

Justin Ukpong 1940-2011

Professor Justin Ukpong was born on 26 December 1940 in Ikot Essen Oku, Etinan LGA, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. He died 16 December, 2011, having been diagnosed with cancer a few months previously. He passed away in his home hospital on the eve of the forty-fourth anniversary of his priestly ordination.

Justin Ukpong is one of the pioneers of African biblical scholarship, having made a massive contribution at both a methodological and an institutional level. His nearly two decades of work as a New Testament scholar at the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria not only established a significant site for African biblical scholarship but also contributed to the formation of numerous contextually committed intellectuals. Justin Ukpong broke the hegemonic hold that Euro-American "contextless" biblical scholarship had on much of the African continent, declaring that African contexts must become the subject of biblical interpretation. Forging a way from within the dominant traditions of his own training, Justin Ukpong invited other African biblical scholars to join him in constructing forms of biblical scholarship that resonated with our African contexts and made a difference to the many millions of Africans who read the Bible in African contexts yearning for social transformation.

Justin Ukpong was one of the first African biblical scholars to recognize the import of the liberation of South Africa in 1994 for African biblical scholarship. He understood that this was the moment in which the religious-cultural contextual concerns of much of West Africa, East Africa, and Central Africa might engage more fully with the economic-political contextual concerns of Southern Africa. In what was to be the last year of his life, he was working at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa on a book that would bring together his reflections on what he called the "intercontextual" dimensions of African biblical scholarship. This work, his many other published works (including a number in SBL publications), and the memories we share of our humble and dedicated colleague will continue to nurture African biblical scholarship.

Gerald West
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