have chosen questions” that are important to their contexts (83). On the other hand, in his presentation of the African interpretation, the author also demonstrates that the major components of his comparison (North Atlantic and African interpretation) are not monolithic or static entities. Consequently, he also notes the various perspectives within African interpretations, among them J. Ukpong’s hermeneutic of “inculturation” and L. Tappa’s look at the centrality of self-assertiveness as a key component of the story (98). Among other ideas within African interpretation is the concept of “power” as associated with a person of authority and the transmission of his or her power. The interpretive trend includes the idea that the healing power transforms the whole person, including the reception into the community.

Chapter 3 examines the texts as a story about women, noting the mid-1980s development in North Atlantic interpretation as the significant period in understanding the story by and about women. These interpretations evidence the pattern of seeing the “shamed” status of women within the story and the possibility of liberation that the story offers. Even so, much of the scholarly attention was still focused on understanding the historical nature of the text. One conclusion is that women were more involved in Jesus’ ministry than is usually perceived (e.g., W. Munro). On the other hand, the author notes that within African contexts the story serves as a voice for and by woman in their understanding of the liberation theme, the move away from self-denial to self-assertion, and the courage to challenge the traditional modes of existence. These interpretations juxtapose the text with cultural concerns, thus seeing the woman in the story as the example of one who was courageous enough to break a dehumanizing tradition. The contemporary African example is that the traditional obstacles have facilitated alternative paths to theological education for women who were otherwise denied ordination and access to educational institutions.

Chapter 4 examines the significance of blood in the story, noting what the author calls a “hermeneutic of embarrassment” among North Atlantic scholars. This embarrassment is seen in the reluctance of male scholars to address the issues of menstrual blood in their interpretation and to focus on the issue of diagnosing the disease. Even so, the investigation of the issue of impurity in the story has garnered concerns about the interpretation of impurity as an anti-Jewish reading of the text. These concerns manifest in interpretations that avoid equating impure with danger and see “equality of the sexes in the Levitical purity laws” (187). From the African perspective, the author notes that the cultural experiences of the exegetes have been the starting point of their analysis of the text as related to specific African practices and Lev 15. Using the interpretation of the text as vehicle, some observe the connection of the story to practices within various

African cultures that physically isolate women because of blood taboos (e.g., R. Cochrane).

By virtue of LeMarquand's perspective regarding the location of the scholar, the author also suggests that all interpretations include the issue of relevance. Consequently, the differences between the North Atlantic and African interpretation are essentially the specific attention to relevance in the scholar's community, whether academic, social, or religious. There are several aspects of the book that may have distracted from its goal. First, it is poignant that, in a work on relevance, the author would seek to be exempt from the concerns of gender-inclusive language on the grounds of its novelty in the African context. Second, the author's insistence about the difference in the North Atlantic and African approaches at times overshadows the necessity to support that observation through the sustained presentation of scholars' primary works. Third, while the book is insightful especially in chapters 3 and 4, it would have been helpful to present a clear understanding of what the author means by "North Atlantic Interpretation." Alongside this definition a clearer delineation of the elements of comparison may have been helpful. Apparently, LeMarquand uses exegesis and hermeneutics interchangeably, often comparing North Atlantic exegetical analysis with African hermeneutical analysis.

The book contributes to the concerns of biblical scholarship and cultural studies in several ways: (1) interpreter's bias—it is a reminder to interpreters to be cognizant of how one's location affects the interpretive process and the concerns about the relevance of the text for contemporary settings; (2) competing interpretations—the book identifies the influence of the Bible in communities whose approaches may illuminate and challenge traditional interpretations; and (3) methodological starting place—the author identifies perspectives on particular texts that illustrate the significance of a methodological starting place as definitive to the interpretive process.