

**Dr Olabisi Obamakin**  
**Decolonising New Testament Studies Plenary Panel**  
**Tuesday 2nd September 2025, 18.00–19.30**

British  
New Testament  
Society



Thank you so much for having me. My name is Bisi and over the past 2 years, I've been working on a 3-year project at Durham University along with my colleague Dr Nina Kurlberg on a project called *Diversifying the Common Awards Curriculum*. On this project, led by Professor Mike Higton, we have been working with faculty across 18 theological educational institutions (or TEIs as we call them) across the UK, to work towards decolonising (or, as we refer to it, diversifying) the content and delivery of Common Awards modules.<sup>1</sup> The funding for this project comes from the Church of England's Racial Justice Commission—and so it inherently has an anti-racist focus.

Ultimately, the project aims to ensure that the curriculum encountered by those training for ministry involves substantial engagement with a wide variety of UK Minority Ethnic voices, and with a wide variety of scholars from across the global church. I highlight the word *substantial* because this project aims to move the work of decolonisation beyond tokenism, which could look like adding a Global Majority heritage (or GMH) scholar to the end of a reading list and leaving it at that (although that is a start and is better than doing nothing), towards actually creating curricula and pedagogies that embed and integrate Global South scholars throughout the curriculum as equal conversation partners.

As a New Testament scholar, I have been leading the Biblical Studies part of this project, and that has predominantly looked like two things: 1) leading Biblical Studies subject groups, and 2) curating annotated bibliographies of books, articles, videos, podcasts authored by Global Majority Heritage biblical scholars. So, in the short time that I have for my presentation, I am going to be focusing on these two aspects.

### **1. Biblical Studies Subject Groups**

Over the past 2 years, I have had the privilege of leading two Biblical Studies subject groups (a different group every year) of 10–15 Biblical scholars across the UK who are teaching the Bible within their TEIs. We meet three times a year for an hour and a half, and our purpose statement is:

*“To create space for critical reflection on the content and delivery of our modules, in order to identify how they are shaped by the legacy of empire, and to find ways to move towards a more inclusive theological education.”*

These faculty members are passionate about decolonising biblical studies and are really invested in working with us to move towards a more equitable and racially just discipline. These sessions have been a great opportunity to read articles and book chapters together by

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<sup>1</sup> Common Awards being a three-way partnership between TEIs, the Church of England (and other participating churches), and Durham University. More information can be found [here](#).

GMH biblical scholars, such as Wongi Park's article *Multiracial Biblical Studies*,<sup>2</sup> published in 2021, and Angela Parker's book *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?*,<sup>3</sup> (both of which I would highly recommend) and have created space for faculty from different institutions to reflect together on this topic.

We as a group decided to focus on modules that introduced students to the Bible, as this seemed to be the place where faculty across institutions found it the hardest to diversify.

So, the first question that we explored when it comes to diversifying introductory modules and reading lists was the question of what is core? i.e. – what do 1st year students need to know? In order to think about this, we reflected on how we had been taught the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as 1st year students many moons ago, and we found that for many of us, our introduction to biblical studies had been informed solely by historical-critical methods originating from the Western epistemology.

Whilst there is nothing wrong with learning about redaction, source, or narrative criticism in and of itself, the exclusion of other hermeneutical approaches from the Global South specifically reinforces the idea that liberation or womanist approaches are peripheral to a Western-dominated centre. We therefore spoke about the great need for us now as educators to break this cycle and not perpetuate the colonial pedagogy we have inherited. We spoke about the need to restructure our modules in a way that introduces our students right from the outset to a wide range of worldviews and hermeneutical approaches—not in a way that is tokenistic, but actually genuinely treating Global South scholars (who are our peers) as equal conversation partners.

These groups were also a space for faculty to share ideas of good practice. I want to share just one example of good practice of what faculty have already been doing in this area that will hopefully spark conversation:

Introducing diverse approaches to studying the Bible right at the beginning of their modules. Again, touching on what I've just said, this practice moves away from pedagogies that add a week on postcolonial, Latin American, or womanist scholarship at the end of the course, in a way that says, 'now that we've covered the really important core of our discipline, here are some quirky critiques that you can take or leave'.

No, this person has intentionally reshaped their module so that scholars like Gail R. O'Day and Musa Dube are read alongside Ben Witherington and Alan R. Culpepper as equal conversation partners. This is a really good example of good practice as it demonstrates anti-racist pedagogy, and does the work of reshaping the discipline in a way that is racially just.

## 2. Annotated Bibliographies

We did a lot of travelling at the beginning of the project, going to different TEIs to listen to what their biggest barriers were to decolonising their curricula. And the biggest barrier by far was

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<sup>2</sup> Park, W. (2021). Multiracial Biblical Studies. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 140(3), 435-459.

<sup>3</sup> Parker, A. N. (2021). *If God still breathes, why can't I?: Black Lives Matter and biblical authority*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

time—which we totally understand!! During the project, we have spent over £10,000 on books by GMH authors for Common Awards students, and I’ve also spent a lot of time reading and collating an annotated bibliography for staff to use. These can be found [here](#).

So, as you can see, I’ve written the resource type, a short summary of the resource, and a description of the author so you can quickly add something onto your module lists without too much trouble. Just to quickly highlight some of the amazing scholars you’ll see—for the New Testament, examples include work by:

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**Dr Mitzi J. Smith** - *African American New Testament scholar*

- Smith, M. J., & Newheart, M. W. (2023). *We Are All Witnesses: Toward Disruptive and Creative Biblical Interpretation*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Smith, M. J. (Ed.). (2015). *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

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**Dr Surekha Nelavala** - *Indian-Dalit New Testament scholar*

- Nelavala, S. (2019). “My Story” in intersection with Gal. 3:26–28: An Indian-Dalit feminist interpretation. In G. Yee (Ed.), *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics* (Vol. 27, pp. 49–64). T&T Clark.
- Nelavala, S. (2006). Smart Syrophoenician woman: A Dalit feminist reading of Mark 7:24–31. *The Expository Times*, 118(2), 64–69.

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**Dr Vaitusi Nofoaiga** - *An Indigenous Samoan New Testament scholar*

- Nofoaiga, V. L. (2014). *Towards a Samoan postcolonial reading of discipleship in the Matthean gospel* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Auckland).
- Nofoaiga, V. (2021). O le pa’ua le popo uli: A coconut discipleship reading of Matthew 12:46–50 and 28:16–20. In M. L. Alefaio-Tugia, R. Smith, & T. Whelan (Eds.), *Theologies from the Pacific* (pp. 207–217). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

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Going forward into the final year of our project, now that TEIs are more aware of the diverse range of scholars that can enrich our curricula and classes, we aim to really focus on how we can embed these voices throughout the curriculum and pedagogy in a way that is not tokenistic and really engages with them as equal conversation partners. In order to do so, we are running two workshops: ‘Integrating GMH Voices in Teaching’ and ‘Compassion-Focused Pedagogy’.

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