

**ECUMENICAL, ECCLESIOLOGICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS
IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPHECY OF ZEPHANIAH 1-3**

Michael Ufok Udoekpo
Department of Theology,
Veritas University, Abuja
ufokism@yahoo.com

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.31621.83688

Abstract

We live in a world of pluralism of religions. These religions sometimes have not only misunderstood other faiths, but eyed them with suspicion and with the tragic distinction that we are the children of light and everyone else the child of darkness. This essay historically and theologically examines the prophecy of Zephaniah (the ninth of the Twelve Minor prophets/dodēkaprophēton), encapsulated in his theological notion of the Day of YHWH (yōm ādōnay) in order to underscore its ecumenical, ecclesiological, and interreligious relevance for the Church and global cultural and religious communities today. The church today as well as individual Christians and members of other religious communities and cultural orientations both within and outside Africa, are globally challenged to be the “Zephaniahs” of today by bearing messages of hope, unity of worship, true interfaith and cultural dialogues with ecumenical spirit that convey to everyone justice and peace.

Keywords: Day of YHWH, Ecumenism, Interfaith and cultural Dialogue, Unity, peace and Justice, Theology of Zephaniah,

Introduction

May 12th 2022 witnessed a national Conference on Interreligious dialogue sponsored by John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue Rome, at the Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria. Emphasis was on the importance of all religions and cultures respecting the common humanity, as well as loving and fostering of dialogue, peace and unity. With this, and as a contribution to the conversation thought went back to Judeo-Christian Scripture, particularly the prophecy of Zephaniah and its ecumenical, ecclesiological and interreligious values. The prophecy of Zephaniah, when closely read could be described as a compendium of prophetic thoughts on the nature of YHWH’s relationship with his

loving people, Israel (Childs, 1979, 462). The nature of this divine-human relationship is dominantly pass on to us through the notion of the Day of YHWH (*yōm ădōnay*) in Zephaniah.¹ It is a notion prominent in the Old Testament studies of which Zephaniah forms a part. Zephaniah adapted this concept from earlier traditions and uses it when he wants to prophetically emphasize the notion of a God who loves, who judges, and punishes (Zeph 1:14–18) and rewards (Zeph 3:14–20).

Theological and interreligious strands of the Day of YHWH: sin, punishment, worship of YHWH alone, monotheism, repentance, hope, contextualization of earlier traditions, restoration and more especially the universality of God's grace, are shared with the Deuteronomic Historians and with poets of the Psalms, especially Psalm 126, demonstrating among other things, the importance of the point each of these prophets were attempting to make.²

Much of these are also been embraced directly or indirectly by many religious groups today, as testified in the teachings of the Vatican II (cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993; Cassidy, 2005; Gaillardetz, 2006; Witherup, 2006; Bevans and Jeffrey Gros, 2009). In his own part, Witherup, commenting on *Dei Verbum* affirms Zephaniah as remaining a common ecumenical ground for dialogue among Christians of diverse denominations and cultural backgrounds (Scripture, 2006, 77–102).

¹ Day of YHWH or Yahweh/ Der Tag YHWHs and the Day of the Lord (*Yōm ădōnay/hē hēmera tou kuriou*) will be used interchangeably in this work. Bearing in mind that YHWH is a common symbolic name for the God of Israel. It represents God's dynamic, active intervention and presence among the people of Israel (Exod 3:14). This is translated in the LXX as *kurios* (Lord).

² In the DH there is the idea of special bond between God and his people/ covenant (1 Sam 9:16; 2 Sam 7:7ff; 1 Sam 12:22; 1 Kgs 8:16). This people conquered the land the land promised them, because God was with Moses (Deut 31:8; Jos 1:5, 17; Deut 2:26ff). For them like in Zephaniah, YHWH is a righteous judge with steadfast love (1 Kgs 8:3; 1 Sam 12:3, 5). God's Grace is universal (1 Kgs 8:60, and one day "all the people of the earth will learn to fear God,"). In other words, DH stresses the theology of exclusive worship of YHWH alone, joy and inclusivity, fidelity to God, the theology of the land, Zion, name and election (Deut 12).

This work, therefore, historically and theologically focuses on synthesizing the theology of Zephaniah and its contextual ecumenical and intercultural and interfaith relevance. It argues that issues wrestled with by Prophet Zephaniah during his time, are in some forms the same problems that confront our pluri-religious communities today, particularly Judaism, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions (ATR). In doing this, it proposes its inherent and discoverable ecumenical and interreligious values for our pluri-religious communities today. Zephaniah's person, his debatable origin or background (Africa or Judah) and universality of his messages are highlighted as representing the universalism of God's judgment and grace, irrespective of one's nation, cultural background or religion. Finally, Zephaniah's theology in my view, and as found in relevant literature that further defines ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, represents a call or model for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue (cf. Colson and Neuhaus, 1995; Gros, McManus and Riggs, 1998; Kasper, 2004; D'Costa, 2009).

Insight into Zephaniah's Overall Background

A broad survey of Zephaniah's background, including a brief review of his person, date and the socio-historical context of his prophecy will prepare us for a better appreciation of his ecumenical and interreligious values that concern this essay. As a literature and a book, Zephaniah is located in the ninth position of the Twelve Minor Prophets in both MT and LXX ordering.³ It has three short chapters, fifty-three verses, with the Day of YHWH (*yōm ādōnay*) as a predominant theological theme. Chapter One, beginning with the superscription (1:1) opens with the announcement of doom on creation, humans and animals (1:2–3). The focus then turns to the judgments and concentrates on Judah and the idolaters and sinners there (vv 4–6). They must prepare for the Day of YHWH (vv 7–18). Chapter Two predicts judgment and misfortunes on several nations, after a window of hope and exhortation to repentance and change of heart (vv 1–15). Chapter Three discusses judgment and misfortunes on Jerusalem. This came as a result of recklessness, abuses of power and offices by her priests, judges and rulers (vv 1–8).

This is followed by a promise of hope, and a note of joy. The sovereign, universal, accommodating and victorious YHWH will calm Israel's fear and gather the dispersed ones. He will make them popular and restore the fortunes of their remnants (vv 9–20). In

³ In the MT the Twelve Minor Prophets are arranged as follows: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi; while in the LXX we have, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

other words, the judgment and threats heard in the first two chapters, anticipate the hope, joy and salvific message of the latter part of chapter three (vv 14–20).

Regarding the personality and the origin of his person, scholars out there continue to debate (see, Ferguson, 1883, 42–59; Kapelrud, 1975, 41–42; Rice, 1979, 21–31; Stuhlmüller, 1986, 99; Széles, 1987, 61–64; Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 221; Berridge, “Zephaniah (Person),” *ABD* 6:1075; Berlin, *Zephaniah* 1994, 31; Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, 1999, 11–13, and Savoca, *Abdia-Naum, Abacuc-Sofonia*, 2006, 145–46). Some are excited about the name Zephaniah, which means, “the Lord hides,” “he whom the Lord hides,” or “the Lord has cause to be hidden” (Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 221; Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 62). Others focus their curiosities on the genealogy, and based on the superscription in Zephaniah 1:1 trace his mentioned origin of Cushi to the continent of Africa (for extensive study see, Udoekpo, *Day of YHWH*, 2010, 80-87). This is in addition to dating when he ministered. This is equally arguable among the following scholars (cf. Ferguson, 1883, 42–59; Williams, 1963, 77–88; Kapelrud, 41–44; Langohr G, “Le Livre de Sophonie et la critique de l’authenticité,” 1976, 1–27; Stuhlmüller, 96–97; Roberts, 1991, 163–164; Ben Zvi, *Book of Zephaniah*, 1991, 325–357; Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 275–278; Nogalski, *Literary Precursors*, 173–215; Berlin, *Zephaniah*, 33–42; Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah*, 13–17; Savoca, *Abdia-Naum, Abacuc-Sofonia*, 148–50).

James Nogalski (*Literary Precursors*, 178.) presents three good summary positions with regard to the dating of Zephaniah. Some date Zephaniah prior to the Josianic reforms begun in 622 B.C.E., while some see Zephaniah’s work as part of those reform processes after 622 B.C.E. There are also those in the third group who argue for the period of Jehoiakim/Eliakim (608–598 B.C.E.).

Even though details of these arguments, already treated elsewhere in Udoekpo (*Day of YHWH*, 88-95) are outside our scope, this current study lines up with those who believe that the preaching of Zephaniah is located within the broader socio-historical setting of the events of the seventh century B.C.E. Judah, at the end of the Assyrian domination, when the religious reforms of Josiah took place. It is true that at the beginning of the seventh century B.C.E. the Assyrian empire was approaching the threshold of its collapse, leaving several states to fight for power and space, leaving Judah in their midst.

Prior to this, Assyria was the dominant force in the Near East under the leadership of Kings Sannacherib (705–681 B.C.E.), Esar-haddon (681–669 B.C.E.) and Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.E.) who conquered Egypt as well. Egypt freed itself from Assyria by 655 B.C.E. led by Psammetichus I (664–610 B.C.E.), but still nurtured their relative friendship. What led to the internal struggle that eventually weakened Assyria was the

death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C.E. Babylon took advantage of this, led by General Nabopolassar (625–605 B.C.E.).

With the help of the Medes, Nineveh, the capital of Assyria was attacked in 612 B.C.E., and by 608 B.C.E. Assyria was out of the circle of a dominating power, leaving Egypt and Babylon to fight for dominance. During this time, Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II or Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 B.C.E.) of Babylon dominated Near East, including Egypt, in a successive fashion (Coogan, *Old Testament*, 2006, 349).

The implication of these powers fighting and wounding one another is that Judah had the liberty to be on its own. Judah by this time produced important kings, Manasseh, Hezekiah's son and successor, a loyal Assyrian vassal, and Josiah, Manasseh's grandson. As further noted by Berlin (*Zephaniah*, 46) and (Coogan, *Old Testament*, 349–377) following the example of his great-grandfather, Hezekiah, Josiah, Amon's son, declared independence and embarked on a very popular religious reform that Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Nahum, the prophets of this time, would come to support.

Berlin is equally right to observe that, information about Josiah in the Bible stands to be interpreted or reconstructed by historians. It is also true that while Josiah's religious and spiritual reformation is narrated in 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35, his overall policies in relation to internal and foreign powers, except Josiah's death at the hands of Neco II of Egypt (610–595 B.C.E.), have not been stressed enough in the texts. And because the books of Kings and Chronicles had different agendas, they put the emphasis on different aspects of Josiah's reign. In the Book of Kings, many scholars especially Berlin (*Zephaniah*, 44–47) and Wright (*Greatness, Grace and Glory*:2008, 97-106) testify that Josiah is a great religious reformer, while in the Book of Chronicles he is a priest-king, with the emphasis on re-building the temple and re-establishing the Passover ritual.

Let us work with the assumption that Josiah's religious reforms were part of a larger program of national reformation, transformation and purification, that was aimed at the reunification of all Israel under the Davidic rule and covenant traditions. Zephaniah's prophecy would have been preached to support the call for faith and hope in God and obedience to YHWH, who continues to act in human affairs, as the Sovereign of all creation. The setting of Zephaniah prophecy is therefore, that of the reforms of Josiah, the king who acted decisively and rightly on behalf of his people.

Key Theological Messages of Zephaniah

In addition to the forgoing attempt to reflect on the person, origin and person of Zephaniah, it is not an overstatement to say that this ninth minor prophet was God's

universal instrument for evangelization. He was rooted in the covenant traditions, and with the idea of YHWH as their Warrior and Deliverer (Exod 3:14; 14:14; 15:1–23). He was familiar with the earlier prophetic traditions. Zephaniah proclaimed the theologies of YHWH alone as the sovereign of all creation. He preached the theology of hope, repentance, universalism, judgment, justice and punishment, covenant renewal and restoration of fortunes. These various strands of Zephaniah's message are delivered in a single theological package of the Day of YHWH as earlier mentioned in Udoekpo (*Day of YHWH*, 275-279) as a foreshadow of intercultural or interreligious dialogue.

Although these theological strands overlap one another, the *pericopae* of Zephaniah 1:14–18 and 3:14–20, demonstrate and highlight YHWH, as the master of all creation, with an unchallenged superiority. YHWH, in Zephaniah is the overall Judge (1:2–3, 7, 14–18, 3:8). Although YHWH is the judge and King of Israel, in the prophecy of Zephaniah, He is also the King of the entire universe. YHWH's reign extends or reaches to the boundaries of all cultures on earth.

Additionally, in Zephaniah, according to Patterson (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 295), YHWH is the one who punishes the wicked action of human beings (1:8–9, 17; 3:7, 11) and nations (2:4–15; 3:6), especially of those who oppose His people (2:8, 10). But before taking on human beings, the phrase “face of the earth” (Zeph 1:2–3), which is also found in the flood narrative (Gen 6:7; 7:4), in DeRoche's view “highlights YHWH's plan to bring judgment on the entire creation, including animals and human beings” (“The Sweeping of Creation,” 1979, 106).

Zephaniah, like the other pre-exilic prophets stresses the covenant tradition earlier highlighted in this study (cf. Udoekpo, “Sinai Covenant,” 2022). Moreover, Fensham (“A Possible Origin,” 1996, 90-97) unequivocally posited that the whole concept of the Day of the Lord, in the OT should be understood against the background of the covenant curses, or covenant implementation and renewal. Stressing Zephaniah's covenant theology, further, he argues that the Day of YHWH may be seen as the day of the Lord's covenant which he establishes his sovereign Lordship over human beings, either by instituting the covenant or by enforcing the provisions of the covenant (Robertson, 1999, 26).

The prophets, including Zephaniah preached against sin. They emphasized repentance of Israel, called for hope and optimism in YHWH's restoration of their fortunes. They stood before Yahweh, accusing and warning the people of certain consequences of covenant violation. While there are several other ways of nuancing their proclamation, their overall message, particularly of Zephaniah, could be summarized under three points.

First, the people have sinned by breaking the covenant, hence must repent. Second, if there is no repentance, then judgment, devastation, wrath, misfortunes and exile. Third,

beyond the judgment there is hope for reversal of fortunes, and salvation (Pate et al., *The Story of Israel*, 2004, 93)

With this window of hope, the prophets were to bring God closer to the community and the community closer to God. They were to draw the community to fellowship with God, for the purpose of converting the former. If God had spoken to the community through the prophets, he wanted them to be converted (Agius, 2009). Zephaniah was committed to these theological roles, particularly of the preaching of conversion that would come to dominate the preaching of Christ and his apostles.

Zephaniah preached the theology of repentance from sin, worship of YHWH alone and hope in the Lord's restoration. His theology exposes the finite nature of human beings. This human condition is vividly described by W. S Lasor, in the following words:

He saw that God brook haughtiness and that people's only hope lay in recognizing their own frailty. Pride is a problem rooted in human nature, and neither Judah (2:3), Ammon, Moab (v 10), nor Nineveh is exempt. Nineveh is made to epitomize insolence, boasting "I am and there is none else" (v 15). Such rebellion, the declaration of spiritual independence from God, is the most heinous of sins (Lasor, Hubbard and Bush, *Old Testament*, 1982, 437).

Zephaniah preached loudly against several sins that attract YHWH's judgment. These include injustices or lack of social justice. These were of course, earlier and mostly heard in Amos 5. But in the time of Zephaniah, some people were still said to have "stepped up the threshold, and filled up the house of their master with violence and deceits" (1:9). Also, Jerusalem was polluted and made tyrannical (3:1). While the prophets and priests, on the other hand, became reckless, faithless and violated laws and social order (3:2-4).

The verb "*chāmās*," (violence) used in Zephaniah 1:9 is not unconnected with those ones used in Zephaniah 3:1-4 (e.g., rebellious, polluted, reckless, and violated). H. Hagg rightly notices that the context of these verbs especially "*chāmās hatorā*", ("violence to the law") in Zephaniah 3:4 points to the wrong-doing and violating of the powerless, to whose disadvantage the religious laws were bent. He added that the socio-ethical aspect of "*chāmās*," ("violence) stands in the foreground from the very outset, signifying the arbitrary and autocratic appropriation and expropriation of what belongs to God and to one's neighbors (Hagg, "sm"x" *chāmās*," in *TDOT* 4: 479). This act of social injustices was countered by the Lord (3:5), and pursuit for justice is not restricted to one culture or religion. It is a universal need.

Zephaniah highlighted that human arrogance and injustices will bring judgment on the Day of the Lord (1:14-18), but those who repent and seek the Lord (2:1-3) shall be

restored. Zephaniah's theology of hope and salvation stress the hope that God will not turn back anyone who repents and surrenders to him. Examples of such people are those who are humble, keep the law, seek righteousness, and humility (2:3). Zephaniah also recommends faith, truthfulness and pursuit of that which is right (3:12–13). Such humble and faithful remnant shall be rewarded by the Lord. YHWH will purify them (3:9–10). YHWH will re-gather and bring many joys (3:13–14). YHWH will calm their fears and turn away their enemies, and rejoices over them with love and happy songs (vv 15–17). He will reverse their woes and misfortunes into good fortunes and well-being before the eyes of their enemies (vv 18–20).

In other words, YHWH's universal Kingship is not only demonstrated through His act of judgment, but also by his redemptive and salvific acts (Wright, *God Who Acts*, 1958, esp., 59–86; PBC, *Bible and Morality*, 2008, 28–29). YHWH is not only a Righteous Lord (3:5) but also a God of love who annuls judgment and turns away enemies of his people (3:15ff). This theological idea is well communicated by D. A. Schneider, who stresses that the book (Zephaniah) persistently portrays the holiness and peace of God. God's holiness appears in the contrasts between Him and the proud sinners: they pretend to rule, but God judges with inexorable power; they hold office, but the Lord gives unfailing justice (3:1–5). God's grace appears chiefly in the two passages (2:1–3; 3:11–20), that offer hope and salvation (Schneider, "Zephaniah," 4:1190-1191).

In other words, the religious value of Zephaniah lies in the fact that while he condemns the particular external fault of his day, worship of false gods (1:4–5), the adaptation of foreign customs (1:8), violent and fraudulent behavior (1:11), faulty rituals and false prophecy (3:4), he also condemns the interior causes of these sins, pride and arrogance (1:16; 2:10, 15; 3:11), rebellion, disunity and lack of trust in God (1:12; 3:2).

Zephaniah's Commonality with Other Religions Today

As earlier noted by Roland D. Witherup, the relevance of the message of Zephaniah, particularly his theology of YHWH alone and his universal sovereignty, forms a common dialogue ground for our pluri-religious communities today. As part of the OT texts, Zephaniah's prophecy demonstrates some commonalities among Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions. Judaism, like Islam, as well as ATR for instance, value monotheism and a sense of oneness unity absent among religious groups in our society today.

Even though full-blown monotheism in Judaism is located in the Second Isaiah, it is sufficient to broadly mention in this work that Israel's monotheism went through a long process of emergence, details beyond the scope of this essay. It witnessed Elijah and

Elisha's movements (1 Kgs 17–21; 2 Kgs 9–10:36). This was followed by the discussed prophetic messages of the eighth century prophets, (Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah), the reforms of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:4,) and Josiah (2 Kgs 22–23). Alongside King Josiah, Zephaniah preached the worship of YHWH alone, with its final breakthrough in exilic and post-exilic Judaism during the time of Deutero-Isaiah (Whybray, *Second Isaiah*, 2003, 45).

This aspect of the prophetic message in the exile was to encourage the Judean in their current situation to turn a new page, by looking at the new vision of their only one God.⁴ This sense of oneness was never restricted to Second Isaiah and Zephaniah but extended to the NT Church.

Ecclesiological-Theological Implications of Zephaniah

Besides the call to worship YHWH alone that creates a common dialogue ground for Judaism and Christianity, other strands of theology stressed by Zephaniah do the same. For example, the hope, reversal of fortunes and salvation, theologically preached by Zephaniah through his central concept of the Day of YHWH, is rooted in the faith and future hope of Israel, preached by all the prophets before and after him. Széles affirms that the period conveying YHWH's acts stretched out towards the future (Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 66). It embraces not only the past and the present, but unites itself with the future as the time when more acts of the Lord would be realized in the NT church (cf. Udoekpo, *Day of YHWH*, 280-286). Israel always knew that its life was in the hand of God, whose mighty powers were directed to the issue of calling mankind to be responsible and accountable. YHWH executed justice, which involved the proclamation of judgment and mercy towards Israel and every nation on earth (Széles, *Wrath and Mercy*, 66-67).

This future oriented message of Israel prophets of which Zephaniah belongs, is well captured by John Bright's suggestions that;

Virtually all of the pre-exilic prophets, albeit by no means in identical ways, looked beyond the judgment they were compelled to announce to a farther future when God would come again to his people in mercy, restore their fortunes, and establish his rule over them in righteousness and peace. This promise of future salvation is one of the most distinctive features in the message of the prophets, and it is this perhaps more than anything else that serves to bind the Old

⁴ Monotheistic statements in Isaiah are located in the following passages: Isa 43:1–11; 44:6, 8; 45:5–7, 14, 18, 21; 46:9.

Testament unbreakable with the New in a single canon of Scripture (Bright, *Covenant and Promise*, 15; Pate et al., 89).

This unbreakable relationship between the OT and the NT is also well articulated in the Pontifical Biblical Commission document (*Jewish People*, 2002, 20–21). So, also in Udoekpo (*Second Inaugural Lecture*, 2022, esp., 46-49), although it is debatable whether the NT texts do at all interpret Christ events as the fulfillment the prophecy Zephaniah, this document specifically highlights that what is written in the Jewish Scriptures must of necessity be fulfilled because it reveals the plan of God which cannot fail to be accomplished in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

The necessity and value of this fulfillment is further captured in the same *PBC* document (*Jewish People*, 21-138), as follows; “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you; that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must (*dei*) be fulfilled” (Lk 24:44). The basis of this necessity is affirmed in several passages of the NT (Mtt 16:21; Mk 8:31; Lk 9:22; 17:25; 22:37).⁵

In other words, “the faith of Israel is fulfilled in Christ and his church. It is Israel which first broke radically with the ‘pagan’ conception of life and provided the view of history and the characteristic hope on which the NT and the Christian faith so firmly rest” (Wright, *God Who Acts*, 26). This hope and restoration of fortunes which dominates prophetic literature especially Zephaniah remains valuable to the NT and the Church today.

Stuhlmüller (*Amos, Micah*, 105, cf. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 323-26) also notices the NT’s use of Zephaniah in a number of phrases in the Lukan presentation of the annunciation to Mary, that she was to become the mother of Jesus: “be glad,” “The Lord is in your midst,” “Fear not,” “mighty savior (Lk 1:26–38). Zephaniah’s teaching on the hope of the remnant (3:11–20) as mentioned earlier foreshadows the teaching of the NT (Matt 5:3, 5; Lk 4:18ff). However, this is not to say that the mystery of Christ presented in the NT is completely the fulfillment of the hopes raised by Zephaniah.

⁵ Here the document takes time to discuss various fundamental themes which the OT (particularly Zephaniah) shares with the NT to include: Revelation of God, the wretchedness and dependency of human beings, God the Liberator and Savior (Zeph 3:17b// Lk1:47) the election of Israel (Deut 7:6; Ps 132:13; Amos 3:2; 9:7; Matt 2:6; 15:24), the covenant (Gen 9:8–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–26; Exod 19:4–8; Deut 7:12; 8:18; 2 Kgs 23:1–3; Ps 89; 132; Jer 31:31–34; Lk 1:72; 1 Col 11:25); the Law (2 Kgs 22–23, Matt 5); prayer, cult and Jerusalem temple (Zeph 3:14ff; John 7:14, 28 Mk 12:35; Lk 19:47; Mtt 26:55), divine reproaches and condemnation (Amos, Hos, Isa, Zeph 1–3, Mtt 3:7; Lk 3:7) and divine promises, descendant from Abraham, land, eternal life and salvation (Zeph 3:14–20; Acts 2:38; 13:38–39, Rom 11:17–29) and the universal reign of God (Zeph 1–3; Ps 47; 96; 114; Lk 19:11; Mtt 4:17, 23; 9:35; Mtt 16:28; 25:31, 34; Rev 11:15).

Zephaniah's relevance is again alluded to in the recent *Encyclical Letter* of Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*. Reiterating the words of St. Paul, "*spe salvi facti sumus*" (in hope we were saved, Rom 8:24), Benedict XVI who was familiar with the writings of the prophet writes "'redemption'—salvation—is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present" (*Spe Salvi*, 2007, 3).

In his several references to NT passages that bear testimony to the overall biblical faith and prophetic hope, Benedict XVI, further cites 1 Thessalonians 4:13, which we usually read along with Zephaniah 1:14–18, Matthew 25:14–15; 27:45; Mark 15:33 and John 12:31–36, during the advent and funeral eschatological liturgies of the Christian communities (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 4–5).

This Day of the Lord passages, especially in St. Paul (1 Thess 4:13–18), is worth illustrating in full:

We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, to make sure that you do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that in the same way God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching, that we who are still alive for the Lord's coming will not have advantage over those who have fallen asleep... then, you should encourage one another.

Evidently, this Pauline passage is mostly famous for its description of Jesus' glorious second coming. Paul's basic point here, is to affirm that believers who had died, with hope in the Lord, will participate in that event of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:50–57).

In other words, St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, according to Harrington (*Meeting St. Paul*, 2008, 33) certainly is not only close to the Jewish apocalyptic writings, but highlights the covenant-rooted future hope, prophesized by Israel's prophets, especially Zephaniah. It affirms in the Christian community the taking on of a new meaning of this theology of hope in Christ: his passion, death and resurrection (Achte-meier, *Nahum–Malachi*, 1986, 71–73).

Harrington notices that these Jewish and prophetic traditions continue in Paul. In the First Letter to the Thessalonians 5:1–11, Paul quickly dampened the enthusiasm of this community about the end-time events, by insisting that since the precise time of Christ's return is unknown (Mark 13:32), the proper Christian attitude is constant vigilance (hope) and behavior appropriate to those who seek to obtain "salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:9). His description of those who will witness the second coming (4:17),

suggests that he may well have expected it to happen soon, in his own lifetime and in the immediate future ((*Meeting St. Paul Today*, 33).

Apart from Harrington, other scholars, particularly John Paul Heil, in his “From Remnant to Seed of Hope for Israel: Romans 9:27–29,” 2002, 703) persuasively demonstrates that the theme of hope pervades Paul’s Letter to the Romans. He sees in Romans 9: 27–29, the OT background of the theology of hope in the prophetic literature (Isa 10:22–23 and Hos 2:1). In fact, it is also argued, as we saw earlier, that Zephaniah’s announcement of the Day of YHWH (1:14–18), through Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation, provided the script for the famous composition of Thomas Celano’s, *Dies irae, dies illa* (ca. 1250 A.D), also used at funeral liturgies in the Church (See Stuhlmueller, *Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk*, 97).

In addition to this liturgical relevance, monotheism, worship of YHWH alone, or a common worship-life and hope, conversions of all kinds, particularly from disunity to the unity of Christians in love, is challenging to the Church today in Africa and beyond. That this is true, is evident in the amount of time and material, devoted by the church, religious and Christian communities to this subject, some of which we have already cited broadly in this study. This is so because the unity of faith and worship stressed by Zephaniah and prayed for by Christ in John 17 has not been fully lived without setbacks by Christians today.

Decrying this situation Jeffrey Gros (*Introduction to Ecumenism*, 1) writes: “We know that Christians do not live in that unity for which Christ prayed for, though through common faith, baptism, and Scripture, they share a real, and yet imperfect communion.” Historically, he observes that after the mission of Christ, God’s self-manifestation, Paul, a man of diverse cultures and symbol of Christian unity, continued the proclamation of the gospel. That there were many communities to which the early Christians belonged is not only evident in the different Gospel narratives, but also in Pauline literature (1 Cor 11–14), and in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15:2). The latter gives an indication to *Koinonia* as an essential element for the communion of churches of such a diverse cultural background (Acts 2:42). Hence, a common faith, a common worship life, bonds of communion with the apostles, and charity were necessary for the unity of the Christian communities from the beginning (Gros, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 10–11).

In other words, although the unity of worship in Zephaniah does not directly imply unity of worship of all Christian denominations, this study proposes that the Christian community today is always challenged to share in common or learn from Zephaniah not only the importance of renewal and monotheism, but also of the need to constantly promote unity of worship, ecumenism, and renewal of services in her evangelizing

mission. This must be realized in the spirit of prayer, mission, ministry, service and dialogue (Gros, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 10–11).

Credit must also be given, at least broadly speaking, to the influence of the Bible on ecumenical dialogue of which the text of Zephaniah and other prophetic literature form a significant part. This influence if we may reiterate flourished in the wake of Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* (Witherup, *Scripture*, 77). This document has promoted and encouraged ecumenically organized bible studies around the world, as well as dialogue between the Catholic Church and other denominations, such as Anglicans, Lutherans, Baptist, Methodists, Evangelicals, Orthodox and Pentecostals (Witherup, *Scripture*, 78–81; Udoekpo, *Second Inaugural Lecture*, 53-54).

Like Zephaniah who bore the message of hope, justice, judgment, perseverance in the midst of suffering, universalism of salvation and restoration, single-mindedness in the worship of YHWH alone, it is incumbent on the Church today to persevere in her proclamation to bring about the kingdom of God after the example of Jesus, a manifestation of YHWH preached by Zephaniah. This Kingdom is, but the source of full liberation, justice, restoration of fortunes and salvation for all people of all cultures (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, as cited in *Ecclesia in Africa*, 53). In other words, human history finds its true and full meaning in the incarnation of the Word of God, who is the foundation of hope and restorer of the human dignity. It is through Christ, the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15), that the human person is redeemed (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 53).

Zephaniah 1:14–18 and 3:14–20, encapsulated in the theme of the Day of YHWH and restoration of fortunes provides theological foundation for the struggle, defense and for the joy of personal dignity. It also promotes fundamental human rights, dialogue, unity, ecumenical spirit, justice and peace. These are values shared by most world religions. It champions reconciliation with God, rebuilding faith and hope, promotion and the restoration of integral development of people of all cultures in Africa and beyond. Jesus of Nazareth, God's Messiah, is the concrete historical instance of the union of the divine and the human. This historical union, incarnation, took place in time and space (Malina, *New Testament World*, 184).

Implications for African Traditional Religions/Culture and Islam

The text of Zephaniah has enormous ecumenical and further interreligious implications, especially for religious communities in Africa. It is true that communal living, family life, respect to elders, human persons, a deep sense of the sacred and monolatry are among numerous positive values that characterize African cultures (Udoekpo, *Worship in Amos*

5, 114-126.) There are also moments these values are overlooked, especially the sacredness of the Supreme Being, YHWH. This sense of the sacred in particular has to be renewed not only in the spirit of Zephaniah's rejection of Assyrian syncretism, but also in the ecumenical spirit, interreligious and cultural dialogues that have been constantly encouraged by Vatican II.

In the *Nostra Aetate* (n.2; Udoekpo, cf., *Second Inaugural Lecture*, 53-53), for instance, it is stated that the Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in the non-Christian religions who "often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men (people)." In the same light, Edward Cassidy (*Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, 130) points out this document's timely indication of the relationship between the Christian faith in YHWH alone and other religions, Islam in particular thus:

Muslims "adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself, merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God (NA, 3). They revere Jesus as a prophet and honor Mary his virgin mother, to whom they turn to at times with devotion. They await the Day of Judgment when God will give each man his due after raising him up, and consequently the prize the moral life while giving worship to God, especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting."

Furthermore, the Council qualifies its understanding and recommendation of ecumenism by stressing that while relatively few are in position to participate actively in the ecumenical process, all are called to contribute to the effort of its actualization (Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 5).

Idowu (*African Traditional Religion*, 1977,106) observes that, in Nigeria for instance, the challenges of various religious communities (Islam, African Traditional Religions), especially Christian communities working together without losing Christ, the center of their faith, is as enormous as those challenges that Zephaniah surmounted in the late pre-exilic period (Udoekpo, *Limits of A Divided Nation*, 2020, 24-38). The monolatrous culture which Zephaniah challenged and successfully dialogued with, in the seventh century B.C.E., makes the prophet's promotion of monotheism ever more relevant in a monolatrous Africa today.

John Mbiti (*African Religions*, 1969, *Concept of God in Africa*, 1970), who has researched African religions extensively, examined cult practices and ideas about God and deities in about 300 African peoples who follow traditional native religions. For most African people and like the prophets of Ancient Israel, God is the origin and sovereign of

all creation. God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. While it is debatable whether African religion is homogeneous, every ethnic group seems to hold the notion of God as the Supreme Being (Mbiti, *African Religions*, 29-38; *Lineamenta*, 1990,63-65). Among some groups as in Ancient Israel, God bears different names mostly expressed in epithets such as creator, almighty, master of all things, and giver of light (Mbiti, *Concept of God*, 45).

The Ashanti of Ghana consider the earth to be second to God in power, being the first of His creations. They personified as the fertile, great-breasted goddess, *Asase Yaa*. Ashanti religion features a pantheon of major and minor divinities through which God manifests himself (Mbiti, *Concept of God*,144-145). According to Idowu (*Olódùmarè*, 21-28) in the religion of the Yoruba of Nigeria shows similar concepts, and their God, the “Sky God” or Supreme God,” is ruler of the whole. Other divinities are God’s agents carrying out the functions of the Supreme Being on earth (Idowu, *Olódùmarè*, 203). Prayer is often directed to various divinities and the veneration of divinities and spirits other than God are found in the religious systems of African peoples like in the folk religion of Ancient Israel a common belief is that the divinities and spirits are intermediaries between humans and God (Denver, *Did God Have a Wife*, 91–195).

Again, while lesser divinities and spirits are commonly identified with natural phenomena, God is not. God’s moral attributes are further expressed as: pity, mercy, kindness, justice, righteousness as would be found in the prophetic literatures of the ancient Israel. (Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, 31-42). Although I hold that in ATR, the concept of God is not strictly polytheistic; the monolatrous tendencies are there, very strong and they need to be addressed, cognizance of African high moral values.

Stressing the importance and necessity of dialogue and addressing the prevailing and persistent ATR, or monolatrous tendencies, especially in Ikot Ekpene Diocese today, Vincent Nyoyoko (Dialogue, 117-`118) makes the following relevant remarks:

These adherents to ATR are not only close relations and friends who in general are willing to engage in dialogue, but also many converts from ATR into Christianity retain most of their traditional beliefs, thus, there is need to formalize the on-going dialogue in the converts. There are many beliefs in ATR which are similar to those in Christianity. The clarification of these through dialogue could enhance their role as basis for “*preparation evangelica*.”, Vatican Council II, has advocated deeper theological research into each cultural area in order to enable the particular church better achieve its identity, and make its contribution to the universal Church. And attention to ATR (through dialogue) will enhance

inculturation, adaptation; promote evangelization and actualization of the Word of God.

This passage invites us to be the Zephaniahs of today. Besides, Zephaniah's prophetic confrontation of the worship of false gods and monolatry culture of his time, his universal theological message, embodied in his person, is also exemplary for our pluri-religious and multi-cultural society today. For example, the superscription (Zeph 1:1) provoked scholarly debate as to his origin, Cushite or Judah. Although, the foregoing opinions as to his origin had its rights, the centrality and the discussed universality of Zephaniah's message, with his person as YHWH's instrument, irrespective of his birth place, remains exemplary for the church in Africa, and beyond plagued with linguistic, gender, race, socio-political, cultural and religious divisions.

Globalization of the Relevance of Zephaniah

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, apart from the shores of the Church in Africa, where the theology of Zephaniah is received, today we all live in a world threatened by war, terrorism, nuclear weapons, materialism and relativism. We are constantly confronted with all forms of uncertainties, including natural disasters, like the tsunami of South Asia, the hurricanes that devastated the southern part of the United States of America, the recent Aquila and Haitian's earthquakes, poverty, cultural misunderstanding and secularism. If Zephaniah could actualize or adapt the ancient Judaism covenant-based theology of hope and earlier prophetic traditions of social justice, judgment, sin, punishment and salvation, relevant to his contemporaries, his theological message, especially of hope, in times of uncertainties, increasingly challenges our times and *Sitz-im-Leben*, as well (Dei Verbum, 12).

Zephaniah's theology becomes refreshingly applicable to our times, valuable to individuals and Christian communities, when we recall once again the exhortation the Fathers of the Vatican II (*Gaudium et spes*, 4) that, "at all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel if it is to carry out its task." This task is such, which includes (*Gaudium et spes*, 1) "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way."

This call for contextualization of Zephaniah's theology is affirmed by the *Pontifical Biblical Commission* (1993,117-132; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 52). The commission observes that "the Church receives the Bible as a Word of God, addressed both to itself and to the entire world at the present time...actualization is possible because the richness of meaning contained in the biblical text gives it a value for all time and all

cultures.” By culture here, we draw insight from Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn who once stated that:

Culture (he said) consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols constituting the distinctive achievement of the human groups, including their embodiments in the artifacts: the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; cultural system may on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on other as conditioning influences upon further action (Dei Verbum, *Review of Concepts*, 1952, 51, cf., Malina, *NT World*, 1993, 12).

In other words, culture is a system of symbols relating to and embracing people, things and events that are socially symbolic; or in according to Malina, (*NT World*, 1993 12) “filling people, things, and events with meaning and value, making them meaningful in such a way that all the members of the given group mutually share, appreciate, and live out that meaning and value in some way.” Kathryn Tanner (1997, 57) also believes that culture produces a commonality of beliefs, sentiments and presumes common stakes. Culture in this sense even goes beyond the boundary of ethnocentrism. Hence, the distinctiveness of cultural identity therefore, is neither a product of isolation nor a matter of “us” versus “them.”

In affirmation, Schreier (*Catholicity*, 2002, 47-48; cf., Bevans, *Models*, 2004, Segovia and Tolbert, *Reading from this Place*, 1995), depicts culture, “as patterned systems (of beliefs, values, rules) in which the various elements are coordinated in such a fashion as to create a unified whole.” He also stresses the importance of applying biblical lessons, including the texts of Zephaniah to every culture, and of interpreting Christ, the New Prophet and the Messiah contextually, to every cultural and life situation. Schreier’s point on inculturation was an endorsement of the teaching of the Synod Fathers, who in 1995 stressed the particular importance of evangelization or inculturation, the process by which ‘catechesis ‘takes flesh’ in the various cultures” (John Paul II, *Catechist Traddendae*, 1379, cf., *Ecclesia in Africa*, 44).

Inculturation, they stressed includes “the ultimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity,” as well as “the insertion of Christianity in the various strata of human cultures” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 45). Zephaniah’s prophecy foreshadows the Good News in Christ; “Just as the ‘Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14),’ so too the Good News, the Word of Jesus Christ proclaimed to the nations, must take root in the life-situation of the hearers of the Word. Inculturation is precisely this insertion of the Gospel message into cultures” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 45-46). Therefore,

Zephaniah is relevant to all cultures. In fact, those problems which confronted Zephaniah and his contemporaries with his response are not only paradigmatic to the church, but remain a huge challenge for the society today.

Truly ancient Judah would have suffered massive destruction of its population, land and abuse of their fundamental human rights. Zephaniah brought them hope in the course their task of surviving, regaining and rebuilding their rural farming population, as well as its moral social, political and religious structures (Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 189). Zephaniah also announced his theology of the worship YHWH alone in the midst of the syncretism of Assyrian collaborators. It was risky to oppose such hegemony, since a prophetic opposition even of those Judeans, who collaborated with the enemies, was usually regarded as punishable opposition to Assyrian imperialism and military might.

Thus, Zephaniah's prophecy challenges us pastorally. It challenges religious communities of Africa and beyond. These pastoral problems range from the need to overcome divisions among various religious and tribal groups in overcoming poverty and promoting civil self-governing, that would eliminate corruption, and ensure social justice, peace and order (Udoekpo, *Corruption*, 1994, 16-49; Udoekpo, *Limits*, 1999, 17-83). *Ecclesia in Africa* has also rightly articulated these problems to include: increasing poverty, urbanization, international debt, arms trade, refugees and displacement of persons, oppression of women, ethnocentricity, war, tribal tensions, political instability and the violations of fundamental human rights (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 35-38). These are challenges of the work of faith, the endurance of hope and the labor of love (1 Thess 1:1-5).

Conclusion

In what we have discussed thus far, it's true that Zephaniah proclaimed the theology of unity of worship or of YHWH alone as the sovereign of all creation. This element of one God is found in many religions today, including, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and ATR. As discussed, Zephaniah, preached the theology of hope, faith, universalism, judgment, justice and punishment, covenant renewal and restoration of fortunes. These various aspects of Zephaniah's prophecies are delivered in a single theological package of the Day of YHWH, with its discussed ecumenical and interreligious implications.

Zephaniah as discussed has been consistent that YHWH is the King of Israel, and of the universe. His love influence extends to all the earth and penetrates the fabrics of all cultures. It is the center of all monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Zephaniah's relevance to exilic and post-exilic Judaism, Christianity, ATR, Islam and the Church, is reflected in the shared themes of future hope, monotheism between the OT and NT, which binds the two testaments together. The hope in YHWH

preached by the prophets and Zephaniah is fulfilled and made anew in Jesus, the Savior and Lord of the Universe. Zephaniah is ever relevant to the Church and people of all cultures, especially African communities and beyond.

This is true, since the discussed problems addressed by Zephaniah take on new forms in poverty, war, syncretism, divisions, political instability, religious discrimination, disrespect for one another. Others are threats of nuclear weapons, secularism, relativism and abuse of fundamental human rights of some people in different cultures today. Hence, the ecumenical and interreligious relevance of this work is indisputable, as evident in the ecumenical, ecclesiological and inspiring, discussed documents that shaped the final form of the teachings of the Vatican II and other cited ecclesiastical documents throughout this paper.

Finally, the church today as well as individual Christians and members of other religious communities and cultural orientations both within and outside Africa, are globally challenged to be the “Zephaniahs” of today by bearing messages of hope, unity of worship, true interfaith and cultural dialogues with ecumenical spirit that convey to everyone justice and peace.

References

- ACHTEMEIER, E. (1986). *Nahum–Malachi*, Interpretation. Atlanta: John Knox Press.
- AGIUS, J. (2009). “Class Lectures on Amos.” Rome: Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, March 13.
- BENEDICT XVI. (2007). Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- BEVANS, Stephen B. (2004). *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Culture*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.
- BEVANS, Stephen B. and Jeffrey G. (2009). *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae*. Rediscovering Vatican II; New York: Paulist Press.
- BERLIN, A. (1994). *Zephaniah: A New Commentary with Introduction and Commentary*. AB. Vol. 25 A, New York: Doubleday.
- BERRIDGE, J. M. (1992). “Zephaniah (Person),” *ABD* 6:1075;
- BRIGHT, J. (1976). *Covenant and Promise: The Prophetic Understanding of the Future in Pre-Exilic Israel*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- BROWN, R. E. (1993). *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narrative in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*. New York: Doubleday.
- BEN Zvi, E. (1991). *A Historical Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah*. BZAW 198. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- CASSIDY, E. I. (2005). *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate*. Rediscovering Vatican II; New York: Paulist Press.
- CHILDS, B.S. (1979). *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- COLSON, C. and R. J. Neuhaus, eds., (1995). *Evangelicals & Catholics: Towards A Common Mission Together*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- COOGAN, M. D. (2006). *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- DE ROCHE, M. (1980). "Zephaniah 1:2–3: The "Sweeping" of Creation." *VT* 30 (1980): 104–109.
- D' COSTA, G. (2009). *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- FEINBERG, C. L. (1951). *The Major Messages of the Minor Prophets: Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai and Malachi*. New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews.
- FEINBERG, C. L. (1990). *The Minor Prophets*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- FENSHAM, F. C. (1966). "A Possible Origin of the Concept of the Day of the Lord." *Biblical Essays*. Bepeck, South Africa: Potchefstroom Herald.
- FERGUSON, H. (1883). "The Historical Testimony of the Prophet Zephaniah." *JBL* 3 (1883): 42–59.
- GAILLARDETZ, Richard R. (2006). *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. Rediscovering Vatican II; Paulist Press.
- GROS, J., Eamon McManus and Ann R. (1998). *Introduction to Ecumenism*. New York: Paulist Press.
- HAGG, H. "sm"x" chāmās." *TDOT* 4: 478–487.
- HARRINGTON, Daniel J. (2008). *Meeting St. Paul Today: Understanding the Man, His Mission, and His Message*. Chicago: Loyola Press.
- HEIL, J. P. (2002). "From Remnant to Seed of Hope for Israel: Romans 9:27–29," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 703.
- HEIL, J. P. (1987) *Romans—Paul's Letter of Hope*. AnBib 112; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1987.
- IDOWU, E. B. *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longmans, 1962.
- IDOWU, E. B. (1977). *African Traditional Religion: A Problem of Definition*. London: SCM Press, 1977.
- JOHN PAUL II. (1990). The Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*. Vatican City: Libreria Vaticana.
- JOHN PAUL II. (1995). *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- KASPER, W. (2004). *That They May all be One: The Call to Unity Today*. London: Burn & Oates, 2004.
- KROEBER, Alfred L and Klyde Kluckhohn. (1952). *A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions. (Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*. Harvard University 47, n.1. Cambridge; MA: Peabody Museum.
- KAPELRUD, Arvid S. (1975). *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- LANGHOR, G. (1967). *Le livre de Sophonie et la critique d'authenticité*. *Analecta Lovaniensia Biblica et Orientalia* V/17. Louvain: Éditions Peeters, 1967; = *ETL* 52 (1976): 1–27.
- LASOR, W. S. D. A. Hubbard and F. W. Bush. (1982). *Old Testament Survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- LINDBLOM, J. (1962). *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- LANGHOR, G. (1976). "Le Livre de Sophonie et la critique d'authenticité." *ETL* 52 (1976): 1–27.
- MALINA, B. J. (1993). *The New Testament World: Insight from Cultural Anthropology*. Revised Edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- MBITI, J. S. (1969). *African Religion & Philosophy*. New York: Praeger.
- MBITI, J. S. (1970). *The Concept of God in Africa*. New York: Praeger.

Ecumenical, Ecclesiological and Interreligious Implications of the Prophecy of Zephaniah 1-3

- NYOYOKO, V. (2002). "Dialogue and Inculturation," in *Reconciliation and Renewal of Services in the Church: Lineamenta for the First Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene*. Uyo, Nigeria: Trinity Press.
- NOGALSKI, J. D. (1999). "The Day (s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve," in *SBLSP 1999: One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Annual Meeting: November 20-23, 1999*. SBL Seminar Paper Series 38. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, (1999): 617–642.
- NOGALSKI, J. D. (200). "Joel as "Literary Anchor" for the Book of the Twelve." Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve. Symposium Series 15. Edited by James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney. Atlanta: SBL, 2000, 91–124.
- NOGALSKI, J. D. (1993). *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve*. Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- NOGALSKI, J. D. (1993). *Redactional Process in the Books of the Twelve*. BZAW 218. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- O'BRIEN, Julia M. (2007). "Nahum–Habakkuk–Zephaniah: Reading the "Former Prophets" in the Persian Period." *Interpretation* (2007): 168–183.
- PATE, C, M., et al., eds. (2004). *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY. (1993). *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice.
- PATTERSON, Richard D. (1991). *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah; The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- ROBERTS, J. J. M. (1991). *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*. OTL. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- ROBERTSON, O. P. (1990). *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*. NCOT; Michigan: Grand Rapids.
- RICE, G. (1979). "The African Roots of the Prophet Zephaniah." *JRT* 36 (1979-80): 21–31.
- ROBERT, J. J. M. (1991). *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*. OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster.
- SABOTTKA, L. (1972). *Zephanja: Versuch einer Neuübersetzung mit philologischen Kommentar*. Biblica et orientalia 25; Rome: Biblical Institute Press.
- SAVOCA, G. (2006). *Abdia-Naum, Abacuc-Sofonia: nuova versione, introduzione e commento*. ILB.PT 18; Milano: Paoline Editoriale Libri.
- SCHNEDIER, D. A. "Book of Zephaniah," *ISBE* 4:1190–1191
- SCHREITER, R. J. (1997). *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book.
- SEGOVIA, Fernando F. and Mary Ann Tolberts. eds., (1995). *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation*. 2 vols. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- STUHLMUELLER, C. (1986). *Amos, Hosea, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk*. Collegeville Bible Commentary. Old Testament 15. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.
- SZÉLES, M. E. (1987). *Wrath and Mercy: A Commentary on the Books of Habakkuk and Zephaniah*. Trans. George A. F. Knight. ITC. Grand Rapids; MI: Eerdmans.
- SWEENEY, M. A. (2003). *Zephaniah: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- TANNER, K. (1997). *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- THE PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993.

- THE PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION. (2002). *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- THE PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION. (2008). *The Bible and Morality: Bible Roots of Christian Conduct*. Vatican City. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- UDOEKPO, M. U. (1994). *Corruption in Nigerian Culture: The Liberating Mission of the Church*. Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press.
- UDOEKPO, M. U. (1999). *The Limits of a Divided Nation*. Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press.
- UDOEKPO, M. U. (2010). *Re-thinking the Day of YHWH and Restoration of Fortunes in the Prophet Zephaniah: An Exegetical and Theological Study of 1:14-18; 3:14-20*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- UDOEKPO, M. U. (2017). *Rethinking the Prophetic Critique of Worship in Amos 5 for Contemporary Nigeria and the USA*. Eugene; Oregon: Pickwick Publications.
- UDOEKPO, M. U. (2010). *The Limits of a Divided Nation with Perspective from the Bible*. Eugene; Oregon: Resource Publications.
- UDOEKPO, M. U. (2022). "Revisiting Sinai Covenant Theology, Its Values and Resonances for Today." *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 2(6), 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.24018/theology.2022.2.6.81>.
- UDOEKPO, M. U. (2022). *Second Inaugural Lecture; Biblical Studies and the Complementarity of Theology and Other Disciplines; An Annual Lecture delivered at the Multipurpose Hall, Veritas University Abuja, Nigeria on Thursday, 18th August, 2022*. Abuja; Nigeria: Veritas University Press.
- VATICAN II. (1964). *Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- VATICAN II. (1965). *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- VATICAN II. (1965). *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate*. Vatican City, Editrice Vaticana.
- VLAARDINGERBROEK, J. (1999). *Zephaniah*. HCOT. Leuven: Peeters.
- WILLIAMS, D. L. (1963). "The Date of Zephaniah." *JBL* 82 (1963): 77–88.
- WITHERUP, R. D. (2006). *Scripture: Dei Verbum*. Rediscovering Vatican II; New York: Paulist Press.
- WHYBRAY, R. N. (2003). *The Second Isaiah*. New York: T & T Clark.
- WRIGHT, G. E. (1958). *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology of Recital*. SBT 8. London: SCM Press.
- WRIGHT, P. H. (2008). *Greatness, Grace and Glory: Carta's Atlas for Biblical Biography*. Jerusalem: Carta Jerusalem.