

**REREADING HEBREWS
FOR LIBERATING INTERDEPENDENCE
FROM WITHIN A ZIMBABWEAN MBIRE CONTEXT**

**BY
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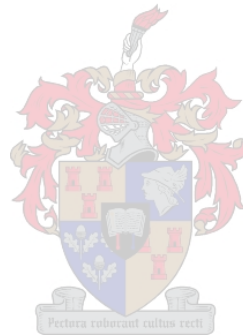
SUPERVISOR: PROF. E. MOUTON

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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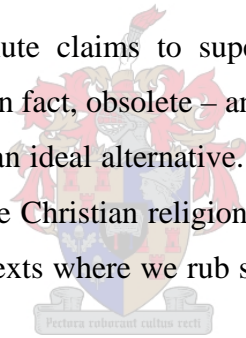


ABSTRACT

As modern society becomes more complex and diverse, a colonial reading paradigm is increasingly becoming less plausible and has reached a point at which it is no longer possible to play tricks with colonized peoples. It belongs to a period and expresses an outlook with which we can no longer identify. A new epoch in the field of reading has opened. What we see in a postcolonial paradigm is a radical shuffling of the cards into a new pattern.

This study argues that a postcolonial assumption of a plurality of contexts of salvation is a liberating paradigm that proceeds along a path that includes the acceptance of the independence and separate character of the various religions and the avoidance of superordination-subordination relationships. It acknowledges and seeks to detect religious intolerance and to encourage an approach that celebrates human cultural diversity—a rainbow religion or religious landscape. In this study a colonial reading paradigm of the bible in general and the letter to the Hebrews in particular, is turned on its head and colonial conception of supersessionism – an absolute claim to superiority – rendered largely obsolete. It is no longer a case of business as usual.

As the Christian assumption of absolute claims to superiority over non-Christian religions is increasingly becoming less plausible – in fact, obsolete – and no longer make sense to many people, collective and collaborative efforts are an ideal alternative. There is a need to create space for other religions to work in partnership with the Christian religion in our unprecedented communicational, democratic and pluralistic cultural contexts where we rub shoulders with devotees of non-Christian religions.



A pluralistic form of religious environment, where there is no one religion with preferential privileges, is an ideal thing in our contexts. We need a different conceptualization of the role of religion, where non-Christian religions are viewed not as demonic, false or inferior, but as worthy colleagues in the religious quest. They are alternative and valid version of religious faith as well. The idea that the ultimate reality, the cosmic power, has dealt with only one segment of humankind, the Christian people, and that ideally there should be one, and only one, universal religion should be rejected.

Moreover, for Christian people to be receptive to non-Christian religions does not entail abandoning or betraying the Christian religion. It simply entails appropriating insights previously unavailable to them. The idea that the Euro-American Christian theoretical line carries automatic evaluative judgements should now be regarded as decidedly outdated.

OPSOMMING

In 'n toenemend diverse en komplekse moderne samelewing is daar nie meer ruimte vir 'n koloniale lees-paradigma nie. Dit is trouens onwaarskynlik dat gekolonialiseerde mense (steeds) 'n rat voor die oë gedraai kan word. Sulke tye behoort tot die verlede en beliggaam 'n wêreldbeskouing waarmee nie langer geïdentifiseer kan word nie. 'n Nuwe epog wat betref die lees van tekste is op die horison. Binne die post-koloniale paradigma bemerk mens 'n radikale herposisionering van weë, en selfs nuwe weë.

Hierdie studie betoog dat 'n post-koloniale veronderstelling van 'n verskeidenheid-van-kontekste-van-verlossing uiteindelik 'n bevrydende paradigma is, wat sigself beywer om die afsonderlike en onafhanklike karakter van ander godsdienste te aanvaar en enige magsverhoudinge tussen hulle te bestry. Dit wil enige vorm van religieuse onverdraagsaamheid hokslaan en die viering van kulturele diversiteit aanmoedig. In die studie word 'n koloniale lees-paradigma van die Bybel in die algemeen en die Hebreërbrief in besonder op sy kop gekeer, terwyl die idee van absolute koloniale super-heerskappy as uitgediend beskou word. Dit is gewis nie meer 'n geval van klakkelose berusting in die algemene gang van sake nie.

Soos 'n Christelike veronderstelling van absolute aanspraak vanuit 'n magsposisie en heerskappy teenoor ander godsdienste al minder verantwoordbaar blyk te wees en vir baie eenvoudig nie meer sin maak nie, bied gesamentlike pogings nuwe en verfrissende alternatiewe. Daar is 'n behoefte om ruimte te skep vir ander godsdienste waarbinne hulle juis as vennote saam met Christene in vandag se ongekend kommunikatiewe, demokratiese en pluralisties-kulturele kontekste kan meewerk.

'n Pluralisties-religieuse omgewing – waar geen godsdiens enige spesiale bevoorregting bo 'n ander geniet nie – kan daarom as die ideaal in huidige kontekste beskou word. Hiervoor word egter 'n ander begrippe-apparaat ten opsigte van die rol van religie benodig, waarmee nie-Christengelowiges nie as demonies, vervloek of minderwaardig beskou sal word nie, maar veel eerder as waardige vennote in die religieuse gesprek. Hul standpunte behoort as alternatiewe en ewe geldige perspektiewe erken en gerespekteer te word. Die idee dat die Almagtige, na wie almal vra, slegs by één bepaalde segment van die mensdom betrokke sou wees, naamlik by Christene, word heeltemal verwerp. Dieselfde geld die beywering en uiteindelijke daarstel van één universele geloof.

Christene se openheid teenoor andersgelowiges beteken egter allermins 'n verloëning van die Christelike evangelie. Die gedagtegang van hierdie studie impliseer bloot dat Christene voortdurend oop sal wees vir ander se religieuse insigte. Die idee dat 'n Westerse teoretiese raamwerk outomaties waarde-oordele kan fel, word dus daarmee beslissend as gedateerd verklaar.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my precious and loving children, Blessed and Beloved.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

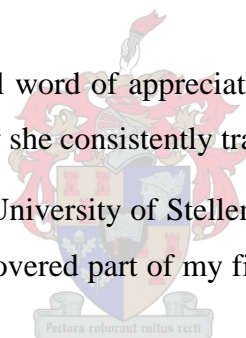
The Mbire people have a proverb, which goes as follows: “Chara chimwe hachitswanyi inda.” This may be rendered, “One finger cannot kill a bug.” This wise saying is true especially for this study. The collective efforts of several people made it possible for this research project to see the light of the day.

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I cannot miss out the contribution of my dear children, Blessed and Beloved, and my dear wife Matilda, for their utmost cooperation in the course of this project. They have stood behind me without minding my long absence from home. They have endured years of neglect because of my engagement with my studies. I am so proud of them.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROBLEM AND FOCUS

The generic definition of a thesis necessitates an objectification of a problem and then the postulation of an arguable theory about this problem towards finding a possible solution. What, then, is the problem addressed in this thesis?

For over twenty centuries, a number of Christian people have been claiming the absolute biblical epistemological¹ and ontological² superiority of their religion – that is, claims to eternal truth (Hick and Knitter 1987:16). Some of these Christian people assume their religion speaks of the ultimate reality³. They recognize their religion as the centre of meaning, the unique location competent to engender a discourse on the human and the divine (Thomas 1995). Such an assumption of superiority is called supersessionism.

This supersessionism seems to have its genesis from the writers of the bible in general and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews in particular. The rhetorical strategy of the author of the letter to the Hebrews of comparing and contrasting Jesus' priestly mediation with the Levitical priestly mediation and the consistent emphasis on the superiority of Jesus over the Levitical high priestly mediation (Hebrews 9:1 – 10:18), in my view, have relegated Judaism to a position of a mere *praeparatio evangelica* to the Christian religion. This suggests its incompleteness since it is said to be unable to achieve fulfilment in itself (9:9; 10:1). This comparative methodological formula, in my view, subordinates other Jewish cultural figures and categories to phenomena, not in search of a liberating paradigm, but to install Jesus and by extension the Christian religion to a position that is higher than any known earthly person is and religion.

Since the first century era, a number of Euro-American⁴ Christians believe that their religion has to judge, evaluate and transform non-Christian religions, because these religions were/are sinful, having been created by people, if not by “the devil” (Ntoedibe-Kuswani 2001:99-100). Non-Christian religions were/are considered as being inadequate (Dewick 1953:39). Hick and Knitter (1987:16) contend that a substantial percentage of Euro-American Christian people assume their beliefs absolute and decisively superior to non-Christian beliefs. Functioning on this

¹The meaning of this term and other unfamiliar terms used in this study are explained under Explanation of Terms at the end of this study. Therefore, for those terms not explained in the study itself refer to Explanation of Terms.

² Refer to Explanation of Terms.

³ See Explanation of Terms.

⁴ See Explanation of Terms

supersessionism, churches expend energy and invest vast sums of money on “foreign mission” enterprises to convert people of other faiths to the Christian faith (Richter 1913:540).

Supersessionism has led to untold suffering in slavery, colonialism, apartheid and neo-colonialism (Danmole 1974). In such a world, the Christian assumption of superiority and monopoly of salvific truth and life needs to be challenged and tested in the light of fresh evidence, or of a change in the premises on the basis of which the evidence is weighed. The idea that the ultimate reality has dealt with only one segment of humankind, the Christian people, and that ideally there should be one, and only one, universal religion is, in my view, naïve (cf. Sullivan 2002:118).

Acting out the artistry of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, most missionaries who brought the Christian religion to Zimbabwe sought to dispossess the Mbire belief system and to plant in its stead, in the soil of Mbire national life, the evangelical faith and the Christian life (Richter 1913:540). The Mbire people witnessed the destruction of their cultural values and ways of life (Wijngaards 1985:233). Some Euro-American missionaries, through the intimidating character of their authority, managed to impose their viewpoints on the Mbire people. The result of this dialectic imposition was guilt and an inferiority complex (Danmole 1974:223). As Bell (2002:55) argues, to escape from this the Mbire converts proclaimed total and unconditional adoption of most Euro-American cultural models and condemned a large portion of their own cultural styles.

While a substantial proportion of Mbire people responded to the material aspects of the missionaries’ message, some of the respondents did not make a deep commitment to the Christian religion (Kirwen 1987: vii-viii). Instead of participating whole-heartedly in the serious religious meaning that the Church tried to instil in them, a number of Mbire Christian people practised a multi-religious allegiance (Kurehwa 2000:10-11). Church membership in practice seldom implied a complete break with the world of the living-timeless. For example, a number of Mbire people, including pastors and deacons, are still members of the Church by day and members of Mbire religion by night (Chavunduka 1977). For all their great influence, the Christian churches in Zimbabwe are still alien institutions to most Mbire people.

Faced with such a dilemma, this study intends to place a colonial biblical paradigm (henceforth referred to as a colonial paradigm) and a postcolonial biblical paradigm (henceforth referred to as a postcolonial paradigm) in a new context and critically evaluate their possible relevance and impact on the Mbire people. The refusal by a number of Euro-American Christians to deal with Mbire ancestral perceptions and prescriptions in a significantly creative and meaningful way prompted this quest for relevance (see section 6.3.1).

What follows is a mixture of description and my reaction to a colonial paradigm. Some might view me as a great exponent of a postcolonial paradigm. I am simply making explicit the hermeneutical

ideas latent in the great flow of a postcolonial paradigm (see Said 1978, 1993; Sugirtharajah 1998; Spivak 1987; Bhabha 1994; Dube 1996, 1998; 2001; Segovia 1995, 1998, 2000 and many others). It will be quite misleading to regard me as a sworn enemy of the Christian faith. What I am opposing mainly is prejudice. Not that I have no prejudices of my own. We all do. The important thing is to be aware of them, as I have shown myself to be.

Consequently, some might also view this study as an attack on the person of Jesus. However, this study is not attacking Jesus himself but the way biblical writers, particularly the writer of the letter to the Hebrews have interpreted him. This study contends this writer's interpretation of Jesus. It contends that the writer might have employed divine representations to construct relationships of domination and subordination. Jesus might have refused to supplant the worship of the ultimate reality with the worship of himself.

The study falls within the borders of postcolonial criticism with regard to Mbire theological reflection. A development calls into question the socio-economic and political interests of a so-called 'biblical construct' of the Christian religion from a context of colonialism. The investigation will focus on a postcolonial reading of Hebrews 9-10:18 and 13:15-16 to expose its co-option by the desire to dominate others, thereby destabilizing its frame of meaning to enable Mbire people to hear the ultimate reality speak in a Mbire voice rather than in a Hebrew, Greek, German or English voice.

In my view, the letter to the Hebrews is a pro-colonial text, which has been used by most Euro-American Christian people to silence non-Christian religions (cf. Swanson 1995:241-63). Thus, it is the present writer's assumption that the motif of Jesus' superiority should be challenged under a postcolonial rubric. This superiority motif needs to be demystified by postcolonial demystifiers. I strongly believe that Christian people are not the only champions in matters concerning the cosmic reality (cf. Smith 1980:92).

This postcolonial reading of the letter to the Hebrews hopes to enable Mbire people to approach basic theological questions from their own Mbire perspective. It will suggest a reading for a liberating interdependence between the Christian and Mbire religions as a possible way towards developing a relevant theology in terms of their own context. Mbire theological language should originate from the heart of their culture and from an honest wrestling to understand the ultimate reality and life for their time and place (Borg 2001).

A number of biblical scholars, missionaries and anthropologists have looked down upon Mbire religion, regarding it as polytheistic and idolatry instead of recognizing and respecting it as a systematic worldview through which its proponents make sense of their world (see Moffat 1885; Dewick 1953:39). Since the advent of missionaries in mid-19th century, Mbire religion has always

excited a stream of colonial racist writing intent on showing that the Mwari⁵ worship of Mbire people is demonic and anti-Christian (e.g. Edwards 1929; Holloman 1952; Doke 1954; Gelfand 1959 and many others).

Whatever the religio-political importance to some of the Euro-American colonialists of Zimbabwe, I could find no reason for supposing that their worship is demonic and idolatry. Nor could an assumption that Mbire people were polytheists and idol worshippers (see section 6.3.1) justify Euro-American religio-political conquest (see also section 6.3.2).

I will definitely challenge the oft repeated and compromising suggestion that the Mwari worship of Mbire people is demonic (see Smith 1950:128). The demonization of Mwari worship carries the imprint and nuances of colonialists who seek to suffuse the notion of salvation with the belief that their way of worship is the natural and only acceptable way. It is evidence of colonialism's insistence that the particular premise on which its ethos is based should be naively accepted as a universal category (Danmole 1974).

The phenomenon of the ultimate reality is far too great to be caught and held in one cultural reading. It will be naïve, too, to believe as Moffat (as quoted by Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2001:98) did, that some Euro-American missionaries brought the ultimate reality to Zimbabwe in the late nineteenth century. To believe the manifestation of the cosmic reality resides in one local culture and that all other manifestations in other local cultures are demonic is an attempt to colonize the ultimate reality and to determine the what, who, how and why of it.

The Christian religion is Euro-American people's attempt to think and understand about the ultimate reality and life in their context. It is a struggle to understand, to celebrate, to witness and to relate. It should not be an attempt to project objective truths. For the relevance of the ultimate reality and life in the Mbire context, these should also be re-conceptualized in Mbire terms. There is no question here of contextualization, that is, adapting Euro-American ideas to make them understandable to Mbire people. Contextualization implies, in my view, a core object, which could be wrapped in different cultural covers. I see this type of contextualization as what Kibicho (1972:319) calls a subtle Christian imperialism, which does not allow any manifestation of the cosmic reality, which is not under the control of its claims. This kind of contextualization is, in my view, a Christian attempt to retain the doctrine of no salvation outside the Christian religion, which they have devised. It is a subtle unwillingness to acknowledge any salvific significance in non-Christian religions.

⁵ See Explanation of Terms

The Mbire people have the right and duty to develop their own theology. The call for a genuine Mbire theology demands a radical and revolutionary re-assessment of the ultimate reality and life in terms of authentic Mbire experience and struggles. That is why a postcolonial reading of the letter to the Hebrews is imperative for me. The letter to the Hebrews has been and is still part of a religious ideology that was/is central to the demise and demonization of Mbire religion (because of its concept of superiority). It greatly supported the Christian people in turning their confessions into absolute truths. This has become the basis of which they have measured the truth or otherwise of Mbire faith-claims (cf. Ariarajah 1985:3-12). Though a postcolonial reading may not correct past injustices, I hope it might help to avoid a possible repetition of the same.

Thus, in continuation with postcolonial reading practices, I will peruse the letter to the Hebrews for gaps, absences and ellipses, silences and closures, and so facilitate the recovery of stories that have been suppressed or distorted in Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16. I will also attempt to explore a new religious formation between Christian and Mbire religions as a possible valid alternative to the Mbire context. I argue that the author's rhetorical strategy needs to be challenged and rejected.

This study consists of eight chapters. The First Chapter provides some introductory remarks with respect to problem statement, hypothesis, methodology and impact of the study. This is followed by a description of a postcolonial paradigm in Chapter Two in order to gain some understanding of the philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations of postcolonial critics and theorists.

To understand a postcolonial paradigm some attention is given to a colonial reading of Hebrews 9-10:18 and 13:15-16 in Chapter Three. This reading is one of various possible readings of a colonial reading paradigm.

Chapter Four re-reads Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 from a postcolonial perspective. It should also be understood that this reading is one of many possibilities of a postcolonial reading paradigm.

Chapter Five provides the contours of the morphological⁶ group of people called the Mbire as a background against which to view the relevance of colonial and postcolonial reading paradigms.

Chapter Six describes in detail the excessive claims by a number of Christian people that their religion is being the only true religion, while the Mbire religion was/is erroneously regarded as an offshoot of "the devil."

Chapter Seven focuses on a postcolonial re-evaluation of the Christian religion. It seeks to unveil religious intolerance and to encourage an approach that celebrates the cultural diversity of the cosmic reality.

⁶ See Explanation of Terms

Chapter Eight provides the conclusion, which offers a synoptic evaluation of the argument and attempts a relative proposal for the Mbire context.

1.2 HYPOTHESIS

I will argue that a postcolonial⁷ reading⁸ of the concepts of the superior sacrifice in the letter to the Hebrews could resist, subvert and relativize Christian biblical claims to absolute epistemological and ontological superiority, thereby enabling a liberating paradigm, or what Musa Dube (1998:38) calls “reading for liberating interdependence.”

She defines “liberating interdependence” as an awareness of colonial⁹ exploitative forces and the accompanying domineering strategies and a conscious adoption of strategies for resistance, while exploring alternative positions and practices that foster true interaction between nations, races, gender, economies and cultures. It entails the implementation of a comprehensive approach where each religion is willing to learn from the other and to approach the other as an equal.

In reading for liberating interdependence, the ultimate reality speaks not only through scriptures but also through other intellectual and cultural forms in which, as they arise out of humankind’s deepest encounter with one’s world and one’s humanity, are stamped by a self-authenticating genuineness and relevance. The love and mercy of the ultimate reality are not confined to any one nation or people but are there for the whole of humanity always (cf. Jonah). It is my hope that such a conceptualization of religion will bring an increasing relevance of the ultimate reality to both Christian and non-Christian people.

With regard to theology, concepts and practices of the ministry, ethics, liturgy and spirituality, Mbire churches are still in some kind of Euro-American biblical captivity (cf. Pobe 1989:2). Hence, the dire need for Mbire critical scholarship to critically re-evaluate and reconfigure its heritage. The crucial period of political transition affords the Mbire community with an opportune moment to re-write stories of its understanding of the ultimate reality and life, to pose new questions, to devise a new epistemology and to open up new spaces for theological reflection.

Amid the often-conflicting strategies for re-thinking our situation, thereby re-thinking our pluralistic and ambiguous heritage, a ‘postcolonial reading’ thus involves both critique and construction (Dube 2000). *Firstly*, it encourages critical assessment of existing readings, values and paradigms. *Secondly*, it takes the socio-cultural reality of a people very seriously. *Thirdly*, it implies that the bible in general and the letter to the Hebrews in particular has to be re-read with the full

⁷ See Explanation of Terms.

⁸ See Explanation of Terms

⁹ See Explanation of Terms

sophistication offered by postcolonial strategies. I will offer a postcolonial reading of Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 and then appropriate its thrust and perspective to the Mbire context.

1.3 DELIMITATION AND MOTIVATION

This study does not intend to undertake the comprehensive task of examining all the components of the rhetorical strategy of the author of the letter to the Hebrews (see DeSilva 2000:58-71). Rather, it intends to examine only one component, namely the concept of the superior sacrifice in Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16.

Several reasons led to the choice of this concept of sacrifice in particular. The first one concerns the affinity of the Mbire worldview with the ancient Jewish worldview. The Mbire people have the most elaborate cult for worshipping and consulting the ultimate reality among the southern and eastern nations of Africa (cf. Daneel 1970:15). Their concept of the ultimate reality, which they call Mwari, is of a peaceful, all-powerful and omnipresent reality-centredness, and in some ways resembled that of the ancient Israelites of *YHWH*. An elaborate hierarchy of foremothers/fathers to be propitiated through the priesthood guides their fortunes.

The Mbire had known and worshipped the ultimate reality long before missionaries came in the late nineteenth century. As Jace Weaver (1996:170) points out, the manifestations of Mwari are as much *logoi* as any of the faces of the deity in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The concept of sacrifice in the letter to the Hebrews is readily comparable with the concept of sacrifice in the Mbire context and resonates very well with Mbire experience.

A second reason entails some colonial views of most Mbire beliefs as worthless and demonic, which were/are held by a number of Euro-American Christian people (see the Methodist Church's Report Vol.111:384). As George Tinker (1993:3) argues, the process of Christianization has involved some internalization of the illusion of the inferiority of Mbire and other non-Christian religio-cultural heritages and the idealization of Euro-American religio-cultural heritages (cf. Dewick 1953:39). Dube (1996:11-12) insists that this point is best illustrated by the portrayal of Jesus as a Euro-American. She singled out the images of Jesus, his mother, his disciples and the other male and female characters in biblical writings and contends that they are depicted as blue-eyed Euro-Americans. However, the devil is depicted as an African black male with horns. This is a clear instance of demonizing Africans and their beliefs. It served to imprint the crude and negative stereotypes of the colonized peoples and their religions.

A third reason concerns the irrelevance of the Christian faith to a number of Mbire people because of the demonization of themselves and their beliefs (Kurehwa 2000:10-11). Religion is a cultural system that embodies a people's history and ideas of self. It gives a nation the unity and intimate

cohesion that assure its life. Mbire religion embodies what I call the “Mbire being”, the essentials of being a Mbire. The Christian religion embodied ‘Euro-American civilization’ for the missionaries. For a Mbire person to participate in Christian rituals was/is to practise a foreign culture and often to forswear one’s own culture.

Consequently, much of what passes for the Christian religion in Zimbabwe today is largely a carbon copy or imitation of various Euro-American norms (cf. Pobe 1989:2). The Christian religion is estranged from the depths of Mbire society, very superficial and blended with Euro-American culture and materialism. A number of Mbire critics see it as a divisive paternalistic destroyer of Mbire spiritual, cultural and social life (Chavunduka 1977).

A fourth reason entails the need to reconfigure or reconstitute the above process. Marie Therese Archambault (1996:135) advocates for the need to eliminate the cultural superiority with which the gospel of Jesus was often presented to colonized peoples. She challenges the gospel in order to perceive its truth.

A fifth reason concerns my choice of Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 in particular. Hebrews 9:1-10:18 forms the fulcrum of the letter’s chiasmic structure (cf. my Chapter Three) and treat more directly the rituals performed by the two priestly mediations and their relative efficacy. Consequently, Hebrews 13:15-16 also deals with the non-material sacrifices in contrast with the material sacrifices, which connects it to the concept of the superior sacrifice being explored in this study.

A sixth and last reason for my focus on the concept of sacrifice concerns the fact that the letter to the Hebrews is a mission text that authorizes the superiority of Jesus and by extension the Christian religion over non-Christian religions (Swanson 1995:241-63). One only needs to attend Church services, bible study groups and other Church gatherings to see that the concept of superiority has been one of the most influential concepts in the demonization of most Mbire and other non-Christian beliefs by a number of Euro-American missionaries. Thus, the rhetorical strategy of the author of Hebrews of comparing and contrasting Jesus’ priestly mediation with the Levitical priestly mediation is the point of departure for this study.

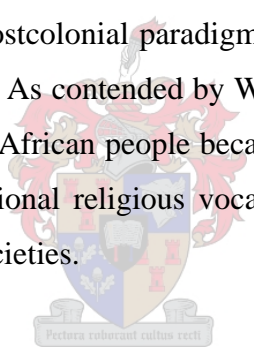
1.4 CHOICE OF PERSPECTIVE

The postcolonial approach used here is one of many possibilities. It is one among many perspectives. It is also one among many postcolonial readings. Other insights and perspectives are not denied. A method is like a road that only leads to one destination or a key that only opens one door. No one method is a master key that opens all the doors. This method was chosen because I do believe that postcolonial insights provide a powerful instrument by which my context could be

adequately addressed. It is the better of the two evils. Despite its own limitations, its advent has heralded more benefits and opportunities for Mbire people than it has inflicted collateral damage. For example, the development of a postcolonial paradigm has created greater opportunities for Mbire people to resist domination than a colonial paradigm had (cf. Dube 1998). It challenges Mbire people in particular to give an account of their belief in the ultimate reality.

A postcolonial paradigm challenges the dominant tradition and epistemology, and thus enables marginalized discourses and groups to become counter-discourses and counter-movements. It challenges the hermeneutical centre from the margins. It embodies the demand to be free from the “withinest” of within, setting out to read what is really going on in freedom from the dominant culture’s most basic assumptions that are so deep that the culture does not notice them (Jobling 1987:4).

Because I deem a postcolonial paradigm to be doing something vitally important, its assumptions are articulated in this study with some vigour. My postcolonial reading of the letter to the Hebrews will not involve acceptance of its superiority in an unquestioning manner, but rather a critical engagement with its performance. A postcolonial paradigm is no chimera. It has set up a ferment, which no serious scholar can disregard. As contended by West (1985:270-271), this paradigm shift is most significant for Mbire and other African people because they have more at stake than others in focusing on the tenuous and provisional religious vocabularies, which have had and do have hegemonic status in past and present societies.



1.5 METHODOLOGY

In order to accomplish these goals, a combination of descriptive, comparative and evaluative methods will be employed. This qualitative social-scientific research method is imperative because a lot of work has been done on Mbire religion (see Gelfand 1962, 1964, 1966, 1974; Ranger 1966, 1967, 1968; Daneel 1970, 1971, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1995; Beach 1980; Aschwanden 1987, 1989; Bourdillon 1987, 1991; and NADA - an old periodical that was launched by the early colonial administrators in their bid to understand more about the Mbire people. It contains some of the personal experiences of the early colonialists when they encountered Mbire people). However, the interpretation of that data by these scholars is what I am challenging in this study.

In Zimbabwe, the dominance of Euro-American scholars and theologians in Mbire religious literature has done a lot of harm to Mbire religion. Those who up to 1980 determined the course of Mbire religious research were Euro-Americans, but were not necessarily theologians (Nada 1923 - 1929). Those who wanted to climb the ladder up the Internal Affairs hierarchy had to demonstrate that they were experts on the Mbire people. Inevitably, they did some sort of work by proxy on the religion of the Mbire communities under them (e.g. Aschwanden 1987). They wrote articles to the

news media (*Nada*) as they deemed fit. Furthermore, the fact that reports of Mbire religion were often made not by Mbire practitioners but by outsiders increased the likelihood that the meaning of Mbire religion would not be comprehended (Opoku 1989:17). It is therefore no surprise that all the labels to Mbire religion have been from an observer's point of view.

This and the absence of correlation have created a false picture of Mbire religion. The religion of one clan fascinates one scholar (cf. Ranger 1967:17-18), without realizing that that clan is only part of a much larger Mbire group in Zimbabwe. Without correlating the discoveries of the various research students, this very important fact is not realized. Because it is not realized, the necessary follow-up studies do not take place and consequently an understanding of the Mbire religion remains as fragmented as it is at present (see Daneel 1995:217-218).

The realization that this one clan is a part of many others would immediately necessitate further investigation to discover the cognates of this clan. In the end, it would emerge that the Mbire people are members of one clan and one religion. This would be a fact of cardinal importance. Either we start with the whole (nation) and descend to the individual unit (clan), or we start with the unit and build up to the whole. Whatever happens, the goal of all the researchers must in the end be to obtain a complete unit. Without correlating the material, people are accepting the false picture of Mbire religion, thereby seriously distorting Mbire religion and conspiring in fragmenting and demonizing it further (see Daneel 1995:217-218; Ranger 1967:17-18).

It is regrettable to note that largely Mbire Christian scholars and theologians have up to this point almost failed to chart an independent path of their own (Kumbirai 1967 was a good start though, in my view, was limited). Those who have attempted to produce something for our expanding education system have regurgitated the same old colonial story, but in a new garb (cf. Kurehwa 2000). They have nothing of their own to offer.

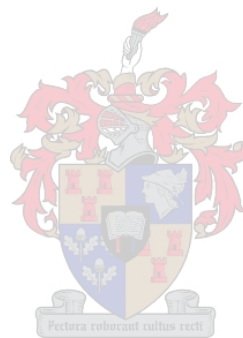
I am in a privileged position to carry out this research. I am a Mbire who was born in Zimbabwe and have spent all my formative years there. This is unlike most Euro-American scholars, whose interest in Mbire religion was generated by short experiences such as academic study trips. Though I will depend on written sources, I am able to write about what I have experienced throughout my whole life. I have been exposed to rural as well as urban environments, having been an active and passive participant and observer in various Mbire cultural and religious activities. I also have two further advantages, namely language and being no stranger to Mbire rituals and belief systems. Mbire culture is the sun and moon under which I live. Thus, in most cases, the light, which the Mbire culture casts, influences what I see. As a result, certain prejudices and empathies will unavoidably creep in.

1.6 IMPACT

In the thesis I hope to advance the cause of a liberating paradigm, or what Dube (1996:38) refers to as “reading for liberating interdependence.” The reading moves away from a colonial reading, which refuses to take seriously the harmful effects that culturally insensitive colonial scholarship could produce. It also hopes to substantiate the Christian religion as one of a plurality of contexts of salvation. It will call for a radical and revolutionary re-thinking and re-orientation of what it means to be a Christian in a postcolonial environment.

The project hopes to contribute towards an accountable and more relevant understanding of the ultimate reality and life, for not only the Mbire people of Zimbabwe, but also for suffering and oppressed peoples around the world. It seeks to encourage an approach that celebrates the cultural diversity of the cosmic reality.

Now I turn to a brief description of a postcolonial paradigm in order to gain some understanding of the philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations of postcolonial critics and theorists.



CHAPTER TWO

TOWARD A POSTCOLONIAL READING PARADIGM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades hermeneuticians have employed an array of methodological approaches (see Segovia 2000a) and some are exploring postcolonial hermeneutics or studies (see *The Postcolonial Bible* 1998). Moore-Gilbert (1998:7) contends that the past two decades have witnessed a veritable explosion of scholarly productions and a proliferation of conferences that have engaged with various postcolonial concerns and their importance as an analytical and political instrument.

Donaldson (1996:1) argues that a postcolonial paradigm constitutes perhaps the most important development in literary and cultural studies so far for the colonized peoples of the world. Though this notion is not completely novel within the Judeo-Christian religion as parallels between the biblical prophetic tradition and postcolonial studies could be seen, a critical distinction emerges from the biblical prophetic tradition's awakening of people to a heterogeneous group of socio-ethical concerns, while a postcolonial paradigm specifically addresses the historical, textual, discursive and epistemological legacies of colonialism.

In this chapter I set out to do five things. Firstly, I will attempt to trace the genesis of a postcolonial paradigm as a critical inquiry in the Euro-American academy. Secondly, I will attempt a definition of this problematic phenomenon. Thirdly, I will briefly discuss its connection with a postmodern paradigm. Fourthly, I will attempt a description of the broad contours of a postcolonial paradigm. Finally, I will also look at the limitation of a postcolonial phenomenon.

2.2 GENESIS OF PHENOMENON

The postcolonial paradigm is comprised of a variety of practices performed within a range of disciplinary fields in a number of different institutional locations around the world. Moore-Gilbert (1998:5) argues that most of these long predate the time when the term "postcolonial paradigm" gained currency and have so far been claimed retrospectively as continuous with what is now identified as postcolonial modes of cultural readings. He listed people such as W.E.B. Dubois (African-American), Sol Plaatje (South African), C.L.R. James (Trinidadian), Frantz Fanon (Martinique-Algerian), Chinua Achebe (Nigerian), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Kenyan) and Ranajit Guha (Indian), to name just a few, and such movements as the Harlem Renaissance (World War I and 1920s) and the Negritude movement (1940s and 1950s) as precursors to a postcolonial paradigm. He also included such stories as Latin American criticism and Commonwealth literary studies of the 1960s and 1970s, and other aesthetic theories in non-Euro-American languages.

Moore-Gilbert (1998:5-6) is insistent that, while a postcolonial paradigm has had a long and complex history outside Euro-America, its arrival in the Euro-American academy was only recent. Since the 1960s, most of the literary productions that originated during and after colonialism in former colonies in Africa and Asia were lumped under the rubric of “*Commonwealth Literature.*” Mukherjee (1996:5) states that the phenomenon of a postcolonial paradigm was only given its imprimatur by Routledge Publishers when they changed the name of a volume from *The Encyclopædia of Commonwealth Literature* to *The Encyclopædia of Postcolonial Literatures in English* (Benson 1994) at the last minute.

Moore-Gilbert (1998:6) observes just how limited part English studies played in re-thinking the area of literary studies in what would now be termed postcolonial studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. An evident fact of its late arrival is the lack of acknowledgement of a postcolonial paradigm as a distinct category of inquiry in a number of relatively recent works of cultural analysis and critical theories, especially in Britain from 1976 to 1988.

For instance, he argues that postcolonial reading was not considered as a distinct category of cultural analysis in influential works such as Raymond Williams’s *Keywords* (1976, revised in 1983), Terry Eagleton’s *Literary Theory* (1983), Raman Selden’s *The Theory of Criticism* (1988), Peter Widdowson’s *Re-Reading English* (1982) and Janet Batsleer’s *Re-Writing English* (1985) (Moore-Gilbert 1998:6). These works did not address in any detailed way the cluster of interests now identified with either colonial discourse analysis or the already well-developed fields of postcolonial literatures in English. A preliminary survey of postcolonial reading only appeared in 1989 with *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989), which was followed by *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory* (William and Chrisman in 1993), the first critical reader in the discipline.

Sugirtharajah (1998:93) argues that initially a postcolonial paradigm was not seen as advancing any particular theoretical concepts. It was not until the trio of cultural critics, the late Edward Said with his books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Gayatri Spivak with her book *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), and Homi Bhabha with his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) (Sugirtharajah 1998:93), gave a postcolonial paradigm its theorization and practice. Bell (2002:46) is insistent that these and other works have spun a new rhetorical web dealing with how to reclaim the identity of the cultures of the developing world, and have developed a new critical discourse to analyze colonialism from their own postcolonial perspectives.

2.3 DEFINING THE PHENOMENON

Said (1993:xii) contends that the arrival of a number of Euro-American people brought forth some resistance in most parts of non-Euro-American world. This resistance to Euro-American dominance

resulted in liberating and decolonizing movements all over the non-Euro-American world. These resistance movements were armed and religio-cultural in nature, whose aims were self-determination and religio-cultural independence. Never was it a case that the colonial encounter pitted active Euro-American intruders against inert non-Euro-American hosts. There was always some form of active resistance and the armed resistance finally won in most cases (see Ngungi 1993 12-13). Africa as a whole is politically independent now. Unfortunately, the religio-cultural resistance is far from being successful yet.

The understanding of colonialism draws the attention of colonized peoples to its violence, immorality and fostering of inequality. This understanding enabled political protest and prompted critical reflection in and among postcolonial subjects (Thomas 1994). The function of liberation from these encumbrances of the colonial heritage, from the crippling constraints that their continued presence entail, involves a revolutionary process that must run through the entire colonial fabric, the entire structure of colonial systems that have proven oppressive and historically irrelevant (Danmole 1974). The effects have been historically devastating to the colonized peoples (see Chapter Six section 6.3.3). It must engage such systems in a cultural confrontation in a determined battle to remove the contradictions that have resulted in the slavery and poverty of the colonized peoples and the freedom and affluence of the colonizing peoples (Achebe 1989:1-20).

The emergence in the humanities of systematic scrutiny of the historical records of colonialism and the changes that colonial experience has produced in identity, practice, knowledge, and the hermeneutical marriage between reading, mission, and colonial expansion have enabled postcolonial critics to re-examine the intermarriage of Euro-American biblical reading and colonialism (Sugirtharajah 1998:15).

There is a pattern of radical problems with the ways some of the Euro-American biblical theologians and scholars have been accustomed to thinking and arguing. Postcolonial critics intend to resist such bad habits, while these Euro-American theologians and scholars have fallen under the influence of colonialism.

The usefulness and validity of a postcolonial paradigm has provoked a rigorous debate among people at various institutions. The reason is that a postcolonial paradigm is not one thing. Indeed, it should not be just one thing. Most varieties of the postcolonial paradigm will strike against the very notions of identity and unity in one way or another. There are many varieties and schools of thought claiming this phenomenon as their own. Sugirtharajah (1998:15) called it:

A hermeneutical salmagundi, consisting of extremely varied methods, materials, historical entanglements, geographical locations, political affiliations, cultural identities and economic predicaments.

Moreover, a postcolonial paradigm is not an all-encompassing oppositional master-narrative¹⁰ (Gallagher 1996:232), since “there is no self-evident project of resistance and emancipation for all in the periphery” (Gugelberger 1994:582). Instead, “the differences among the various discourses of resistance and emancipation are to be emphasized as much as the similarities” (Segovia 2000a:140-141). Thus, a postcolonial reading “takes competing modes of discourse for granted, renounces the idea of any master-narrative as in itself a construct, and looks for truly global interaction” (Segovia 2000a:33). A postcolonial paradigm is “thoroughly self-conscious of itself as construct” (Segovia 1998:63).

Jeremy Punt (2003:63), a South African New Testament scholar, contends that a postcolonial paradigm is a sort of an ideological¹¹ reading, which is concerned primarily with the socio-political context and one’s stand within it. Nevertheless, he argues that it goes beyond this and addresses the silencing of the other through a colonial strategy of posing the colonized people as opposites of the colonizing people and requiring at the same time the idea of emptying the colonized world of meaning. This idea includes the structure of political power and ideology, economic structures and practices and socio-cultural configurations and experiences.

Punt (2003:64) further argues that the situation of sources/voices into time, distance, space, autobiography and paradigm is imperative in understanding hegemonic and colonial structures of oppression. A postcolonial paradigm considers the production and promotion of New Testament writings during the colonial formative time as not only imperative, but also that the colonial context itself is constitutive for the development and production of these New Testament writings. Equally imperative is the fact that the politics of biblical reading assume a significance that goes beyond just being the tools of a trade and the locations where a trade is operating.

Thus, as a critical reading enterprise, a postcolonial paradigm is geared at uncovering the marriage between ideas and power lying behind most of Euro-American writings, theories and education (Sugirtharajah 1998:16-17). Given its short history as a practice in the Euro-American academy, Moore-Gilbert (1998:6) argues that a postcolonial paradigm has had a major impact upon the current modes of cultural analysis. It inaugurates a new era of academic inquiry, which brings to the hermeneutical forefront the intermarriage of issues of race, nation, empire, gender, migration and ethnicity with cultural production. Fuery and Mansfield (2000:118) also argue that it analyzes the meaning of colonial and postcolonial history as it under-props language and socio-political life at its historically most enduring and constitutionally most fundamental way.

¹⁰ See Explanation of Terms

¹¹ See Explanation of Terms

It should also be said from the outset that a postcolonial paradigm makes use of a variety of already existing hermeneutical methods. However, a postcolonial paradigm has to do with a radical change of focus and purpose, which reserves particular attention for ideological and suspicious readings. It is usually fair to think of it as a movement of resistance. The name itself suggests that it defines itself against colonialism. Ahmad (2003:2) simply defines it as the emergence of a culture, literature, writings, discourse, attitudes, positions and ideologies, which deconstruct, expose, reject, and condemn colonialism entirely. Fuery and Mansfield (2000:118) see its impetus as towards the destabilization of the cultural place and authority of the ex-colonial powers and the promotion of diversity within the postcolonial cultures.

Punt (2003:60) sees its usefulness as twofold. The first one is its ability to articulate the desire of the colonized people concerning their sense(s) of identity and self-determination. The second one is the ability of its discourse to pose a counter-offensive against political, economic and cultural forms of colonialism, without losing sight of the crucial aspects of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. He contends that a postcolonial paradigm is about social formation and analysis as well as cultural production, which is an effort to rewrite history. It is a reflective reading, which permits a critical re-thinking of historical imbalances and cultural inequalities which colonialism erected.

2.4 POSTMODERN CONNECTION WITH POSTCOLONIAL PARADIGM

The present hermeneutical debate revolves around two critical categories of a postmodern paradigm in Euro-America and a postcolonial paradigm in non-Euro-America, although with some overlap. Thus, it is important to explore their connection. Implicit in these political categories is the issue of their status and value. William and Chrisman (1993:289) recognize the complex affinities between a postmodern paradigm and a postcolonial paradigm and contend that the two categories should never be collapsed nor posited as distinct. Sugirtharajah (1999:15) argues that both are products of discomfort over modernistic thinking with its excessive emphasis on reason and a spurious belief in objective truth. Evidently, William and Chrisman (1993:289) argue that a postmodern paradigm has made some features of a postcolonial paradigm visible or speakable for the colonizer. In turn, a postcolonial paradigm draws attention to the occluded politics and forgotten precursors of a postmodern paradigm. According to Sugirtharajah (1999:15), a postmodern paradigm does not adequately address the needs of a developing world.

Consequently, William and Chrisman (1993:28) contend that there is a double trend towards a complicit postcolonial paradigm: an increasing alliance with a postmodern paradigm at the level of theory, and an increasing predominance in political life. In my view, the main differences between these categories entail their context and object of analysis. The postmodern object of analysis is modernity, that is, the subject as defined by humanism with its essentialism and mistaken historical

verities, its unities and transcendental presence. However, the postcolonial object of analysis is colonialism, that is, the colonialist subject, the colonized as formed by the processes of colonialism.

Segovia (2000c: 68) is insistent that, though at present a postcolonial paradigm operates according to various philosophical, theoretical constellations and ideological agendas such as modern, poststructural and postmodern paradigms, it can still position itself intertextually as a dialogue interlocutor with other “subjugated discourses” such as gender studies, queer studies and race studies. It can position itself and others for the purpose of hermeneutical up-frontness, intellectual honesty and ethical responsibility and accountability.

2.5 SELECTED CONTOURS OF A POSTCOLONIAL PARADIGM

Though no consensus exists on a precise definition and conceptualization of a postcolonial paradigm, several broad contours of its operations may be mapped out, especially as a critical reading enterprise in biblical studies. The broad contours observed in a postcolonial paradigm include, *inter alia*, challenging the totalizing epistemology of Euro-American reading practices; demystifying the mystifiers of Euro-American reading; celebration of relativity and plurality; renouncing the master-writings of Euro-American reading; a different reading formation with respect to the bible; a transgressive epistemology; and a representative epistemology. According to Sugirtharajah (1998:17), it is both a reaction to colonial practices and an alternative way of seeing and restructuring the community. In the following pages, I will briefly describe some of these broad contours.

2.5.1 Challenging the Totalizing Epistemology

A postcolonial reading paradigm challenges the totalizing epistemology of Euro-American reading practices, exposing their co-option by the desire to dominate the other, thus, destabilizing their frames of meaning (Sugirtharajah 1998:15). As Adam (1995:10-11), then assistant professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, argues, a postcolonial reading suspects any reading that claims to account for everything, contending that it suppresses counter-examples or is applying warped criteria so that it can include recalcitrant cases. A postcolonial reading contends that either a colonial reading includes everything altogether or proceeds by excluding other possible members. It argues that perhaps the totality in question has excluded embarrassing counter-examples. Or perhaps unity has been imposed by rhetorical force on heterogeneous categories of facts, artefacts and impressions such as the case with the bible.

A postcolonial reading contends that people can specify the domains of their claims and can make arguments that rather have local relevance than a hypothetically universal relevance. As Adam (1995:11) further argues, in most instances an appeal to what is supposedly universal serves most

often as a stick with which to beat recalcitrant opponents. He questions whether people can know universal truths, or ascertain the limits of a unity, or plumb the depths of an individual and make the presumptuous tyrannical claim that ‘we know the truth about you.’ Consequently, a postcolonial paradigm contends that universal categories frequently serve as self-authenticating warrants for theoretical or ethical arguments. It latches onto such claims and suggests that these appeals to abstract universal entities are a mystification of more concrete, worldly reasons. Thus postcolonial critics accuse some of the Euro-American people of concealing mundane (economic and political) motives behind a smoke screen of universality of necessity. Non-Euro-American people no longer need totalities. This demystifying tendency is characteristic of postcolonial thinking.

2.5.2 Demystifying the Mystifiers

A postcolonial reading paradigm demystifies the mystifiers of a colonial reading. It is a counter-hegemonic discourse, which pays particular attention to the hidden and neglected voices as well as protesting and opposing voices in a writing (Sugirtharajah 1998:21). A postcolonial reading demystifies certain assumptions that claim to be natural and shows that they are in fact ideological projections. Demystifying provides one of the most familiar gestures in postcolonial discourse, namely the dramatic sweep with which the critic unveils the grubby interests and motives that drive even the most high-minded and apparently disinterested institutions. A postcolonial hermeneutic searches every closet of the colonial enterprise to discover the lurid secrets that are surely concealed there.

The postcolonial inquiries wield the flashlights and microscopes for searching colonial closets. A postcolonial demystification addresses the colonial mystifiers – science, reason and liberal democracy. A postcolonial reading directs itself against a colonial practice.

Consequently, Adam (1995:14) contends that the cardinal virtue of Euro-American philosophy – reason - does not exist in an atemporal transcendental zone. In fact, time, the problems that one is dealing with, and countless other variables change the attributes of rational discourse. Despite Euro-American attempts to uphold the importance of rational deliberation by setting reason over against tradition, postcolonial critics argue that the very nature of reason is always dependent on the ways particular traditions have interpreted reason itself. They argue that most Euro-American people cover the particularity of their intellectual position by treating reason as if it were a natural universal category, which it is not. Postcolonial demystifiers will turn the tables on many Euro-American critics and posit that this appeal to a naturalized, universalized conception of reason is nothing other than a power play and a “colonizing ideology.”

Thus, Adam (1995:15) argues that many Euro-American colonialists have falsely presupposed that the specific attributes of their intellectual tradition were immune from the sort of mystifying that

they had applied to every other pattern of thought. Postcolonial critics have applied the demystification to the mystifiers themselves. Their findings suggest that the intellectual traditions in which it stands inevitably constitutes reason. It is implicated in personal and political struggles and is inevitably subject to subjective biases in countless ways. Postcolonial critics argue that whenever people sit down to establish a single theoretical system that would have a privileged relation to the truth, they will contaminate the purity of their theory with decisions, which one can attribute to personal interests and unresolved psychological determinations.

2.5.3 Celebration of Relativity and Plurality

A postcolonial reading paradigm places the bible or any religious writing within the multi-scriptural contexts of diverse settings and thus engenders “an advocacy of a wider hermeneutical agenda to place the study of sacred texts...within the intersecting histories which constitutes them” (Sugirtharajah 1998:23). A postcolonial reading believes that different people have different ideas of what the world is like. Unlike a colonial reading, which assumes that the same rules and standards apply everywhere at any time, a postcolonial reading argues that each context/situation is distinct. There is no room for universal reason in a postcolonial reading, because all worldviews are equal and each one has its own logic (Chimeri 1998:39).

Aichele *et al.* (1995:48-50) define relativity as a perspective in which all concepts must be understood as relative to a conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life and society/culture. A postcolonial reading believes in an irreducible plurality of conceptual schemes. There is no substantive overarching framework by which people can rationally judge or univocally evaluate competing claims of alternative worldviews. There is no standard of rationality. Nevertheless, relativity is not synonymous with subjectivity for its essential claims are the following:

There can be no higher appeal than to a given conceptual scheme, language game, set of social practices or historical epoch. There is a non-reducible plurality of such schemes, paradigms and practices; there is no substantive overarching framework in which radically different and alternative schemes are commensurable...no universal standards that somehow stand outside of and above these competing alternatives. But the relativist does not necessarily claim that there is anything subjective about these schemes, paradigms and practices (Bernstein 1983:12).

Religious truth is seen as a special type of truth, but not an eternal and perfect representation of cosmic reality. Enforcing a single official reality construct is hard in postcolonial thinking. As Anderson (1990:19, 183) argues, polarization is a division between different types of beliefs rather than between different beliefs. What people believe defines the truth.

A postcolonial reading paradigm is characterized by an understanding of a plurality of possibilities or perspectives (Aichele *et al.* 1995:129-131). Postcolonial thinking celebrates relativity and plurality. In postcolonial thinking, relativity is accepted as the nature of the human condition and the assumption is made that there is no one centre, and thus nothing has been lost or given up. Moreover, in postcolonial thinking plurality represents alternative possibilities of experience and expression. Van Gelder (1991:415) asserts that,

Life is lived in the local context as the only reality that matters for the moment and the technologies available allow for a seemingly endless array of such local contexts to be experienced in other moments.

2.5.4 Renouncing the Master-narrative

A postcolonial reading paradigm renounces the idea of any master-narrative as in itself a construct. It does not depend on master-narratives and is uncomfortable with philosophical master-narratives. Built upon its celebration of relativity and plurality, postcolonial thinking contends that issues of absolute fact, truth, correctness, validity and clarity can never be posed or answered (Aichele *et al.* 1995:120-125). It objects to all-encompassing worldviews such as capitalism, secular humanism, modern science and the Christian religion and dismisses them as logocentric, transcendental, totalizing narratives that anticipate all problems and provide predetermined solutions (Aichele *et al.* 1995:122-123).

A postcolonial reading de-legitimizes a colonial reading that claims to be a master-narrative. It is at home with the absence of certainty and contented with ambiguity, uncertainty and an ultimately inexplicable life. As Smith (1989:12) argues, instead of attempting to justify faith by appeals to the objective world, postcolonial theology points out that, as such appeals indicate nothing about reality one way or the other, the way is wide open for free decision.

A postcolonial reading rejects narratives that claim to be scientific and objective, which function to legitimize colonial projects and assume justice and truth. These narratives:

Subordinate, organize and account for other narratives; so that every other local narrative, whether it be the narrative of a discovery in science or the narrative of an individual's growth and education, is given meaning by the way it echoes and confirms the grand narratives of the emancipation of humanity or the achievement of pure self-conscious spirit (Connor 1989:30).

A postcolonial reading renounces the idea of any master-narrative in philosophy, social and cultural theory. It contends that master-narratives, which claim for privileged universality in their ideas of science and humanism, are flawed. A postcolonial reading seeks to produce less showy modes of knowledge. Its posture is one of incredulity towards all statements which make out that things have to be done in one particular manner and that manner only (Chimeri 1998:41).

Adam (1995:16-17) argues that master-narratives are stories people tell about the nature and destiny of humankind. Consequently, Euro-American thought has relied on these narratives to supply the warrants for its own distinctive agenda. Nevertheless, Adam contends that these narratives can no longer sustain the importance with which they are loaded. They only serve as intellectual expedients that plaster over cracks in the projects of Euro-American colonialism.

As is further argued by Adam (1995:17-18), incredulity about colonial master-narrative chastises the bible's pretension to tell the story of everything from creation to the apocalypse. Postcolonial incredulity about master-narrative argues that there are sources galore here, as the stories of reading well illustrate. A postcolonial reading observes that there is no single clear master-narrative of the bible. The various components of the bible interweave and argue among themselves. A postcolonial reader is amazed at its internal contestation.

A postcolonial reading resolutely refuses to posit any one premise as the privileged and unassailable starting point for establishing claims to truth. Adam (1995:6) contends that whatever one's master-narrative, Euro-American philosophical tradition has assumed that one needs to have some 'indubitable', 'unshakeable' truth with which to back up one's theoretical claims.

Consequently, postcolonial critics argue that to judge a claim 'indubitable' one needs to know beforehand what kinds of claim one should doubt and what kinds one should not. The distinction between 'dubitable' and 'indubitable' master-narratives is evidently more fundamental than the proposed master-narrative. Moreover, what criteria enable the advocate of a master-narrative to know 'dubitable' from 'indubitable' master-narratives?

Consequently, Adam (1995:6) argues that master-narratives do not secure philosophical discourse because discourse itself is a human construct and the nature of humankind complicates the project of putting together a master-narrative. For instance, a master-narrative would have to provide an account of perception that allows for such phenomena as optical illusions, or false memories, and at the same time explain how one could distinguish between the real, true, perceived reality from the supposedly unreal, false reality, which an optical illusion represents. The precise importance of a master-narrative is that one cannot doubt it. If one assembles one's master-narrative from data that one collects with faculties whose workings one must always question, how sturdy can a master-narrative be?

Adam (1995:7) further contends that people communicate their philosophical master-narratives with words and symbols, which are in every case ambiguous. The capacity to discover unintended multiple meanings is a general condition of human communication. Humankind's capacity to communicate about what is or is not master-narrative is defined by humankind's capacity to communicate about anything. Because philosophical master-narratives are supposed to make our

conclusions obviously unquestionable, an ambiguous master-narrative is as bad as no master-narrative at all, for at least when one has no master-narrative, one does not suffer from a false sense of security. The problem is not that our perceptions or our communications deviate from some putative standard of reality, but that the inherent ambiguity of human perception and communication renders those unfit elements for anything as rigid as a master-narrative. It is like building one's master-narrative of sand.

Master-narratives simply are not necessary since they do not do the work one asks of them. They are not reality depicted, or problem solving. They are not life-giving, nor life-affirming. People should get used to the idea that our arguments, claims, convictions, truths, and rules do not depend on having an absolute philosophical/theological master-narrative.

2.5.5 Different Reading Formation with Respect to the bible

Sugirtharajah (1998:16-17) contends that a postcolonial paradigm requires a different reading position, aimed at exposing the marriage between ideas and power, language and power, and knowledge and power, and how these marriages prop up most Euro-American hegemonic readings, narratives, theories and learning. It challenges the contexts, contours and normal procedures of biblical scholarship, scrutinizes, and exposes colonial domination and power as they are embedded in some of the biblical writings and in their readings and searches for alternative hermeneutics. It is a discursive resistance to colonial reading ideologies and attitudes and their continual reincarnations in today's politics, economics, history, theology and biblical scholarship.

Punt (2003:67) describes a postcolonial reading of ancient texts as done in relation to their socio-cultural context and then placed within a broader context of an "omnipresent, inescapable and overwhelming socio-political reality...of Empire," which assumed various postures during the narrative's time: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Hellenistic Greek and Rome. Consequently, the present readings of these ancient texts are equally positioned in the midst of the overpowering and relentless presence of Euro-American colonial rules. Moreover, the focus on real readers and producers of these texts, both inside and outside colonial Euro-American tradition, occurs within a developing postcolonial world and a developed neo-colonial Euro-America.

Segovia (1998:54) argues that in all these dimensions questions of culture, ideology and power are central for a postcolonial reader and "postcolonial studies can function...as an excellent model for cultural studies in the discipline." He developed two constructive proposals, which relate a postcolonial paradigm to other hermeneutical frameworks. The first one is the hermeneutical model of "otherness and engagement," which views biblical texts, readings of biblical texts, and their readers as categories to be acknowledged, respected and engaged rather than bypassed, overwhelmed or manipulated (Segovia 1995a). The second one is the "intercultural reading" that

views biblical texts, readings of biblical texts, and their readers as literary/aesthetic, rhetorical/strategic and ideological/political products, which have to be analyzed and critiqued in dialogue (Segovia 1995b). He defines intercultural reading as a strategy of “reading across,” in an effort to break with the scientific reading strategies’ characteristic competitiveness, hierarchy, empiricism and objectivism (Segovia 2000c).

A postcolonial reading points out to the broader scene of cultural production in and around the bible, implicating it. Segovia (2000a:136-140) contends that a postcolonial reading investigates the “material base or social formation of the bible,” but does not negate or relativize the value of historical, literary and socio-cultural investigations of the bible.

Consequently, Adam (1995:18-19) argues that one’s reading depends on one’s commitments to various social institutions, on the readings of one’s closest peers and colleagues, and on the experiences to which one has been exposed in life. A postcolonial reading would point out to countless mediations, which complicates the colonial picture of a single reader encountering an autonomous text. A postcolonial picture would show dozens of colleagues looking over the reader’s shoulder, with employers and various other institutional officials alternately dangling money and picking the reader’s pocket. In this way the text would not be an autonomous object of contemplation, but would be shown with representatives of sundry reading interests, some of whom are suggesting particular passages, others obliterating passages, others adding words here and there, and still others thrusting filters between the readers and the text.

As is further argued by Adam (1995:19), postcolonial thinking contends that the forces complicating any reading of text are both social and institutional. It emphasizes the extent to which one’s relation with other people shape one’s reading and the extent to which various conflicting economic and social constraints compete for the reader’s allegiance. This perspective breaks down the putative totalities of text and reader. Here a postcolonial reader sees a crowd of readers encounter several different versions of the text, which shimmer and shift, chameleon-like, into different further texts. Postcolonial critics argue over the problem of figuring out what the text of the bible is. Is it the Hebrew canon? Is it the Septuagint, together with the New Testament? Which translation? Moreover, what about such problematic text as the ending of Mark’s narrative or the story of the woman found in adultery? These are most obvious examples of text instability.

2.5.6 Transgressive Epistemology

As is concluded by Adam (1995:22), a postcolonial paradigm is wilfully transgressive. It defies the boundaries that restrict colonial discourses to carefully delimited regions of knowledge. A postcolonial reader ignores the boundaries that dictate what one may say at which academic convention, or in which sort of reading. While a colonial reading demands the expertise of anyone

who speaks of a given discourse, a postcolonial reading observes that a large part of the process of becoming an expert involves learning certain things that one may not say. A postcolonial transgressor will not respect any disciplinary measure, which would hold her/him accountable to the laws of that particular field of knowledge or communication. A postcolonial reader recognizes that the rules of reading are provisional guides rather than eternal commandments. They are not master-narratives, or natural laws, but the habits and styles that scholars and teachers have passed down in the craft of reading.

The evolvement of a postcolonial paradigm is accompanied by the demise of epistemologically centred philosophy. A postcolonial paradigm refuses to make distinctions and divisions between body and soul, the physical and the mental, reason and the irrational, the intellectual and the sensual, the self and the other, nature and culture, reality and utopia, reader and text. It attributes renewed relevance to the traditional and the sacred. All that a colonial (modern) reading has set aside, including emotions, feelings, intuition, reflection, speculation, personal experience, custom, metaphysics, tradition, cosmology, magic, myth, religious sentiment and mystical experience, take on renewed importance in a postcolonial paradigm (Chimeri 1998:45).

A postcolonial paradigm is at home with continuity between personal and cosmic wholeness. It affirms the ontological continuity between the knowing human subject and the objective world, which is known by the human subject. Colonial objective knowledge is incomplete. It should be complemented with some form of participatory knowledge, with effective or aesthetic knowledge. A postcolonial reading paradigm in the social sciences is a response to the perceived insufficiencies of a colonial reading paradigm. Consequently, there is a growing unwillingness to claim that a colonial reading is either the best or the only way of knowing (Sugirtharajah 1998).

A postcolonial paradigm is also reconstructive. It evolves from the desire to reconstruct what colonialism had destroyed. It is holistic. It inter-mingles the aesthetic, the epistemic and the socio-cultural senses. While a colonial reading paradigm considers certain parts greater than the whole, a postcolonial reading paradigm considers the whole greater than the sum of the parts. In contrast to a colonial reading paradigm, a postcolonial paradigm does not view space as a hierarchical pyramid, nor as a collection of Newtonian particles. Rather the parts exist in holistic communion with one another. Holland (1989:19-20) asserts that:

Each part has distinct dignity, while each cooperate creatively for the whole. Above all, the creativity is in the communion, so that the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts, both structurally and historically.

A postcolonial paradigm moves beyond epistemology into ethics and advocates programmes for cultural justice, personal transformation, solving the ecological problem, defusing the nuclear threat

and establishing world peace and justice. It provides support for ecology, peace, justice, feminist and other emancipatory movements (Njoroge 2001).

2.5.7 Representative Epistemology

A postcolonial paradigm advocates for an equal representation by recognizing and assigning the once-colonized peoples their status in the chronicles of history, thereby affirming their agency in the present. It encourages and welcomes contributions from marginalized groups that have been neglected. The centre is being challenged by the rise to confidence and prominence of those formerly colonized peoples. Those once colonized and once assigned to the margins appear at the centre as confident and indispensable partners in dialogue. Consequently, they collaborate with other empowered voices in the developed Euro-American world and ask for their narratives to be listened to and to be heard, thereby claiming to take their rightful places as historical subjects. Gyan Prakash (as quoted by Sugirtharajah 1999:16) beautifully expresses this new situation:

The third world, far from being confined to its assigned space, has penetrated the inner sanctum of the first world in the process of being 'third worlded,' arousing, inciting, and affiliating with the subordinated others in the first world. It has reached across boundaries and barriers to connect with the minority voices in the first world: socialists, radicals, feminists, and minorities.

Consequently, Sugirtharajah (1999:16) argues that the breaking down of earlier prohibitive barriers necessitates the acknowledgement of those previously on the periphery and margins in the centre. The arrival at the centre of those once assigned to the margins means that it is no longer business as usual. The prohibitive barriers are crossed, thus creating an engagement, which will release those once colonized from the marginal status.

Moreover, a postcolonial paradigm highlights the acquisition of, and propagates a new identity, realizing the importance of hybridity, where identity is viewed as hyphenated, fractured, multiple and multiplying (Sugirtharajah 1999:16), "a complex web of cultural negotiation and interaction, forged by imaginatively redeploing the local and imported elements" (Said 1993:407).

2.6 THE LIMITATION OF A POSTCOLONIAL PHENOMENON

Nevertheless, there are without any doubt numerous points of detail in a postcolonial paradigm that needs to be refined or modified. No human work is perfect and the achievement of even the greatest theologian is open to criticism at certain points. A postcolonial paradigm is not an answer to all the questions. Its negative side could be articulated as well.

Firstly, the 'multiplication of margins' accompanying the 'coming to voice' of increasing numbers and kinds of national, linguistic, religious or ethnic groups, communities or subcultures in the modern era could pose a danger to a postcolonial paradigm of exploding as an analytic construct

with any real cutting edge (Moore-Gilbert 1998:11). Although the ‘multiplicity of the margins’ could attest to the increasing success of the manifold struggles against neo-colonialism which itself takes many forms, it could also confuse many people as to the legitimacy of seeing certain regions, periods, socio-political formations and cultural practices as genuinely ‘postcolonial.’

Secondly, there is the question of whether the object of a postcolonial analysis as a reading practice should be postcolonial culture alone or to what extent it is legitimate to focus on the culture of the colonizer (Moore-Gilbert 1998:12). In my view, just as a feminist reading is not confined to the analysis of women’s or feminist texts or to geographical regions or socio-cultural formations in which feminism is an influence, or to the period since the technical political emancipation of women in the area under discussion, so a postcolonial reading can still be seen as a more or less distinct set of reading practices. Confining it to postcolonial culture alone is unnecessarily restrictive and limiting.

Thirdly, a postcolonial paradigm is not yet securely established or as readily identifiable as some of the older and prestigious contemporary modes of cultural analysis such as feminist reading, psychoanalytic reading or post-structural reading, no matter how contested these may continue to be. A postcolonial paradigm has by no means been fully recognized as an important or even distinct mode of cultural analysis within the Euro-American academy (Moore-Gilbert 1998:13). Thus, it is marginalized in the academic circles.

Lastly, a postcolonial paradigm could be an essentially complicit mode of political (dis) engagement from the coercive realities of colonial history and the current neo-colonial era (Moore-Gilbert 1998:18). A postcolonial paradigm is viewed by others as not politically radical or even ‘correct’ but as deeply conservative in its ideas and effects (cf. Moore-Gilbert 1998:18). Some even went as far as to suggest that postcolonial paradigm is simply one more medium through which the authority of Euro-America over the formerly colonized parts of the world is currently being reinscribed within a neo-colonial ‘new world order.’ It is, indeed, best understood, as a new expression of Euro-America’s historical will to power over the rest of the world (Moore-Gilbert 1998:18).

However, the limitations outlined above by no means stand in the way of its usefulness. This should not blind Mbire and other non-Euro-American scholars to the very great achievement it presents. A great number of Euro-American tools of analysis, namely criteria of judgement between good and bad, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical and criteria for envisioning just futures have been challenged radically.

It is also important to note that postcolonial societies, cultural formations and movements emerge at different times, in different forms and in different places around the world. Moore-Gilbert

(1998:203) argues that since colonialism has taken many forms and has many histories, and is accompanied by a plethora of at times internally and mutually contradictory discourses, decolonization has been similarly multiform and complex. Its discourses may thus at times be incommensurable with each other – as well as complementary. On the debate over what is or is not, an appropriate or ‘proper’ mode of analysis of colonial history of India, Ranajit Guha had to say: “There is no one way of investigating this problematic. Let a hundred flowers blossom and we don’t mind even the weeds” (as referred to by Moore-Gilbert 1998:203).

2.7 SUMMARY

A postcolonial paradigm represents a radical shift from colonialism, not in complete abandonment of such discourse but in search of other discourses heretofore bypassed and ignored. The positive contributions of the colonial era to theological reflection are accepted and should not be dismissed as of any consequence. A postcolonial paradigm is mainly concerned with the negative aspects of the colonial era, which continues to be very influential even today. This is the main goal of this study. The time of a discourse controlled by one centre is over. Our situation calls for a discourse with many centres.

This paradigm shift challenges non-Euro-American peoples to evaluate the relevance and impact of the colonial and postcolonial paradigms for their contexts. The story of the Christian religion is filled with instances of an ideological and manipulative use of the bible, which should be rejected (cf. Ariarajah 1985:3-18).

I will read the concepts of the superior sacrifice in the letter to the Hebrews and the subsequent Christian biblical claims to absolute epistemological and ontological superiority in this context. Now I turn to the colonial reading of the concepts of sacrifice in the letter to the Hebrews in the following chapter, before I propose a postcolonial reading in Chapter Four for contrasting the twin readings.

CHAPTER THREE

READING SACRIFICIAL CONCEPTS IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS FROM A COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The letter to the Hebrews is an enigmatic piece of writing in the New Testament. It is unique in its style and content and this puts it in a class of its own. Since the time it was written, it has generated a stream of excellent writing intent on substantiating the superiority of Jesus and the Christian religion in comparison with non-Christian religions and their founders. In this endeavour, a host of witnesses was daring enough to descend into the dark cave of the letter to the Hebrews and they discovered excellent riches (see Westcott 1892; Albert Vanhoye 1962; Bruce 1962-63, 1964; Cosby 1988; Graham Hughes 1979; Harold Attridge 1989; Barnabas Lindars 1989; William L. Lane 1985, 1991; David A. Desilva 2000; Craig R. Koester 2001 and various others who have specialized in studying this piece of writing).

While these works are foundational to this reflection on the letter to the Hebrews, there remains more to be discovered about this writing, especially when it is examined from a postcolonial perspective. Those conversant with the current state of critical scholarship know the shifting and fickle phases, often described through historical criticism, literary criticism and cultural criticism, or author-centred, text-centred and reader-centred approaches (Segovia 2000a). These phases described it from a Euro-American perspective. Those who are postcolonial subjects inhabiting colonial spaces constructed about them, for them and against them (Dube 1998:118) would want to present critical scholarship as falling only into two phases, namely colonial and postcolonial (Sugirtharajah 1998:15).

A colonial reading is informed by theories concerning the innate superiority of Euro-American culture, the Euro-American male as the subject, and the non-Euro-Americans as “the other” needing to be controlled and subjugated. It is grounded on the desire for domination (Sugirtharajah 1998:15). It carries with it the imprint and nuances of colonialists who seek to propagate the belief that their way is the natural and only accepted way. It is a colonial reading’s particular premise that its ethos is grounded in a naively accepted universal category. Nevertheless, it is, as sensible people are well aware, nothing of the sort. Sugirtharajah (1998:15) argues that the replacement of indigenous reading practices; negative representations of the non-Euro-Americans and the employment of exegetical strategies and hermeneutic discourses were the means whereby a legitimized colonial control reinforced its intentions.

A postcolonial reading is a movement of resistance. Sugirtharajah (1998:93) defines it as an active confrontation with the dominant system of colonial thought, its lopsidedness and inadequacies and underlines its unsuitability for colonized people. A postcolonial reading is a process of cultural and discursive emancipation from all dominant structures whether they are political, linguistic or ideological.

The current conversation about the letter to the Hebrews could be enriched as postcolonial methodological approaches are brought to bear on this text. It is therefore important to not only disagree with a postcolonial reading of the letter to the Hebrews and articulate that disagreement, but to be prepared to learn from it point by point. That which has been learnt in this way may then be integrated into a different overall hypothesis. Postcolonial insights could enhance and challenge colonial readings of the letter to the Hebrews and call for a new integration with the findings of established approaches. It is hoped that the result will be a more richly textured multidimensional reading of this text for a liberating interdependence.

To understand a postcolonial reading of the letter to the Hebrews in the subsequent chapters, attention is given in this chapter to a colonial reading of it. Some Euro-American biblical theoreticians have employed an array of methodological approaches, which postcolonial critics call “colonial readings” (e.g. historical criticism, literary criticism and cultural criticism, or author-centred, text-centred and reader-centred approaches). The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate colonial reading performance in order to review it.

This chapter is divided into nine parts. The first section provides some introductory remarks. This will be followed by a discussion of the unresolved compositional issues of the letter to the Hebrews in the second section. The third section examines the rhetorical genre of this writing. This will be followed by a discussion of some revealing remarks on the text in the fourth section, while the fifth section examines the importance of the concept of sacrifice in the letter to the Hebrews. A colonial reading of Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 follows this in the sixth section. The seventh section provides an explanation for the sacrificial emphasis, while an evaluation of the writer’s use of sacrificial concepts follows in the eighth section. The ninth section is a synoptic summary of the chapter.

3.2 UNRESOLVED PUZZLES OF HEBREWS

3.2.1 The Exigency¹²

What could have led to the composition of the letter to the Hebrews? The text itself is silent about this. As a result, scholars have engaged in mirror reading of the evidence in the writing itself in an

¹² See Explanation of Terms

effort to resolve this puzzle. Graham Hughes (1979:28), professor of biblical studies at United Theological College in Sydney, thinks that there was growing hostility against the readers of the letter to the Hebrews and an impending persecution. Robert Jewett (1981:5), on other hand, sees heretical teachings as the exigency that led to the composition of the text. William L. Lane (1985:22-25), professor of Religious Studies at Seattle Pacific University, and the late Anglican brother of the Society of Saint Francis, Barnabas Lindars (1989:390-395), see an inclination to return to the synagogue as a lively possibility. Harold Attridge (1989:3), an active Roman Catholic layman and professor of New Testament at Yale University, sees external pressure and a waning commitment to the congregations' confessed faith as the exigency. T. Schmidt (1992:167) sees moral lethargy as the exigency. David A. DeSilva (2000:18-19), professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary, Ohio, thinks that the exigency was neither impending persecution nor heretical subversion, but rather commitment caused by living without honour in the society.

In my view, DeSilva and Attridge's theories are not very far away from each other and from that of Hughes, though DeSilva (2000:18-19) has failed to see that the loss of honour only makes sense within the context of the argumentation of the writing itself. His theory is as good as other theories, but it will not solve the puzzle. Jewett and Schmidt's theories do not adequately account for the author's reliance on argumentation from the Hebrew Scriptures and the comparison of Jesus with Jewish cultural figures of note.

Lane and Lindars' theories appear to be more likely explanations on three grounds. The first one entails that communication is possible only where a common conceptuality and a common language are presupposed. The second concerns the avoidance of marketing Judaism to universal standards. Judaism was not a universal religion, but one of the various cults on the Greco-Roman world's religious market (Fiorenza 1976:3). The picture that DeSilva's theory (2000:18-19) paints is that Judaism was a universal religion and that everyone in the Greco-Roman world was at home with the complex Jewish religious rituals, which is doubtful. The third one entails the adequate accounting for the author's reliance on argumentation from the Hebrew Scriptures and the comparison of Jesus to angels, Moses and the Levitical priestly mediation. In my view, the other theories fail to adequately account for the author's interest in establishing the superiority of Jesus' priestly mediation over the Levitical priestly mediation.

DeSilva's further argument (2000:19) that violent persecution or returning to the synagogue could not counteract apostasy is not convincing. Why should persecution or returning to the synagogue fail to lead to apostasy? It is quite possible that, because of the unfulfilled promises of the Christian religion, some of the believers began to feel the need for their Jewish society's affirmation and

approval, which could satisfy only if they returned to Judaism. To many believers renouncing the Christian faith and returning to the synagogue was increasingly becoming a better option.

3.2.2 The Author's Identity

One of the various unresolved puzzles of the letter to the Hebrews have to do with the identity of the author. Since the writing is completely anonymous, scholars have once more engaged in varying degrees of guesswork in suggesting an answer. Paul was the first to be guessed as its author. Nevertheless, internal evidence is against Pauline authorship on two grounds. The first one concerns the style and syntax of the letter's Greek, which is more polished than the Greek found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus. The second reason has to do with the content of the letter to the Hebrews, which is different from the Pauline theology. DeSilva (2000:23) takes the Pauline authorship as having been championed by Jerome and Augustine for getting the letter recognised as canonical. However, as DeSilva (2000:24) further notes, the criterion of apostolicity advocated for a link with an apostolic witness not for actual authorship by the apostle. As such, the letter to the Hebrews meets that criterion if the author happens to be any apostle's associate(s).

A second guess by Tertullian was Barnabas, a Levite and Paul's co-worker (Acts 4:36). Though this could be a good guess, since the author exhibits knowledge of the Levitical system, there is nothing concrete to substantiate him as the author of the letter to the Hebrews. It just remains a good guess.

A third and popular guess has been Apollos, "an eloquent man" (Acts 18: 24, 28), well versed in the Old Testament and capable of disputing with Jews and an associate of Paul's. Though this is also a good guess, since the author exhibits knowledge of classical rhetoric and a good command of the LXX, there is nothing concrete to indicate that he is the author of this writing.

Other guesses have been Prisca, Silas, Luke – all Paul's associates – and Clement of Rome. As Attridge (1989:1-5) and Long (1997:1), professor of Preaching and Worship at Princeton Theological Seminary, point out, the arguments are weak for any candidate suggested based on a guess.

My guess, though not easily substantiated as well, is to see the letter to the Hebrews as a product of a collective effort. I believe that several authors could have taken responsibility for the writing. If that is the case, then the interpretive efforts of this text suggest the possibilities of a corporate exegetical enterprise. This could also explain why the writing is anonymous.

Although one cannot know everything one wishes to know about the author of the letter to the Hebrews, there is no lack of a personality. One can deduce that this author had a good command of the LXX, classical rhetoric and the Greek language (the Greek of the letter to the Hebrews is considered by many to be the best in the New Testament). The basic thought pattern of the author is

Jewish, though. Long (1997:3) argues that the author gives evidence of being a well-educated Jewish Christian with a broad training in Hellenistic thought.

There are other bits and pieces of information about the author. The author knows Timothy (13:23). If this Timothy is the Pauline one, then the author of the letter to the Hebrews was among the Pauline circle of missionary activity. The author also knows the congregation and is probably a member of this congregation, since s/he wishes to return soon (13:19, 23). Long (1997:3) further argues that the author might have been one of the travelling preachers who moved around, engaging in missionary activity.

3.2.3 Date, Location and Readers' Identity

One of the various unresolved puzzles of the letter to the Hebrews concerns the date of composition and the location of the author and readers. As usual the writing itself lacks internal evidence. The best one can do in these cases is to guess at the answers to these puzzles.

3.2.3.1 Date

The latest possible date of composition is usually placed before 96 CE, because Clement of Rome quoted the letter to the Hebrews in one of his letters written some time near this date. Scholars are divided into two camps on this issue of the date. The first camp favours a pre-70 CE date, while the second camp favours a post-70 CE date. Those who favour a pre-70 CE date claim as their basis the author's failure to mention the demise of the Jerusalem temple. This camp includes Lane (1991: lxii-lxvi), who narrows down the range to somewhere between 49 CE-64 CE and DeSilva (2000:21), who feels that the letter to the Hebrews reads more naturally in a pre-70 CE setting.

Those who favour a post-70 CE date claim as their basis the elaborate Christology of the letter to the Hebrews, which could not have been developed overnight and which would more likely reflect the theological activity of the second or third generation of Christians. With a few other pieces of evidence these scholars have guessed 60 CE-100 CE as the possible range during which the letter to the Hebrews was composed. This camp includes Attridge (1989:10), who refuses to narrow the range down from 60 CE-100 CE, and Long (1997:1).

Although arguments from silence are most tenuous, I would disagree with those who favour a pre-70 CE date solely because of the author's silence concerning the demise of the Jerusalem temple. This seems not to substantiate anything. The argument for a post-70 CE date seems more convincing.

3.2.3.2 Location

The geographical location of the author and readers is even more problematic. Were they in Jerusalem or Rome or Colossae? The supposed geographical reference to Italy in Hebrews 13:24, which Lane (1991:lxiii) and others take to be an indication that the author was sending greetings back to Rome, is ambiguous at best. Long (1997:1) thinks that even the one who attached a title “To the Hebrews” was probably just speculating about its original readers and that his/her guess is no better than ours.

3.2.3.3 Readers’ Identity.

The last problematic issue is the identity of the readers. Were they Jews or Gentiles or a mixture? In light of Lane and Lindars’ theories on the exigency of the letter to the Hebrews discussed above, readers of Jewish origin are favoured, though mixed with Gentile converts. Otherwise, the argumentation from the Hebrew Scriptures, the use of rabbinical exegetical methods and references to complex Jewish rituals would be unintelligible to those who did not share a common conceptuality and a common language (see pp.30-31).

3.3 THE TRIPARTITE RHETORICAL GENRE

J. Dunnill (1992:122), head of Biblical and Theological Studies at the Anglican Institute of Theology in Australia, argues that the central hermeneutic problem in the letter to the Hebrews is a lack of identifying an adequate conceptual framework to which to relate the author’s theology presented in symbols. The importance of identifying the genre of the letter to the Hebrews has to do with the attempt to discern the fundamental issues addressed and the author’s main goal for the readers. In this way the intention the author hopes to realize is revealed. This then provides a focal point for the exposition of the entire writing. One can always refer back to find how each section contributes to the master strategy of moving readers toward the desired goal.

Consequently, the unresolved puzzle is to determine whether the letter to the Hebrews is rhetorically deliberative, forensic (judicial) or epideictic in nature (Lane 1991:lxxvii). DeSilva (2000:40-58) quotes Aristotle arguing that these three genres arose out of the practical needs of Greek institutions such as the council chamber, law court and public forum, respectively.

3.3.1 Council Chamber: deliberative rhetoric

According to Aristotle (as quoted to by DeSilva 2000:48), the first type of genre was deliberative rhetoric, which means that members of the council chamber determine what course of action the city could take to meet a particular need. Of course, there will be a variety of courses to choose from and members would speak up in favour of one or another, taking into accounts the advantages and disadvantages as they compare it with other available courses. The council chamber seems to

have been the locus of a deliberative rhetoric that seeks to promote or discourage a certain course of action. The members advocating a particular course would seek to demonstrate why it was just and right, expedient, feasible and honourable. They would substantiate why the course they favoured would be nobler, more just, or more expedient than others would. The opposing courses would be used to dissuade the council chamber from taking a particular course of action.

Consequently, Aristotle (as quoted by DeSilva 2000:48) defines deliberative rhetoric as a kind of speech in which a choice between two or several courses of action is considered. The focal point of deliberative rhetoric is the consequences that follow each course of action.

3.3.2 Law Court: forensic or judicial rhetoric

A second type of genre, according to Aristotle (quoted by DeSilva 2000:52), was forensic or judicial rhetoric, which concerns the need to assess the guilt or innocence of the people accused of wrongdoing in a law court. This seems to have been the locus of forensic rhetoric as orators (a plaintiff and a defendant) tried to establish blame or innocence before the jurors regarding some action that had occurred. In this endeavour, oaths, witnesses, material proofs, and probabilities were used in the reconstruction of the past event in order to assign guilt or innocence.

3.3.3 Public Forum: epideictic (or funeral) rhetoric

A third type of speech was epideictic (or funeral) rhetoric, which, according to Aristotle (quoted by DeSilva 2000:53), entails the need to commemorate the life or lives of the honoured dead in the public forum. The dead person's virtues and achievements were the focus of this rhetoric. Thus, the locus of epideictic (or funeral) rhetoric was the public forum in order to praise the virtuous and censure the vicious, and thus remind the assembled people of those values that sustain their culture and society. This has the effect of arousing a desire to cultivate the same honour in the listeners. An epideictic (or funeral) oration would include the facts of the dead person's life, as well as the dead person's physical and moral excellencies. Consequently, Aristotle (quoted by DeSilva 2000:53) defines epideictic rhetoric as a kind of speech that:

praises notable aspects of the subject's life (nobility of birth, illustrious ancestors, education, fame, offices, wealth, and death), the person's physical excellencies (strength, beauty, health), and his or her moral qualities (virtues like courage, prudence, justice, temperance, nobility and magnanimity), especially as these were manifested in actions that were beneficial to others and were performed in timely manner, at great cost to oneself, efficiently, alone, and the like.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews calls her/his writing "a word of exhortation" (13:22), which Attridge (1989:14) sees as an indication of its epideictic nature, a homily "celebrating the significance of Christ and inculcating values that his followers ought to share." DeSilva (2000:47) concurs with Attridge and thinks that though the epithet *τὸ ὑμῶν παρακλητικὸν*

(13:22) could suggest deliberative aspects; epideictic rhetoric entails a strong element of inculcating values, virtues and commitment to a certain way of life.

Lindars (1989:382-406) and T.E.Schmidt (1992:169) see the letter to the Hebrews as deliberative rhetoric in which the prominence given to exhortation suggests the author's concern to urge the readers to take a certain course of action. Lane (1991:xciv-c) points out segments of sustained argumentation aimed at leading readers to heed the texts' imperatives and cohortatives.

The problem of the genre of the letter to the Hebrews, as DeSilva (2000:47-48) points out, derives from the almost equally balanced sections of deliberative and epideictic rhetoric (exposition and exhortation). The first one moves within the parameters of comparison. Thus, the letter to the Hebrews is epideictic (or funeral) rhetoric in praise of Jesus' singular achievement, punctuated by deliberative rhetoric connected by inferential particles $\delta\iota\alpha$ and $\omicron\upsilon\nu$ to the epideictic sections that precede them. Each epideictic reference serves to set up the next deliberative implication.

Thus, DeSilva (2000:52) concludes that the letter to the Hebrews uses both epideictic rhetoric and deliberative rhetoric. The text cultivates a sense of deliberative rhetoric by referring, very often, to two alternative courses of action. It emphasizes strongly the positive results of one course of action. The author intends to encourage commitment to the Christian faith as the virtuous, safe, noble and expedient course, and turning back to their former beliefs [apostasy] as an unjust, cowardly, disgraceful, dangerous and inexpedient course of action. In so doing, the author gives much space and emphasis to deliberative rhetoric. Hence, the writing is deliberative in its exposition of two alternative courses of action and in its projections of the results of each course of action.

Nevertheless, the writing also uses epideictic rhetoric in its exposition of Jesus' achievements and person. The comparison of Jesus' priestly mediation with the Levitical high priestly mediation serves as an extended development of the topic of amplification, magnifying the value of access to the cosmic reality which had never been available before, but which had now been made possible by Jesus (DeSilva 2000:52). Consequently, the author motivates the readers to preserve the incomparable value of Jesus' gift of access to the ultimate reality (10:18-25) and heightens the danger of spurning such a precious advantage (10:26-31; 12:16-17).

When one further compares the letter to the Hebrews to other writings of its day, it becomes evident that it is not a letter at all. While there are some letter-like exposés at the close (13:22-25), the main body of the letter to the Hebrews exhibits all the evidence of an early Christian sermon (13:22), a sermon preached possibly in numerous first-century Christian congregations. According to Long (1997:2) and DeSilva (2000:58), the writing's alternation between epideictic and deliberative rhetoric (exhortation and exposition) reflects the macrostructure of rabbinical sermons. Thus, the

letter to the Hebrews is an instance of a sermon that is rabbinical in design, Christian in content, and informed by classical Greco-Roman rhetorical practices.

3.4 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

The experience of the readers of the letter to the Hebrews to which the author responded was one of marginalization, humiliation and rejection caused by the readers' commitment to an alternate belief system. The author envisioned two opposing options at their disposal. The first one entails the possibility of their continued commitment to the Christian faith and hope. The second one concerns the possibility of reverting to their former faith. The writing is designed to heighten the advantages and positive results that accompany and follow those who would choose the first option and the disadvantages and negative results that follow those who would choose the second option.

DeSilva (2000:58-71) lists five components of the author's rhetorical strategy to achieve this intended goal. The first one entails "repositioning the deliberations," where the author reorients those wavering readers to their Christian commitment. A second one concerns "responding to the Divine Benefactor," where the author uses the social code of reciprocity (patron-client mutual expectation and obligation) to move the readers to continue their loyalty to Jesus. A third one entails "insulating the community from societal pressure," where the author turns the experiences of disgrace into tokens of honour and promises of greater rewards. A fourth one concerns "nurturing a supportive community," where the author tries to strengthen the mutual interaction and reinforcement within the congregation by encouraging frequent and more meaningful encounters between the readers. A fifth one entails the "ritual journey of priest and people," where the author uses ritual language to reinforce and urge the readers to soldier on.

This chapter does not intend to examine all five components of the author's rhetorical strategy comprehensively. Rather, it intends to emphasize only the fifth component, particularly as expressed in Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and Hebrews 13:15-16.

3.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Although the sacrificial character of Jesus' death is alluded to throughout the entire New Testament, it is nowhere developed so thoroughly as in the letter to the Hebrews. Daly (1978:208) argues that in all the New Testament, only the author of the letter to the Hebrews attempts to understand the significance of the event by coming to terms with the Jewish sacrificial religion that preceded it. While other New Testament authors show these elements in a fragmentary way (e.g. John), the author of the letter to the Hebrews attempts a systematic reading of Christian salvation as a liturgical fulfilment of Israel's old covenant-sacrificial cultus. Goins (1990:1) argues that, while

other phenomena from the thought-world of the Jewish cultus are also prominent in the letter to the Hebrews, the significance of sacrifice is attested throughout the entire writing.

For instance, in the christological exordium, which opens the letter to the Hebrews (1:1-4), the Son is referred to as the one who sat down at the right hand of the cosmic reality “after he had made purification for sins” (1:3). Wilfrid Stott (1963:63) points out that the act of making purification for sins recalls Jesus’ sacrificial death as understood within the conceptual framework of the Day of Atonement. Lindars (1989:387,391) argues that this reference to purification is a rhetorical device, which allows the author to hint at the real issue of this writing without immediately alienating the readers from an overly aggressive and didactic attitude. Lindars (1989:394) further believes that the author’s primary concern is to convince the readers that the Christian religion provides the only sufficient means for dealing with the consciousness of sin. What is alluded to in 1:3 is then developed fully in 8:1-10:18.

Although the prevalence of sacrificial language in these chapters has long been recognized, some scholars have sought to diffuse its impact, with its reputedly primitive religious orientation (cf. Hughes 1977:2-3). That such a procedure is no longer considered tenable is due, among others, to the work of Albert Vanhoye, the French Jesuit. In his reading of the letter to the Hebrews, Vanhoye (1962:37, 49-52) concluded that this writing is structured around the use of six literary devices or indices, which included announcement of the subject, hook words, alternation of genre (exposition or *paranaesis*), characteristic terms, inclusions and concentric symmetry or *chiasmus*. A *chiasmus* is an inversion in the second phrase of order following the first (crosswise arrangement).

The fulcrum of the letter to the Hebrews’ *chiastic* structure is chapters eight and nine, which, as noted by Vanhoye (1962:240) and Goins (1990:2-3), are dominated by the sacrificial death of Jesus. The degree to which the entire writing is dependent upon the logic of sacrifice becomes evident. It is evident that this author found the Old Testament cultus with its sacrificial emphasis a meaningful context within which to view the death of Jesus.

Jesus’ sacrificial death is described as a single, non-repeatable sacrifice that has rendered all the offerings of the old covenant cultus obsolete. This emphasis on the finality of Jesus’ sacrifice would seem to suggest that there could be no more room for sacrifice in this congregation. However, that such is not the case is shown by the fact that the letter to the Hebrews is concluded just as it was begun with a reference to sacrifice. This time, however, it is the readers themselves who are encouraged to “offer up a sacrifice of praise to the ultimate reality” (13:15). From this reading, it would appear that sacrifice is a concept of great significance for the author of the letter to the Hebrews. The following section will consider how the sacrificial concept functions in the letter to the Hebrews in more details.

3.6 A COLONIAL READING OF THE CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Although no scholarly consensus exists regarding the *religionsgeschichtliche* background of the letter to the Hebrews, Buchanan (1972:xxvii) contends that its author found the Old Testament a source of divinely inspired authoritative teaching concerning the redemptive work of Jesus. It is within this context that the references to sacrifice should be considered. Of the three kinds of sacrifice referred to in Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16, Goins (1990:4) argues that the first two have their genesis in the cultic instructions of the Pentateuch, while the third one is anticipated in the prophetic tradition. These are the Day of Atonement sacrifices (which shall be referred to in this chapter just as atonement sacrifice or ritual), the covenant-inauguration sacrifice, and the spiritual sacrifice.

3.6.1 The Atonement Sacrifice: Hebrews 9:1-14

Having established that Jesus is the high priest of the prominent order of Melchizedek (ch. 7), the author proceeds to further elaborate the superiority of Jesus' priestly mediation to that of the Levitical priestly mediation. This is done in Hebrews 9:1-10:18 through a comparison of the cultic regulations and the sacrifices enacted by these two priestly mediations under the categories of sanctuary, sacrifice and covenant.

3.6.1.1 Cultural Context

The categories of sanctuary and sacrifice are taken up in Hebrews 9:1-14. The context of this discussion is the atonement ritual, that most solemn of all Jewish fasts which signalled the end of a special period of penitence and, in conjunction with an elaborate ritual, was intended to secure forgiveness for the sins of the previous year (West 1981:190). Goins (1990:4) points out two separate though related aims of the atonement ritual. It was first intended to provide cleansing for the tabernacle and priesthood. Secondly, it was intended to purge the people of their own transgressions. However, as Martin Noth (1965:124) indicates, it is highly probable that this distinction is not original and that it was the sins of the people, which in undermining their relationship with the ultimate reality, were thought to be responsible for the defilement of the holy place.

Nevertheless a dual purpose is evident in the rites of the atonement, which began with the high priest's sacrifice of a young bull as a sin offering for the priesthood (Lev.16: 6). This was followed by the sacrifice of a goat for the atonement of the people (Lev.16: 15). The sacrificial blood of the bull and goat, which was offered within the Holy of Holies only on this day of the year, was believed to effect the purification of Israel's cultic forms (Goins 1990:4). However, it was the ritual

of the scapegoat that was responsible for removing the guilt of the people themselves. This third rite required the high priest to lay his hands on the head of a goat and confess over it the sins of Israel, after which it was led into the wilderness and forced over a cliff to its death.

3.6.1.2 Structural Elements

Chapter nine opens with the resumptive οὐ, which serves to link to the previous pericope. The particle με;ν introduces the explication of the earthly sanctuary. The term πρῶτη is feminine and presumably refers to the covenant, though some manuscripts specify that it refer to the first σκηνή. The noun λειτουργία is used for priestly service. The word τὸ ἅγιον is neuter singular, though τὰ ἅγια the neuter plural is used in vv.3, 8,12 (Koester 2001:393). The imperfect εἶπε seems to stress the fact that the old covenant was outdated (Attridge 1989:231).

In vv.2-3 one gets the impression that there were two tabernacles. Nevertheless, the author(s) references to two tents are to be read as two compartments of one tabernacle. The tabernacle and the first and second temples were bipartite structures. Each had a forecourt (*hekal*) and an inner court (*debir*, 1 Kings 6:17-19). As Koester (2001:394), professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota, correctly points out, the terms πρῶτη and δεύτερον could be used for successive courts in a sanctuary, though he argues that their function in the letter to the Hebrews is a little bit complex.

The word προσφύρει in v.7 anticipates the way the author will refer to Jesus' self-giving (v.14). The noun ἀγνοημάτων (sins of ignorance) may just be a synonym for sins as Philo in Koester (2001:397) assumed that sacrifices on the atonement ritual were offered for all of their sins, both voluntarily and involuntarily.

The term παραβολή (v.9) is used not in the sense of a narrative as in the gospels, but to indicate that the first court was a symbol. Koester (2001:398) notes that in rhetoric a παραβολή was a comparison of things where the resemblance was not obvious. Here the author uses the term for typological connections between the old and new covenants. The first court is a symbol for the "present time" that is associated with Jewish regulations (9:9).

Attridge (1989:241) argues that the phrase "present time" (τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεσθηκότα) should be taken to mean the author's time, which is the way the term was usually used. The new element is the distinction between flesh and conscience (9:9-10). The old covenant provided means for purifying the flesh, but not the "conscience" (συνείδησιν), a word Attridge (1989:242) says was very rare in the LXX, but common in the Hellenistic world.

The term συνείδησιν basically means consciousness, though it could also refer to moral consciousness. Aristotle (as quoted by DeSilva 2000:300-301) defines it as:

a person's internal moral faculty, the resource by which a person discerns right and wrong. This is formed within the person as he or she is socialized into a group and begins to internalize the group's definitions of right and honourable behaviour and wrong and shameful behaviour. On the one hand, the conscience connects an individual to the group's values, but, on the other hand, it is not the same thing as being concerned about public opinion. It is an internal knowledge of whether or not one has acted virtuously and honourable, and it is intimately connected with the juridical sense of guilt.

Koester (2001:399) lists two primary associations of terms *brwvmasin kai; povmasin kai; baptismois*". First, these terms could be associated with Levitical sacrificial practices. The worshippers ate portions of certain sacrifices. 'Drink' probably refers to drink offerings. Ablutions were part of the preparatory rites for those taking part in priestly practices. Secondly, these terms could be associated with Jewish statutes of purity. Food and drink were associated with clean and unclean foods. All Jews, not only priests, used ablutions for purification.

The author critiques the regulations of the first covenant as *dikaiwvmata sarko;*" "mere regulations of the flesh", which were *mh; dunavmenai kata; suneivdhsin teleiw`sai* "unable to cleanse the conscience." According to Koester (2001:399-400), the term 'flesh' has two pejorative meanings here. First, it connotes weakness, since fleshly life is subject to death (2:14; 5:7). It is the physical, transient (7:16) side of human existence in contrast to the conscience (9:9-10). Secondly, it identifies what is common to humankind. Regulations concerning food, drink and ablutions were common to both Jewish and non-Jewish traditions alike.

Koester (2001:407) notes that, though the verb of the participle *paragenovmeno*" can mean appearing in public, *paragenovmeno*" + *de* at the beginning of a sentence often indicates arrival at a destination. Having demonstrated Jesus' appointment to the high priesthood and the "good things, which come into being" (*tw`n genomevnwn ajgaqw`n*), the author describes the high priestly rite enacted by Jesus in this "time of correction."

"Time of correction" was of particular importance in Jewish and non-Jewish contexts. "Correction" was needed when a building was in despair, or when an account was in arrears, or when a law became ineffective. When a law underwent correction, the existing statute was annulled and a new one put in its place (Koester 2001:400).

Koester (2001:412) points out that structurally; this section is made up of two segments. The first segment is the exposition of the tabernacle and the Levitical priestly mediation which is introduced by the particle *me;n* (v. 1.) and framed by references to regulations of the Mosaic covenant (vv. 1, 10). The second segment (vv. 11-14) is introduced by the contrastive *de* (v. 11) and depicts Jesus' priestly mediation. The second segment is made up of two long sentences. The first sentence is a

complex one (v. 11-12) and deals with Jesus' entry into the heavenly sanctuary, while the second one (vv. 13-14) contrasts Jesus' sacrifice with Levitical sacrifices.

Attridge (1989:249) and Koester (2001:408) point out that *aijwnivan luvtrwsin* (eternal redemption) encompasses multiple aspects of meaning. First, it can entail deliverance from bondage. *Luvtrwsin* and *luvtron* were terms used for buying back property (Lev. 25: 24-29) as well as slaves that may have been taken into someone else's possession (Exod. 21:30; Lev. 25: 48). In Luke 1:68; 2:38 the term is used for deliverance from oppression. In the New Testament, the noun appears only in this verse of the letter to the Hebrews and in Luke 1:68; 2:38. Second, it can entail forgiveness of sins. In 9:15 *ajpoluvtrwsin* refers to forgiveness of sins. Jesus is said to have given his life as a *luvtron* (ransom) for many (Mt. 20:28; Mark. 10:45). His death brings *ajpoluvtrwsin* (redemption) from sins (Rom. 3:24; 1Pet. 1:18).

3.6.1.3 Rhetorical Effects

Rhetorically, the author will contrast *prwvth* (v.1) and *deuvteton* (v.3) very often in the comparison of the mediation and access to the ultimate reality available under the Levitical and Jesus' priestly mediations throughout chapter nine. The pair will further be used to refer to the two covenants, two courts of the sanctuary, and two sorts of sacrificial offerings and two advents of Jesus. As DeSilva (2000:297) rightly notes, they give coherence to the entire central exposition and sustain the readers' awareness of comparison in this exposition.

It is difficult for modern scholars to consider the atonement ritual without projecting some theory to explain the phenomenon of sacrifice in ancient Israel (Davies 1977:387-399). However, the author of the letter to the Hebrews seems to be more concerned with the actual location, procedure and purpose of the observance itself. For instance, the focus of the first five verses is on the physical setting of the atonement ritual. Here the author describes the wilderness tabernacle, the most salient feature of which is the fact that it is divided into two compartments, namely, the Holy Place (v.2) and the Holy of Holies (v.3).

Aspects of the exposition of the tabernacle are peculiar, but serve the argument. The author faulted the first covenant for the failure of its cultic regulations (*dikaivmata*) and its priestly mediation to effect perfection. The author's remark that it is "not possible" (*oujk e[stin*) to discuss them "in detail" (*kata; mevro*) in v.5 is a rhetorical device called *paraleipsis*, where passing by something without detailed comment signifies familiarity, while relativizing its importance (Koester 2001:404). Thus, the author is not concerned with the sanctuary itself, but with the significance of the bipartite structures and the progressive limitations on access to the ultimate reality that these structures and their regulations enforce (9:6-7). As Westcott (1892:250) notes, the Holy of Holies

symbolizes the divine presence of the ultimate reality, so that even the locus of the cult, with its barrier of “the second curtain”, supplies graphic evidence for the inadequacy of the old covenant rituals to provide continual access to the ultimate reality.

Having described the sanctuary in the first five verses, the author shifts attention to the rituals that revolve around the first tabernacle. Hebrews 9:6-10 highlights the rites of the atonement ritual. Attridge (1989:238) rightly observes that the particle *de* does not introduce a contrast with the preceding verse here, but draws out the implications of the tabernacle’s arrangement. The contrast with the whole old cultic order commences in v. 11, where *de* introduces its counterpart, Jesus’ mediation in the heavenly sanctuary.

Although the letter to the Hebrews has material relating to almost every aspect of the cultic system, its central argument expounds the death of Jesus and his exaltation as a fulfilment of the atonement ritual. The author ignores the incense, the slaughter of the bull and goat and the confession of sins over the head of the scapegoat (Lev. 16), which form part of the atonement ritual. Instead, the author’s focal point is on the entry of the high priest into the Holy of Holies and his offering of blood. The author reveals knowledge of the Temple ritual, though s/he parts company with its custom of referring only to the scriptural narrative (v.7). The author seems to have done this in order to make a distinction between the one priest and the many in preparation for the description of Jesus as a ‘unique high priest’ (v.11).

The result of this device is to contrast the mediation of the ordinary priests with that of the high priest. Details of the Levitical mediation correspond in general but not in an exact way to Jesus’ mediation. The Levitical high priest entered into the inner court once a year rather than once for all time as Jesus did (9:25-26). The once-a-year event is treated as an anticipation of the once-for-all-time event (vv.7-12). The Levitical high priest offered blood for his own sins and the sins of others, while Jesus made an offering only for others, since he was sinless (4:15). Taking the cosmic properties of the Temple, the entry into the Holy of Holies is fused with Jesus’ entry into heaven (Dunnill 1992:140).

As Koester (2001:404) points out, the symbolic exposition of this point comes in vv. 8-10. The symbolic value of this definite physical movement is fully exploited in the letter to the Hebrews. Dunnill (1992:140) contends that the movement’s goal of personal encounter of humankind with the ultimate reality in the holiest place is contrasted with the impersonal symbolism (9:9-10) as well as with the disjunctive ideology expressed in vv.18-22.

Here the cultic arrangements of the first tabernacle are a vehicle by which the Holy Spirit demonstrates that, “the way into the holy places has not yet been shown, while the first court still

has cultic status, in which gifts and sacrifices are being offered that cannot perfect the worshiper in regard to conscience, and which court is a parable for the present time” (9:8-9).

Koester (2001:405) identifies two assumptions underlying the reference to the Holy Spirit. The first one entails that the ultimate reality that is spoken of by the prophets, whose words are in the Scriptures, is the same ultimate reality that has been spoken through the Son (1:1-2). Thus, each is read in the light of the other. The second one concerns the Spirit who enables what the ultimate reality said in Scriptures to address later generations (3:7). The Spirit is the ultimate reality’s way of confirming the message concerning Jesus (2:3-4). Thus, the Spirit discloses the congruence between what the Scriptures foreshadow and what Jesus’ death and exaltation have achieved. The Spirit does not work independently of the Scriptures and of Jesus.

The author believes that s/he and the readers were already living in a time in which access into the holy places has in fact been opened up (10:19-20). In a physical sense, this suggests that the first court conceals the access into the inner court that lies behind the curtain. Yet the incongruity suggests that the first court was the entire cultus established by the first covenant. The sanctuary and worship prescribed by the first covenant conceal a greater reality that is only known when “revealed.” The first covenant’s problem was that no gifts and sacrifices offered brought the worshippers closer to the ultimate reality. The worshippers were always kept outside the holy place. Direct access to the ultimate reality was limited to one person, once a year, with a lesser degree of access enjoyed by a few priests.

These regulations remain only until a *kairou` diorqwvsew* “time of correction.” The “time of correction”, however, has already come from the author’s perspective, since Jesus the high priest has already entered the heavenly sanctuary and instituted the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31.

As shown previously, the term *diorqwvsew* may refer to improvements of various sorts, the reconstruction of a building, the rectification of an account, or frequently, the correction of a law. Attridge (1989:243) sees the correction of a law as operative here, since legal language should be used to abrogate a legal system.

DeSilva (2000:301) sees v.10 as forward looking, since the author is leading the readers to first consider the conditions under the first covenant and then, in 9:11-10:18, the correction effected by Jesus. The author demonstrates in the exposition of Psalm 40:6-8, that the first court has already lost its cultic significance. Its metaphorical significance is “a parable pointing to the present time” (9:9). The good news is that the readers are now living under the jurisdiction of the new covenant, since Jesus has provided the needed correction.

The purpose of the passage seems not to be descriptive but analytical, the result of which is an enumeration of the limitations and obstacles to access the ultimate reality that existed under the first covenant and its atonement rituals, which have now been overcome by the Son. The ultimate reality has provided the correction in Jesus. The readers stand at a point in time after this correction with regard to access to the ultimate reality, for the “new and living way” into the holy place (10:19-20) has been revealed to them. They may now “approach with boldness the throne of grace” (4:14).

At this point, the author shifts the emphasis from the description of the old covenant cultus and its weaknesses and limitations (9:1-10) to the exposition of the superiority of the sacrifice of the new covenant (9:11-14). The contrast with the old covenant cultus begins emphatically here with Jesus, who makes the new covenant what it is.

The new covenant, just like the old one, has its own sanctuary and sacrificial rites. The old covenant provides the language and framework for conceptualizing the death and post-ascension experiences of Jesus, though the author had to stretch and refashion that framework to suite the new rite. For instance, DeSilva (2000:303) notes that Jesus is characterized as both priest and sacrificial victim. The old culture map provides the raw materials, which are combined by the new high priest in a new and impossible manner.

Jesus’ arrival as high priest in “the greater and more perfect tent” (meivzono" kai; teleiotevra") marks a high point in the central exposition. For the author, correction had come with Jesus’ arrival as high priest, since his entry into the heavenly sanctuary provides the ultimate cleansing that can purify the conscience (9:11-14). According to Koester (2001:412), the rhetorical function of the arrival of Jesus as high priest (v. 11) is to show that he did not seize priestly prerogatives, but was the ultimate reality’s initiative as authoritative strategy (5:4-5) and qualified after suffering and exaltation (4:15; 5:8). Jesus has arrived at his heavenly destination (7:26; 8:2), where alone he officiates as a “priest forever” because of the indestructible nature of his life (7:20-28). Moreover, good things came to Jesus after suffering and exaltation to glory (1:3-4; 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 5:8-10). In turn, his exaltation gives assurance that the faithful who struggle will also receive good things promised by the ultimate reality (1:14; 6:12).

In Hebrews 9:12 the redemption brought by Jesus should be seen as cleansing from sins rather than as payment or a ransom. In Hebrews 9:13-14 redemption is defined not as a payment, but as cleansing.

Koester (2001:412) contends that the rhetorical function of proclaiming redemption as having come with respect to the ultimate reality awakens courage in the readers not to turn back in the face of opposition (10:39; 13:14), but to soldier on in faith (6:12) until they enter the promised rest (4:9-11; 12:22-24).

The comparative adjectives *meivzono* " kai; *teleiotevra*" (v.11) recognize a degree of greatness and perfection of the Mosaic covenant, while insisting on the superiority of the heavenly sanctuary. Koester (2001:413) identifies two common ideas here. The first one entails the superiority of what the ultimate reality makes over what humankind makes. It is an indisputable fact that the tabernacle was human-made (9:11). Thus, the heavenly tent made up by the ultimate reality is greater and perfect. The second one concerns the fact that heaven is superior to earth and the earthly tabernacle is subject to decay (1:10-12). Therefore, only what is transcendent can be the ground of abiding faith.

The above argument is supported by comparison with other sources. For instance, the biblical prophets faulted those who confined the ultimate reality to the temple context (Isa. 66:1) and thought the temple could protect them from judgment (Jer. 7:1-20). The Qumran and other Jewish sects thought corrupt priests had polluted the temple, though few could deny the temple itself in principle (Koester 2001:414). Likewise, the gospels characterize Jesus denouncing some temple practices, while calling it his Father's house (Mt. 21:13; Mark. 11:17; Luke. 2:49; John. 2:16). Koester (2001:414) further argues that the letter to the Hebrews does not fault the earthly sanctuary for its material quality nor for its corrupt practices, but for its limited effectiveness. The problem is not that the cleansing was external, but it was incomplete, since the conscience remained not cleansed. A more complete cleansing was needed (see 9:9; 10:1).

The writer's contrast of Jesus' blood and animal blood is also instructive (9:12). Unlike the Levitical high priest who offered animal blood annually, Jesus entered the holy place "once for all" (*ejfavpax*) providing his own blood as the means of an eternal redemption (*dia; de; tou` ijdivou ai{mato" aijwnivan luvtrwsin euJravmeno*"). While animal blood served only for external purification (9:12), Jesus' offering, made in the realm of the spirit, provides effective cleansing of conscience (9:14).

The above argument is also supported by comparison with other sources. Both Jewish and Greco-Roman writers considered moral conduct superior to animal sacrifices (Koester 2001:414). According to the letter to the Hebrews, sacrifices do not atone for sin. The writer's perspective is shaped by the conviction that the ultimate reality has dealt ultimately with sin through the death of Jesus (9:12). As such, all other means are considered inadequate. DeSilva (2000:306) describes it as the "better blood, taken into the better sanctuary, effects better results". The single act of Jesus' event, namely the entry "once for all" into the heavenly sanctuary, contrasts with the annual entry of the Levitical high priest into the earthly sanctuary, which was not able ever to achieve ultimate removal of sins (10:1-4). The quality of the redemption he obtains is said to be eternal and does not

need to be repeated because it lasts forever. Repetition is viewed here as a mark of ineffectiveness, inefficiency and inefficacy.

Scholars have since wondered why the author of the letter to the Hebrews thought the blood of Jesus possessed such pre-eminent salvific value. Westcott (1892:261), for instance, believes that the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice derives from the fact that it was voluntary, rational, spontaneous and moral. By "moral" Westcott was referring to the fact that Jesus' death was not "the performance of a prescribed rite", but a response to his own awareness of the needs of humankind. However, later he asserts that the meaningfulness of Jesus' sacrifice lies in the fact that it represents "a life made available for others", and yet he is forced to admit that it is the blood of Jesus that is specifically said to provide purification.

In my view, however, this author had a less philosophical ground for asserting the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice. Hebrews 9:13-14 introduces an antithesis of the animal blood versus Jesus' blood. The blood of animals and Jesus is the central element here. Blood has several functions. It can cleanse, sanctify and bring forgiveness (9:13-14, 22), inaugurate covenants (9:20; 10:29) and provide access to God (9:7, 12, 15). It is declared that there is no forgiveness without blood (9:22), though animal blood is said to be unable to atone for sins (10:4) and unable to purify the conscience (9:9, 13-14), a seemingly contradictory statement.

The blood of animals offered on the atonement ritual described in the letter to the Hebrews is linked with the "sprinkled ashes of a heifer," which was not used on the atonement ritual, but for purification from defilement through contact with a corpse (Num. 19). The various rituals listed here seem to suggest that a great number of rites do not mean great effectiveness, since all are "regulations of the flesh not able to remove the contamination of the conscience" (9:9-10). This link allows the relegation by the author of the atonement ritual to the level of only purifying the flesh (9:13).

Thus, the effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice is attributed to the fact that it was offered "through the eternal spirit" (v.14). David Peterson (1982:138) and other scholars have identified this phrase as a periphrasis for the Holy Spirit. However, Attridge (1989:251) has recognized it as a reference to Jesus and to "the interior or spiritual quality of his sacrificial act," which was made "with that portion of his being that was most truly himself." Thus, the logic of the argument would be that since Jesus offered the sacrifice of his whole self, he could provide a cleansing, which penetrates beneath the physical even to the point of purifying the conscience.

Koester (2001:416-416) suggests four aspects of the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice. The first one entails the source of the sacrifice, which is Jesus' blood. The assumption that animal blood was of limited effectiveness is the ground for a *fortiori* argument (Goins 1990:6). The writing does not

attach salvific value to any person's blood, but to Jesus' only, because he is characterized as the Son of the ultimate reality. Jesus' blood is characterized as superior to any other blood because Jesus himself is characterized as superior to any other cultural figure. I shall return to this aspect fully in the next chapter.

A second one concerns the manner of the sacrifice, which is *dia; pneuvmato" aijwnivou* "through the eternal spirit" (9:14). While Levitical sacrifices used animal blood, Jesus offered his own blood. While Levitical sacrifices were completed "through perpetual fire," Jesus' sacrifice was completed *dia; pneuvmato" aijwnivou*. While the victims offered under the Levitical system were to be "blameless" in a physical sense, Jesus was blameless due to his sinlessness (4:15).

A third one entails the effect of Jesus' sacrifice, which is to *kaqariei` th;n suneivdhsin hJmw`n ajpo; nekrw`n e[rgwn* "cleanse our conscience from dead works" (9:14). The cleansing is not through physical contact but through proclamation of Jesus' death for Jesus' blood speaks of the grace and mercy of the ultimate reality (12:24). Though Jesus' blood was shed years before the composition of this writing, the author asserts that a person's conscience is cleansed when Jesus' self-sacrifice is proclaimed and received in faith through the agency of the Spirit (2:1-4; 6:4-5; 10:29). Dead works derive from sin, which is one's stance toward the ultimate reality (3:12-13; 6:1; 10:38; 11:24-25; 12:4).

A fourth one concerns the results of animal sacrifices, which differed from those of Jesus' sacrifice. While in 9:13-14 animal sacrifices culminate in purification, Jesus' sacrifice leads to worshippers *latreuvein qew`/ zw`nti* "serving the living ultimate reality." DeSilva (2000:307-308) contends that the author strongly believes that the worshippers now have so great and so efficacious a mediator and they can serve in the very presence of the living ultimate reality. Their lives will be liturgical services carried out wherever they find themselves in acts of worship, confession, sharing and doing well (13:15-16). Hughes (1977:362) sees the best evidence for the efficacy of Jesus' sacrificial death as a person whose inward cleansing is openly displayed in a wholehearted dedication "to serve the living ultimate reality" (9:14).

Thus, Hebrews 9:11-14 rings further changes on the fundamental antitheses of the central exposition and develops the sense in which the reality of the new covenant corresponds to the 'image' of the old cultus. Numerous positive elements of the antithetical poles are related such as the heavenly, the unique, the eternal and the internal. Nevertheless, the marriage among these elements remains abstract and superficial and the connection with the new covenant is yet not clear. Attridge (1989:244-245) indicates that the marriage would be seen to be more intimate as the writing progresses and as the association with the promises of Jeremiah are made more secure.

3.6.2 The Covenant-Inauguration Sacrifice: Hebrews 9:15-28

Having led the readers through the ancient sanctuary (9:1-5), showing them the Levitical priestly mediation (9:6-10) and Jesus' movement into the heavenly sanctuary as the high priest (9:11-14), the writer shifts to the mundane area of the law and inheritance (9:15-17). This seems to illustrate the implications of the death and exaltation of Jesus. Then in a sudden move, the scene shifts again to the Mosaic covenant (9:18-22). Then the author finally takes the readers to the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus appears before the ultimate reality on their behalf, while they await his second advent for their final and full salvation (9:23-28).

3.6.2.1 Legal Context

Hebrews 9:15-17 is set up in the context of the law and inheritance. The promises of the ultimate reality to forgive sins in Jeremiah's new covenant (31:31-34) is recalled and elaborated here. In the previous section, Jesus' death and exaltation were described as a sacrifice of atonement. Here declaring that through Jesus' sacrifice the mercy promised in the new covenant is given brings the atonement and covenant motifs together.

According to Koester (2001:378-379), the term *mesivth*" (mediator) has two facets of meaning. Firstly, it could mean one who mediates between two parties to remove a disagreement or to reach a common goal. Secondly, it could mean a "guarantor," one who helps someone in the event that agreements were violated or would prevent one party taking further actions against another. In commerce a *mesivth*" agrees to assume responsibility for another person's debt, if that person should fail to meet the obligation or to ensure that a legally established contract was carried out.

Usually the guarantor was a relative or friend. People were very careful about standing guarantor because a failure to repay a debt leads to lawsuits. Guarantors were liable to the same penalties as the persons whom they would have bailed out, which in some cases entailed death. This way a guarantor and an intermediary were almost the same (Koester 2001:363-364).

The term *diaghvkh*" encompasses two aspects of meaning. The first one is that it can mean a covenant. Yahweh and Israel's relationship was a *berit* in Hebrew, which was translated in the LXX as *diaghvkh*". There were several covenants made by the ultimate reality. For instance, the ultimate reality made a covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:1-18), with Abraham (Gen. 15:18), with Moses at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:2-8), with David (2 Sam 23:5) and with the Levitical priesthood (Num. 25:12-13; Mal. 2:4-5). The author here is only concerned with two covenants: the Mosaic covenant and Jeremiah's new covenant.

The second meaning is that of a 'testament'. Outside the LXX usage, *diaghvkh*" is used for 'testament' or 'will'. According to Koester (2001:418), a 'testament' spelled out how property was

to be distributed and debts were to be paid after a person is deceased. This usage bridges the ancient Israel and Greco-Roman worlds of the readers/hearers. Legally, people had to present evidence that the testator is deceased for a will to take effect. Heirs commonly have no valid way to claim inheritance until the testator dies. In this manner, a 'testament' becomes valid upon death. The 'testament' had to be filed properly with a notary in the presence of witnesses while the testator was alive for it to be valid at the time of death. The unusual statement that a testament becomes valid upon death arises from the coupling of legal practice with biblical covenant traditions. Hughes (1977:43-46) argues that the expression "upon death" is plural and probably refers to a general practice rather than that a covenant was made "upon sacrifice." The provisions of a 'testament' usually took effect upon the death of a testator.

3.6.2.2 Religious Context

Hebrews 9:18-22 is set up in the context of the Mosaic covenant. The rite by which Moses established the first covenant is drawn from the Sinaitic covenant in Exodus 24:3-8. In the covenant the law is read, the blood is brought into contact with symbols of the ultimate reality and the people, but many of the details are borrowed from elsewhere resulting in a composite covenant-ceremony. In this ceremony, Moses threw the blood against the altar and over the people. According to Dunnill (1992:129), this ceremony, in common with ancient secular "covenanting" procedures, contains three important elements, among others. Firstly, it contains a rehearsal of the past benefits of the ultimate reality as the ground for future trust and obedience. Secondly, it entails a command to loyalty. Thirdly, it refers to the ultimate reality as the witness of the covenant with formulae of blessing and curse pronounced upon those who either honour or disregard its terms.

3.6.2.3 Literary-Rhetorical Elements

Koester (2001:423-424) points out that structurally, this section weaves together the motifs of atonement and covenants (old and new). The first segment of the section (9:15-17) identifies Jesus' atoning sacrifice with the establishment of a new covenant, through which forgiveness of sins is offered. In turn, the new covenant is identified as the testament through which the people are given their inheritance. The second segment of the section (9:18-22) compares the sacrifice by which Jesus inaugurated the new covenant to the sacrifice by which Moses inaugurated the old one. The third segment of the section (9:23-28) relates Jesus' sacrifice to the continued intercession in the heavenly sanctuary and to his expected return.

Having indicated that through his sacrificial death Jesus has made possible an internal cleansing of conscience that the old covenant was unable to achieve, the author now concludes that Jesus is *mesivth*" of a new covenant (v.15), which actually recalls Jeremiah 31:31-34. With Jesus' death and exaltation described previously as a sacrifice of atonement (9:1-14), Hebrews 9:15 combines

the atonement and the covenant motifs under the declaration that Jesus' sacrifice is the means by which the mercy promised under the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 is made available. As the *mesivth*" of a new covenant Jesus guarantees the reader that all the promises of the ultimate reality will be fulfilled. Previous arguments concerning law and Jesus preface the exposition of the new covenant (9:15b) with an added dimension that the aim of the new covenant is that "those who are called might receive the promised eternal inheritance" (9:15c). Though the new covenant of Jeremiah did not mention inheritance, the readers already hoped to inherit salvation in the age to come (1:14; 2:5). They were to see themselves as heirs of the promises of the ultimate reality to Abraham (2:16; 6:12-18; 11:8). They were called by the ultimate reality (3:1; 2:5) in the same manner of Abraham and looked forward to living in the kingdom of the ultimate reality (11:13-16; 12:22-24, 28).

It would appear then that Jesus' death has resulted in two inestimable accomplishments. It set humankind free from the guilt of previous sins and it ratified a covenant that guarantees unhindered access to the ultimate reality. Positioned at that mid-point between the old and new aeons, the sacrificial death of Jesus radically transformed both the past and the future.

Johannes Schneider (1957:85) points out that, while initially it appears that the overriding theme of this section is the new covenant, the logic of the writing is actually designed to reveal the necessity of Jesus' death. Two arguments are adduced which make the shedding of Jesus' blood mandatory. The first is a deductive one in which the author connects the new covenant promise with the hope of inheritance through a comparison that plays on two different uses of the Greek term *διαθηκη*. As we have seen previously, in the LXX *διαθηκη* is used to translate the Hebrew *berith* "covenant," but according to Behm (1964:124), in classical and Hellenistic Greek it is commonly understood as a technical term of jurisprudence meaning "last will" or "testament."

In societies where property was passed down within the family, inheritance was of central importance for a person's future well being. Koester (2001:425) points out that in common practice it was "necessary that the death of the testator be presented," by a formal statement to a local official. Attridge (1989:256) sees *fevresqai* (v.16) as somewhat ambiguous. The verb literally means, "to be brought," which he takes to mean, "to be reported" or "registered" officially. It appears that the writer does not assume that the ultimate reality was bound by the secular practice to make Jesus' death the ground for inheritance, but seeks to illustrate its significance with regard to testamentary practice.

Hebrews 9:17a functions on both human and divine levels. The former entails that a testament is valid while the testator is still alive, but its provisions are only realized at the death of the testator. The latter entails that the promise of the ultimate reality through Jeremiah was realized through the

death of Jesus. Attridge (1989:254) suggests that the author's point seems to be that a covenant is similar to a will in that the death of the testator or covenant maker is a prerequisite to the awarding of the beneficiary. The human level also entails that no claim is made to the inheritance until the testator dies. The divine level also entails that the promise of the ultimate reality was fulfilled after Jesus' death, which was able to cleanse the human conscience (9:14). Hence, apart from the death of Jesus the benefits of the new *διαθηκη* would not be realized.

Koester (2001:425-426) contends that in this way Jesus' death is affirmed as both a covenant inauguration sacrifice and as the passing away of a testator that enables the inheritance of the testator to fall to the heirs. DeSilva (2000:308) notes that this is a rhetorical conceit, which provides another prop for the readers' continued confidence and perseverance in that hope. It is employed to assure the readers that the Son's death and exaltation symbolize their own future exaltation and inheritance of glory. Cosby (1988:257-266), professor of New Testament at Warner Pacific College in Portland, notes that while this use of semantic ambiguity might be considered an instance of 'playful' argumentation, it is in tune with the author's love of rhetorical devices as demonstrated throughout the whole writing.

A second argument, as Attridge (1989:253) notes, is more exegetical than deductive. Hebrews 9:18-22 modifies the Mosaic ceremony of Exodus 24:1-8. According to the Sinaitic rite in Exodus 24, the ceremony which marked the sealing of the covenant between the ultimate reality and Israel included a reading of the law (24:3a), a pledge of obedience from the people (24:3b), the offering of a sacrifice (24:4b-6), and a sealing of the oath signified by the sprinkling of sacrificial blood over the alter and the people. Goins (1990:8) argues that, as the atonement ritual illuminates Jesus' work in Hebrews 9:7-14, the ratification of the Mosaic covenant illuminates Jesus' death both as atonement sacrifice and as a covenant inauguration sacrifice (9:15, 20).

DeSilva (2000:310) is insistent that in this manner Jesus is held up as the antitype of which the key cultural figures and rites of the Torah were but hints and prefigurations. These cultural figures and rites then provide a vocabulary and grammar as the author of the letter to the Hebrews sought to give meaning to Jesus' death on the cross. Thus, the language of blood sacrifice enabled the author to accentuate the purposeful quality of Jesus' death.

However, as Attridge (1989:258) and Koester (2001:426) point out, covenants were not always established by sacrifice. The best instances of non-sacrificial covenants are the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17) and the covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:4-17; 23:5). Nevertheless, the Mosaic covenant was inaugurated with blood sacrifice and the author of the letter to the Hebrews saw it as a precedent for the new covenant established by Jesus' blood. The mode of the testator's death was of no consequence to the validity of the testament.

Hebrews 9:18 turns from testamentary practice to biblical precedent. Koester (2001:426) notes out that just as Moses was the *mesivth*" of the Sinaitic covenant (9:19), Jesus was the *mesivth*" of the new covenant (7:22; 8:6). Moses and Jesus were alike in their faithfulness, but Moses was a servant while Jesus was the Son (3:1-6). Moses saw the heavenly sanctuary, but Jesus officiates in it (8:1-6). Nevertheless, the Mosaic covenant, with its animal sacrifices foreshadows the self-sacrifice by which Jesus inaugurated the new covenant.

Many of the details in Hebrews 9:15-22 are borrowed from elsewhere. Lane (1991:9-13, 244) and Attridge (1989:247) are insistent that the author includes rites conflated from different places in the Torah, which were prescribed for different occasions and purposes to stress the exterior nature of these acts. The slaughtered beasts include he-goats *τραχων*. Dunnill (1992:127) contends that these would be permissible for burnt offerings and peace offerings such as Moses offered, but they are prescribed only for the atonement ritual (Lev.16: 5). However, a female goat (*αιγα*) is involved in the covenant-sacrifice of Abraham (Gen.15: 9). The author gives this sacrifice a distinctively expiatory character.

While in Exodus 24:6-8 blood is thrown against the altar and over the people, here the people are sprinkled (*ejrravntisen-v.19*). Moses takes not only animals' blood but also 'water and scarlet wool and hyssop', details drawn from the leprosy rite (Lev.14: 4-5). According to Dunnill (1992:127), the red heifer rite for 'water purification' (Num.19: 6-7) is perhaps drawn from a traditional version of the atonement ritual.

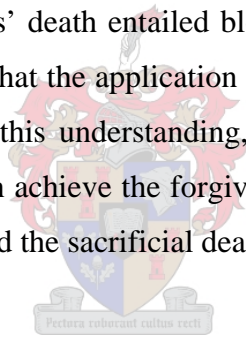
Attridge (1989:257) draws attention to the author's modification of the citation from Exodus 24:8. Instead of the prophetic utterance "ιδου (behold) the blood of the covenant", the letter to the Hebrews has "του`το (this is) the blood of the covenant". Instead of ο κυριος (the Lord), the letter to the Hebrews has οϋ γεον" (the ultimate reality). Instead of διεθετο for the event of establishing a covenant, the letter to the Hebrews uses *ejneteivlato*. The words of the letter to the Hebrews resonate with the words of the Eucharist institution (Mt. 26:28; Mark. 14:24). Possibly the author's reflection on the rite stimulated this reflection on the meaning of the body and blood of Jesus for the readers.

Dunnill (1992:127) observes that in place of the altar, in the letter to the Hebrews' version, blood is applied to the book, and to the tent and to "all the vessels used in worship" (*vv.19, 21*). These items may have been derived from Moses' consecration of "the tabernacle of the tent of meeting" in Exodus 40, where they were anointed with oil rather than sprinkled with blood. However, the author's use of το; biblivon as principal symbol of the covenant promise aligns this version with a very different strand of Old Testament theology. Nevertheless, the covenant sacrifice, as described here, has been subsumed into the dominant ideology of expiation, as a type of sin

offering, probably with the purpose of showing how far the Mosaic covenant stands from the will of the ultimate reality.

Because the writing does not provide an explication of the precise meaning of this ceremony, numerous theories have been proposed. Brevard Childs (1974:505) has seen the blood as “a positive symbol of a community of life established between the ultimate reality and his people”. E. W. Nicholson (1982:83) however, thinks that the prominence of the ancient belief that blood is holy makes it more likely that the ritual was a symbol of purification meant to consecrate Israel as the holy people of the ultimate reality. That the author of the letter to the Hebrews viewed the Exodus account in this light is evidenced by the remark that closes this section (v.22).

Koester (2001:427) identifies two assumptions underlying Hebrews 9:22. The first one entails blood as given in most Old Testament rituals. The Old Testament does not explain how blood cleanses or atones, but simply states that it does so. As Dunnill (1992:100-103) points out, people were expected to recognize the value of blood without understanding how it works. The second one concerns the author’s assumption that Jesus’ death is the ultimate means by which the ultimate reality offers forgiveness and that Jesus’ death entailed bloodshed (9:12). This understanding was the general Jewish cultural knowledge that the application of the sacrificial victim’s blood removes sins (Lev. 17:11). The author accepts this understanding, but denied animal blood to atone sins (10:4). Only Jesus’ sacrificial blood can achieve the forgiveness of sins. It is for this cause that the inauguration of the new covenant needed the sacrificial death of Jesus.



3.6.2.4 Heavenly Sacrifice

Having established the marriage between a purifying death and a covenant, the author shifts to the new column of the ledger. The fourth segment of this section corresponds to the second segment of the first section (9:11-14) in various ways. They all deal with Jesus’ entry into the heavenly sanctuary and its effects. They all contrast the earthly symbol with the heavenly reality. While previously the focal point was on the sacrificial victims and the superiority of Jesus’ sacrificial blood, this segment’s focal point is the priests of the two mediations and on the distinction between the Levitical multiplicity and the uniqueness of the new (9:25-28). Attridge (1989:260) rightly points out that the antithesis of one and many implicitly alluded to in various arguments is now developed explicitly here.

Hebrews 9:23a sums up aspects of the Mosaic Law and accepts the necessity of blood in cleansing the earthly sanctuary. This was the main feature of the atonement ritual (Lev. 16:11-20, 33) and the covenant inauguration ritual of Exodus 24:1-8. This segment resumes the reflection on purifying sacrifices associated with the old covenant and draws an analogy for the new one. Hebrews 9:23b assumes that, if the lesser earthly sanctuary needed animal blood, then the heavenly sanctuary

needed the superior human sacrifice. The author seems to understand fundamental reality in heavenly terms and not in earthly ones. Koester (2001:427) points out that, since the earthly sanctuary was a representation of the heavenly one (8:2, 5), the laws of the earthly sanctuary presumably disclose something about the heavenly sanctuary that it represents. Thus, the Levitical practice foreshadows Jesus' cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary at the coming of the new age (10:1).

Hebrews 9:24 develops a second antithesis between the lesser, earthly, material sanctuary and the locale of Jesus' ministry in the very presence of the ultimate reality in the heavenly realm. First, Jesus entered into the true sanctuary, heaven itself, not as an antitype that was "human made" (9:24). According to Koester (2001:428), the forecourt in Jewish tradition symbolized the earth and the inner court symbolized heaven. Thus, the Levitical high priest's entry into the inner court symbolized movement toward heaven. It follows then that Jesus' exaltation achieves what the Levitical high priest's action merely foreshadows (8:1-2).

Secondly, Jesus' absence is not an absence of concern, but a part of his role as high priest. DeSilva (2000:313) argues that the atonement ritual lends meaning to both Jesus' passion by which he cleanses the people (13:12), and to Jesus' ascension by which he removes the memory of sin from the presence of the cosmic reality, the memory that has stained and constrained human access to the ultimate reality.

Consequently, the focus on the heavenly reality draws the readers' attention away from this worldly life into an alternative reality, which is more real than worldly realities. In other words, this world is far less important and lasting than heaven, the focal point of hope for the readers. This of course, will encourage the readers to endure the hardships for the sake of that hope.

Hebrews 9:25-26 develops a third antithesis, which contrasts Jesus' single sacrifice with the annual sacrifices of the Levitical high priest. Unlike the Levitical high priestly annual ritual ($\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\epsilon\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\delta\omicron\tau\omicron\iota$), Jesus' self-sacrifice was non-repeatable ($\rho\omicron\lambda\lambda\alpha\upsilon\kappa\iota$). Unlike the Levitical sacrifices, Jesus' self-sacrifice was not achieved with someone else's blood ($\alpha\iota\{\mu\alpha\tau\iota\ \alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon\iota\upsilon\omega$). Attridge (1989:264) points out the importance of Jesus' self-sacrifice ($\pi\rho\omicron\sigma\phi\epsilon\upsilon\rho\eta/\ \epsilon\upsilon\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\nu$), which is not a separate act from his entry into the presence of the ultimate reality.

Assuming that the readers understand the significance of the annual rites of the atonement ritual and Jesus' pre-existence (1:2), the author envisions the implication of Jesus' full conformation to the Levitical pattern (9:26a). Taking the idea of Levitical repetition, which was assumed, the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice is strongly enhanced (cf. 10:1-18).

Hebrews 9:26b develops the eschatological dimension of the cultic argument. The Jesus event is not only historical but also eschatological. Seeing the evidence of sin that continued to threaten the readers (3:12-13; 12:4), the author argued for an eschatological event that will then abolish sin (9:26c). Sin will be no more and this will change the condition of humankind (8:10; 10:16). This will further equip the readers to bring out the fruit of righteousness and to live lives pleasing to the ultimate reality (11:6; 12:18; 13:16, 21). Consequently, the readers are at the threshold of their entry into the promised rest and receiving their promised inheritance in the unshakable kingdom. The time of reckoning is at hand and the readers needed to hold fast to their faith “yet a very short while” (cf. 10:36-39).

Hebrews 9:27-28 concludes this section with yet another characteristic comparative clause, which consummates the above end-time events within the author’s cultic exposition. Attridge (1989:265) points out that the first half of the comparison consists of what may be a bit of proverbial wisdom. Koester (2001:429) concurs with Attridge and sees the author voicing a commonplace, which was valuable in rhetorical speech for the “hearer, when he [sic] perceives that an indisputable principle drawn from practical life is being applied to a cause, must give his [sic]-tacit approval.”

The idea of judgment after death (9:27b) was also commonplace. This strategy keeps the readers firmly focused on their Christian faith and hope. Not that they will be exempted from the judgment, but because the judgment of the ultimate reality will bring them salvation (*swthrivān*). DeSilva (2000:316) points out the meaning of salvation in the letter to the Hebrews, which is distinct from its meaning in Ephesians. The use of salvation that the believers will receive at the time of Jesus’ second advent is quite distinct from a *fait accompli* in Ephesians.

DeSilva (2000:316) further points out that this was also a rhetorical device calling the readers’ attention to the future dimension of the deliverance of the ultimate reality for those who remain faithful in Jesus. Thus, the readers live between the first advent of Jesus, when Jesus’ blood cleansed them, and the second advent, when they shall be rewarded for their faithfulness, while those who were not faithful shall be judged and condemned. This was meant to encourage the readers to preserve what Jesus has achieved for them. Otherwise, they would face judgment instead of reward.

3.6.3 The Consummate Sacrifice: Hebrews 10:1-18.

This section of Hebrews deals with well-prepared ground. As far as the content is concerned, there is no new argument but only a few fresh nuances. The basic aim of this section of the text is to sum up this sermon-within-a sermon. Nevertheless, as far as the rhetorical impact is concerned, there is something new. The author is driving home the central claim of the sermon, which is the assurance of pardon (Long 1997:101). The contrasts between the Levitical sacrificial system and Jesus’

singular sacrificial death dominant in the previous chapter intensify in 10:1-18. True to the author's customary design the old covenant side of the ledger is described first (10:1-4) before the new covenant side of the ledger (10:5-18). The Levitical sacrificial system is depicted as having served as a reminder of sin (10:1-4), whereas Jesus' sacrificial death is depicted as having inaugurated the new promised covenant of Jeremiah 31, where the ultimate reality promised never again to remember sins (10:5-18).

3.7.3.1 Structural Elements

Koester (2001:436) points out that structurally, 10:1-18 is bound by commonplace vocabulary: offering (*προσφορά*; 10:5, 8, 10, 14, 18), sacrifice (*θυσία* 10:1, 5, 8, 11, 12) and sin (*ἁμαρτία* 10:2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18). The old and new covenants are described in the first and last segments, while the two central segments described the superiority of Jesus' sacrificial death and priestly mediation in comparison with the Levitical sacrificial system.

According to Koester (2001:377), the term *σκιά* (shadow) in 10:1 could be used in two ways. Firstly, it could be used spatially to differentiate between heavenly realities from earthly shadow (8:5). Secondly, it could be used temporarily to differentiate between present shadows from future realities (10:1). In a negative way, a shadow is transient, contrasting the lower realm of the senses with the higher realm of the mind. In a positive way, a shadow retains the shape of the object that casts it, and it can therefore help one discern what is real. This ambivalence of the shadow is retained in the letter to the Hebrews. Positively, the ultimate reality furnished Moses with the pattern of the sanctuary so that the earthly tent was the counterpart of the heavenly one. Negatively, the earthly tent was transient and limited in its benefits.

An *εἰκὼν* (manifestation) usually refers to what is visible like images on a coin (Mark 12:16), statues and paintings (Ezek. 23:14). Plato (in Koester 2001: 430) called the world "a moving image (*εἰκὼν*) of eternity." Early Christians associated *εἰκὼν* with the glory that manifested the power and presence of the cosmic reality (1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:18). Although humankind was created in the image of the ultimate reality (Gen. 1:26), Jesus was uniquely identified as the image of the cosmic reality, since the ultimate reality was manifest in him (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15).

The contrasting of *σκιά* with *εἰκὼν* in the letter to the Hebrews is unique, since in philosophical writings these terms were synonyms. While Philo (in Koester 2001:431) uses *εἰκὼν* for incorporeal archetypes, the author of the letter to the Hebrews uses *εἰκὼν* to include the offering of the body of Jesus (10:10). The author uses *εἰκὼν* in a revelatory sense.

3.6.3.2 *Rhetorical Effects*

The old covenant side of the ledger (10:1-4) first contrasts the old and new as shadow and reality (10:1). Secondly, it reiterates the often-repeated criticism of the ineffectiveness of the old to cleanse the conscience (10:2), and thirdly, the inability of animal blood to remove sin (10:4). The added dimension is that the Levitical sacrificial system was an annual bringing of sin to consciousness (10:3).

Both Israel's prophets and Greco-Roman authors support the judgment against sacrificial practice (10:4). Pythagoras (in Koester 2001:438) "would not stain the altars with blood." The ultimate reality is "not to be worshiped with immolation or with much blood – for what pleasure is the slaughter of undeserving victims – but with pure mind, and good and upright intention." The wicked "do not escape impiety although they dye the altars with streams of blood."

The rejection of animal sacrifices (10:4) and the emphasis on obedience indicate that to the author animal sacrifices were merely external acts, since the ultimate reality desires obedience (Attridge 1989:275-276). Nevertheless, Hebrews 9:22 assumes that without blood there is no forgiveness of sin. Thus, while animal blood cannot remove sin, Jesus' blood does. The annual repetition of sacrifices is taken as a mark of ineffectiveness.

The author does not only argue for replacement of animal sacrifices with deeds of kindness, but also with obedience which first pertains to Jesus, whose obedient death achieved the cleansing of sin foreshadowed, but not achieved by the Levitical sacrificial system. As the critique of the Levitical sacrificial system intensifies, extended quotations confront the readers with Jesus' voice (10:5-7 is a *peshet* on Ps.39:7-9) and the later with God's voice (10:15-17 is a *peshet* on Jer.31:33-34).

DeSilva (2000:320) sees Hebrews 10:5-10 as developing a reading of this psalm in which Jesus is the implied speaker. It provides the author's need of a perfect solution, since it attributes to the ultimate reality decreeing the replacement of animal sacrificial system with Jesus' singular human sacrifice. The author believes that certain Scriptures find their true meaning when placed on Jesus' lips and that a latter word from the ultimate reality corrects, clarifies or nullifies an earlier one. Thus this psalm provides very strong scriptural support for the claim of putting aside the first sort of sacrifice in order to pave way for the second one. The opening phrase subtly sets the hermeneutic context for attributing Jesus as the speaker of the oracle. The second half of the psalm is left out, because it does not serve the author's argument.

Attridge (1989:274) observes that the psalmist contrasts the conventional sacrificial system of the temple with his/her own willing service. In contrast with this sacrificial system stand the expression for the personal response of the psalmist. The author of the letter to the Hebrews then exploits this

contrast of sacrifice and obedience. Attridge further points out that the LXX interpretive translation of “body” for “ears” serves the argument very well since Jesus’ obedience to the will of the ultimate reality was also an act that involves his body (10:10).

Attridge (1989:276) sees the entire reflection on Jesus’ sacrifice and the new covenant as coming to climax in 10:10, which is the focal point of the author’s argument. This verse resumes and integrates the thematic development of the central exposition. What have taken place in Jesus are the achievements of the will of the ultimate reality (*qelhvmati*).

Koester (2001:440) sees this verse as encapsulating the paradox of the cross and its relationship to the law. Numbers 19:11 says a dead human body does not sanctify, but defiles. Deut.21:22-23 states that the cross was defilement. If one “is executed and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under the curse of *the ultimate reality*.” Thus, under the Jewish law the cross was especially offensive. This was also true of the Greco-Roman world. The author of the letter to the Hebrews argues that if the law sanctifies, then the cross must be denied, but if the crucified Jesus sanctifies, then the law is supplanted. Thus, the author transformed this psalm from an oracle of commitment to please the ultimate reality through the obedience of the law into an oracle by which the will of the ultimate reality be fulfilled by Jesus’ self-sacrificial death.

Hebrews 10:11-14 provides a résumé of the exposition of Jesus’ priestly mediation, joining the principles that have governed the exposition since Hebrews 7:1. Though no new insights are introduced, Attridge (1989:279) contends that the repetition of familiar themes helps to reinforce the focal point of the central exposition. The author contrasts the priests, who stand daily officiating at their ineffective sacrifices with Jesus, who offered one effective sacrifice and then sat down. The author encapsulates centuries of Levitical practice in a single image, arguing that such continuous offering is a mark of ineffectiveness, since repetitive sacrifices “can never remove sins” (10:11c). The standing image of a priest is further contrasted with the seated image of Jesus (10:12).

True to the author’s christocentric reading of key Old Testament writings, Jesus first offered his life as the only acceptable sacrifice (Ps. 40:6-8), enters the holy place with his own blood (atonement and covenant inauguration rituals) and is then invited to sit down at the right hand of the ultimate reality (Ps. 110:1). According to DeSilva (2000:323), the author envisions Jesus’ priestly mediation as that which has completed its priestly mediation and Jesus could now “sit down permanently” with no need to engage in repeated cultic activity that require “standing”.

As such, the sacrificial act of Jesus is presumed to have achieved the desired effects for the God-human relationship. Hebrews 10:12-13 highlights the completeness of Jesus’ priestly work. The eschatological chord of Hebrews 9:26-28 is resumed by reference to the future subjugation of Jesus’

enemies. His second advent (9:28) will not only reward the faithful, but also subjugate the unfaithful, who are characterized as his enemies. Thus, DeSilva (2000:323) sees this as a welcome assurance for the vindication of Jesus and his faithful clients against those who opposed them and help for the wavering readers to remain with the Christian group. This was probably meant to be an effective strategy to keep the readers focused on Jesus and maintains group commitment. Consequently, Hebrews 10:14 is framed as a solution to Hebrews 10:1. While the continuous Levitical sacrifices are not able to perfect those coming close to the ultimate reality (10:1), Jesus has “by a single sacrifice perfected forever those who approach the ultimate reality through him (10:14).

To conclude the central exposition, Hebrews 10:15-18 shifts attention to the new promised covenant of Jeremiah 31:33-34. This is, in my view, the theological climax of the entire central exposition. Long (1997:103) observes that all what has been exposed since Hebrews 7:1 now comes to laser focus in 10:15-18. On account of the priestly work of our great high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled (7:26), the divide curtain shielding the Holy of Holies has been removed, thus opening the access to the living ultimate reality (10:17).

Hebrews 10:15 addresses the readers through the voice of the Spirit. This is not the first time the Spirit has become active in the lives of the readers. The Spirit vindicated the message of salvation the readers received in Hebrews 2:3-4 and 6:4-6. The Spirit brought them faith through the Scriptures and preaching of Jesus. The new covenant offers forgiveness of previous sins and transformation of people. The ultimate reality overcomes sins (10:17) by writing its laws on human hearts and minds (10:16), thus conforming them to its will. Readers can now approach the ultimate reality with confidence because it has been declared possible (10:17).

DeSilva (2000:324) sees Hebrews 10:15-18 as a reprise that serves as a sort of scriptural *Quod erat demonstrandum* (that which was to be substantiated) of the author’s exposition, which has shown how the prophetic oracle was fulfilled in Jesus’ sacrificial death and post-resurrection life. The author’s belief that the Spirit of the ultimate reality speaks through Old Testament writings is apparent in the introduction of Jeremiah 31:33-34 here as elsewhere. According to Jeremiah’s oracle, the inauguration of the new covenant means the ultimate forgiveness of sins.

The author has spent considerable time and space exposing Jesus as the sacrifice that inaugurates the new covenant, which brings ultimate cleansing of sins so that the cosmic reality will never ever remember them. True to the author’s design, certain components of Jeremiah 31:33-34 are left out because they do not serve the argument. The focal point is on inscribing the laws in their hearts and minds and on forgiveness of their sins.

In conclusion, Hebrews 10:18 rounds off Jeremiah's oracle by suggesting the ultimate significance of Jesus' sacrificial death. Since Jesus' sacrificial death provided the ultimate cleansing which makes possible the ultimate removal of sins, the Jeremiah promise not to remember sins and iniquities is rephrased in terms of their forgiveness (α[φεσι]). Because the ultimate reality has declared foregoing future remembrance of sins, there is no longer room for an offering for sin (10:18). Attridge (1989:282) notes that the verse recalls the exposition of Psalm 40:6-8 in Hebrews 10:8-9, where what the Levitical sacrificial system foreshadowed has been achieved by Jesus' unique and ever-effective sacrifice.

Koester (2001:441) points out the social implication of the author's insistence on the finality of Jesus' sacrifice. It establishes a unique ground for Christian life in an inter-religious society. With respect to Judaism, s/he concludes that the temple was now no longer of any effect for the Christians, since Jesus' self-sacrifice has put an end to the Levitical sacrifices.

Now I turn to Hebrews 13:15-16, where the writer(s) insisted on the continuation of the non-material sacrifice of Jesus. This is central to the entire letter to the Hebrews as it provides a reading grid through which the readers were to understand their own mission.

3.6.4 Spiritual Sacrifice: Hebrews 13:15-16

Goins (1990:9) observes that within the predominantly *paraenetic* context of chapter thirteen, the readers of the letter to the Hebrews are encouraged to repeatedly offer up "sacrifices of praise to the ultimate reality through Jesus" (v.15). This actually connects this passage to 9:1—10:18. According to Montefiore (1964:247), though this encouragement may be intended to be taken spiritually, the practical implications are mentioned in the subsequent verse in a way that defines the sacrificial concept as inclusive of good deeds and *κοινωνία* (v.16).

There is no doubt that the author's concept of spiritual or non-material sacrifice is derived from the Old Testament prophetic tradition, though also embedded in priestly discourse. Daly (1978:99-100) suggests three stages, which led to the spiritualization of sacrifice. The first stage is grounded in the preaching of the Old Testament prophets and their insistence that every ritual offering of a material sacrifice had to be accompanied by the appropriate religio-ethical disposition. The second stage is associated with a paradigm shift of emphasis, which attached more importance to the obedience of the one making the offering than to the actual ritual itself and this dated from approximately 200 BCE. The third stage is specifically Christian and entails the replacement of material sacrifices with ethical actions.

One should remember that the spiritualization of sacrificial activity was not unique to the Old Testament prophets. Everett Ferguson (1980:1152-1156) explains that spiritualization of sacrifices

is also attested in the works of Greco-Roman philosophers and poets. This being the case, the author of the letter to the Hebrews' debt to the Old Testament is evidenced by such a phrase as "the fruit of lips..." (v.15), which recalls Hosea 14:2. It is also evident that the author knew and appreciated the words of the Psalmist who rejected the need of the ultimate reality for the sacrifice of bulls and goats and admonished the Israelites to "offer to the ultimate reality a sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Psalm 50:12-14). Goins (1990:9) suggests that it is in the light of these Old Testament emphases that the author(s) calls every reader to offer that form of sacrifice which is still said to be pleasing to the cosmic reality: "the sacrifice of praise to the ultimate reality and service to humankind" (13:15-16).

3.7 AN EXPLANATION FOR THE SACRIFICIAL EMPHASIS IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Having examined the prominent use of sacrificial and cultic imagery in the letter to the Hebrews, it is important to explain these phenomena. It has been assumed that its author depicted the redemptive death of Jesus through cultic imagery in order to illustrate that by his death the Old Testament cultic institutions had been disqualified. It has also been assumed to remind the readers that Christians have no more need of temples, priests or sacrifices (Fiorenza 1976:170; Koester 2001:441). Others have suggested that the author was motivated to represent the Christian religion as the cult to end all cults. James Thompson (1979:576), for instance, has stated that the author was influenced by Hellenistic philosophy with its admiration for the metaphysical and its disdain for the material. Ronald Williamson (1974-75:311), on the other hand, believes that the author's polemic against material sacrifices was actually caused by a distrust of "physical media of grace," the most conspicuous instance of which was the Eucharist.

While the author of the letter to the Hebrews portrays the old covenant cultus as superseded, the writing does not indicate that the author found the concepts of priestly mediation, temple and sacrifice superfluous. Rather, the author's conviction regarding the continuity/discontinuity between the covenants makes it evident that Christians do have Jesus as their high priest (8:1), the heavenly sanctuary as their temple (10:19), and praise and good deeds as their sacrifices (13:15-16). C. F. D. Moule (1950:29) has suggested that, instead of serving as a means to distance the Christian religion from the issue of cultic, the sacrificial references were used as a response to those Jewish and non-Jewish critics who judged the Christian religion deficient because of its lack of a material cultus. Responding to this accusation, the author of the letter to the Hebrews contends that the Christian religion, indeed, has its own priest, temple and sacrifices. He argues that these are superior to those of the Jews and non-Jews, because their spiritual nature implies a permanence that any material cultus does not have.

Other theories that have been advanced to account for the sacrificial terminology in the letter to the Hebrews suffer from the same weaknesses apparent in the previous instances. Either they fail to account for the context as a whole or represent the author as a dispassionate theologian whose motivation was more polemical than pastoral. Four approaches that avoid these extremes are Attridge's *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (1989); Barnabas Landers's article on *The Rhetorical of Hebrews* (1989); DeSilva's *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (2000); and Koester's *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (2001). Their readings, which take seriously the rhetorical devices in the letter to the Hebrews, conclude that only deliberative rhetoric (see 3. 3. 1 above), which seeks to persuade an audience, corresponds to the writing scheme of the letter to the Hebrews.

The author is not writing in a vacuum. The author is seeking to diffuse a real and urgent pastoral problem as the references to apostasy attest (6:4-8). Apparently, some within this congregation had begun to neglect the services of worship (10:25), while yielding to the influences of "diverse and strange teachings" related to "food" (13:9). This congregation also demonstrated a reluctance to endure the abuse associated with membership of a group rejected by the religious establishment (13:13).

Although DeSilva (2000:294-295) is of the opinion that the exigency was not about reverting to Judaism, one could think otherwise. The above problems, in conjunction with the fact that the fulcrum of the letter to the Hebrew's argument concerns a contrast between the Levitical sacrificial system and the sacrifice of Jesus, make it more likely that some within the congregation were considering going back to Judaism. This led Lindars (1989:390) to identify the recipients as a Jewish Christian group, probably of the Diaspora, who had begun to manifest an inclination to return to the synagogue.

Some key references in the writing (1:3, 4:16, 9:9, 14, 10:2) help later readers to appreciate the readers' motivation for reverting to Judaism. There was the need for some means to cope with the consciousness of sin. A delayed *parousia* made the Levitical system of unlimited sacrifices an attractive expedient for recurrent post-baptismal sins. Responding to this need the author asserts that, while Jesus only provided one sacrifice for sin, its effects are permanent. A point of cardinal importance is that the author's argument for the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice takes "the Jewish practice of atonement as the standard to which any exposition of the permanent effectiveness of the sacrifice of Jesus must conform" (Lindars 1989:395). According to Lindars, the only logical explanation for this fact is that the readers are converts from Judaism and their understanding of the issues of sacrifice and atonement derives from an intimate familiarity with the old covenant cultus.

3.8 A VALUATION OF HEBREWS' USE OF SACRIFICIAL CONCEPTS

Having considered these sacrificial concepts in the letter to the Hebrews, we can now formulate certain conclusions that are suggested by the author's use and valuation of sacrificial concepts. It is evident that the author viewed the old covenant cultus with respect and appreciation. The new covenant is presented not as a novelty, but as the inner reality of the old covenant cultus. Dunnill (1992:228) argues that, though the heavenly is presented as more real than the earthly, employing physical language with all its possible risks describes it. Thus, the new covenant is described by deriving the necessary concreteness and numinous quality not from fantasy but from the real power of the old covenant cultus.

That the writing respects and appreciates the old covenant cultus is especially obvious in the references to the earthly sanctuary and the rituals performed there (vv.1-10). Westcott (1892:242) observed that:

(The author) seems indeed to linger over the sacred treasures of the past; and there is a singular pathos in the passage, which is unique in the New Testament. There was, he says, something majestic and attractive in the Mosaic ordinances of worship.

Such an attraction was grounded on something more substantial than mere form and appearance. Robert H. Smith (1984:107) observes that the author found within the old covenant cultus "a faint echo of eternal verities" (v.9), the contemplation of which would invariably lead the heart or mind upward. Moreover, the author was convinced that "regulations for the body (v.10) and ritual cleansing" (v.13) were effective at least in the accomplishment of their limited purposes. Rather than grounding his case for the superiority of the new covenant by denigrating or demonizing its predecessor, the author asserts that in its time the old covenant cultus was efficacious.

More support for the preceding point is seen in the fact that the author portrays the relationship between the salvific work of Jesus and the sacrificial rituals of the Old Testament as one of both continuity and discontinuity. The letter to the Hebrews is a conscious re-reading of the whole of the Levitical sacrificial system. The author claims to understand the Levitical sacrificial system better. For instance, the atonement ritual in the letter to the Hebrews represents a radical re-reading of the whole of this tradition.

Goins (1990:10) warns that, though the new covenant with its one final sacrifice is presented as superior to the old covenant cultus with its repetitive sacrifices, this should not obscure the fact that it is the correspondence between the two that makes the claim of superiority tenable. The new covenant can be said to be superior to the old covenant only because it is more successful in seeking to achieve the purposes through similar means of sacrifice.

This question of continuity/discontinuity and correspondence may illuminate the puzzling question of the author's choice not to contrast the work of Jesus with the old covenant rituals as they were practised in the Jerusalem temple. Koester (2001:401) argues that the tent-like sanctuary described in (9:1) had ceased to be used centuries before this writing was composed, though the biblical statutes concerning the sanctuary retained its importance for Jewish identity.

Those scholars who favour a post-70 CE date of composition have been asked to explain the author's failure to appeal to the demise of the Jerusalem temple as evidence for the suppression of the old covenant cultus (Attridge 1989:6-7). According to Dinkler (2:573), some have suggested that the author was a Diaspora Jew who was ignorant of the temple cultus, but who was able to speak knowledgeably of the tabernacle because of a familiarity with the Pentateuch.

No matter what date is assigned to the letter to the Hebrews, it is possible that the omission of any reference to the temple in it was deliberate. Bruce (1962-63:228-229) argues that it has been established that the Essenes of Qumran and other Jewish sectarian groups found the temple sacrifices unclean, because they were administered by unworthy and corrupt priesthood. It is possible that this author shared this conviction or was at least aware of it. Under these circumstances, the author could not be expected to argue for the superiority of Jesus' sacrificial work on the ground of a correspondence held to be the ritual observances of a perverted priesthood. Goins (1990:11) argues that, in an attempt to preserve the value of the old covenant cultus while pressing for the superiority of the new covenant cultus, the author asserts that the sacrificial offering of Jesus corresponds with but nevertheless supersedes the old covenant cultus in its purest form as it was practised in the wilderness tabernacle in obedience to the law of the ultimate reality.

This correspondence is carried so faithfully that it is possible to see in this writing a representation of the sacrificial offering of Jesus that has no parallel in the whole of the New Testament. For instance, some have argued on the ground of v.12 that it was not on the cross that Jesus secured the redemption of humankind, but in the heavenly Holy of Holies only after he had offered his own blood. The basis for this stance lies in the author's teaching on Jesus' priestly mediation. As Walter Brooks (1970:206-207) notes, Jesus was not declared to be a (high) priest on the ground of his birthright (7:14), but only became a priest "by the power of an indestructible life" (7:16), a reference Brooks regards as an allusion to the resurrection.

According to Brooks (1970:208), it was only after he was raised from the dead and was exalted to the right hand of the ultimate reality that he began his priestly functions (8:4). He contends that, since the offering of sacrifice is a central element of the priestly office, it is therefore inconceivable that the sacrificial offering of Jesus could have been made before the resurrection.

More support for this view is found in the work of F. C. N. Hicks (1930:12), who asserts that under the Levitical sacrificial system it was the sinner who killed the victim, not the priest. It was only after the slaughter of the victim that the work of the priest began.

More appeal is made to v.12 which states that “he entered once for all in the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (RSV). F. F. Bruce (1964:200-202), professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University, rejects the notion that this verse can be used to justify the idea that Jesus took his blood into the heavenly sanctuary, because that would mean that the expiatory work of Jesus was not confined to the cross. In his opinion, the preposition $\delta\iota\alpha$ must be read in the sense of ‘through’ so that Jesus is said to have entered the heavenly sanctuary ‘through’ or ‘on the basis’ of his own blood. However, Brooks (1970:210-211) points out that the same preposition is used in the preceding clause, where surely the author does not intend to state that the Levitical high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the atonement ritual merely “on the basis” of animal blood.

Philip Hughes (1973:210) argues against a reading of v.12 that would locate the completion of Jesus’ redemptive work in the heavenly sanctuary. According to Hughes, the aorist particle $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\rho\alpha\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron$ in the last phrase of v.12 should be translated ‘having secured’ so that Jesus is read to have entered the Holy of Holies only after he had already secured redemption at the cross. Attridge (1989:248-249), however, seems to be correct when he identifies $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\rho\alpha\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron$ as a coincident aorist, which should not be forced to indicate antecedent action.

It would appear that Bruce’s and Hughes’s arguments in regard to v.12 are not persuasive. As Roger L. Omanson (1985:368) observes, they seem to reflect more “the pedantic mind of the interpreter than the creative mind of the author of the letter to the Hebrews.” Hebrews 9:12 seems to say just as animal blood made entrance into the Holy of Holies possible for the Levitical high priest, so his own sacrificial blood permitted Jesus to enter the heavenly Holy of Holies, where he was then able to secure eternal redemption (Thornton 1964:63-65). According to Goins (1990:13), such a reading is in tune with the author of the letter to the Hebrews’ notable paucity of references to the cross (12:2) and the fact that the exaltation of Jesus is given more emphasis than the resurrection.

The source of the author’s focus on the vital importance of blood is another conclusion suggested by the references to sacrificial concepts. It is evident that the emphasis on sacrificial blood as a purifying agent may be attributed to the influence of the Old Testament. William Manson (1951:134) notes that,

No explanation at all is offered why the sanctification of the worshipper, the removal of his [sic] guilt, the expiation of his [sic] sin, and the atonement of his [sic] soul to God should be made

dependent on the blood of sacrifice. That necessity is assumed. It is something given. It is a thing inseparable from the age-long history of grace in Israel.

The author's exclusive argument for the cleansing power of blood puts him/her in the class of the rabbis, Philo, the author of Jubilee 6:1-14 and others who simply accepted at face value the words of Leviticus 17:11 that "it is the blood that makes atonement".

In conclusion, it should be noted that, though the author sees the salvific work of Jesus as rendering the old covenant cultus obsolete, the language of sacrifice has still retained its pertinence (13:15-16). Notwithstanding some who consider the maintenance of sacrificial terminology as indicative of the author's attempt to perpetuate a cultus which operates outside the area of the cultic (Attridge 1989:401), it is more likely that the influence of the Old Testament and the idea of continuity/discontinuity between the covenants is responsible for the application of sacrificial concepts to the Christian worship. Nevertheless, the author has invested that terminology with new meaning. Goins (1990:14) argues that, while 'sacrifice' once described the only Jewish means to an imperfect and limited access to the ultimate reality, it now connotes the praise rendered by Christians to Jesus who has made open access to the ultimate reality an endless reality.

3.9 SUMMARY

Although the author of the letter to the Hebrews accepts the Levitical sacrificial system to effect external cleansing (Lev. 16:30), s/he believes that fuller, internal cleansing still awaits the people. The Levitical sacrificial system continually left the worshipers outside the holy place, a mark to the author of their inability to cleanse the conscience. Since they remained unclean in their conscience, they could not come into the presence of the ultimate reality. The notion of perfection, which runs through Hebrews 7-10, is linked to this divine purpose. On the one hand, the law was not able to perfect those coming near to the ultimate reality since it failed to achieve the cleansing of their conscience so that they can stand in the presence of the ultimate reality (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1). The endless repetition of the "same sacrifices" was a demonstration of their inefficacy (10:1-4, 11).

The ultimate reality promised to remove sins from its memory by writing upon the human mind and heart the way to please it in the new promised covenant of Jeremiah. The author finds in the atonement ritual and the ratification of the Mosaic covenant the language to express the significance of Jesus' death as a sacrifice that inaugurates the new promised covenant of Jeremiah.

Jesus' taking on of flesh and blood, his offering of that body and his ascension into the heavenly realm is characterized as the witness that sins that defiled the conscience were removed, thus restoring fully the favour of the cosmic reality to the worshippers. The worshippers are finally cleansed to come into the presence of the ultimate reality (10:19-25). The Jesus event achieved both the removal of the obstacles to access to the ultimate reality and the writing of its way upon human

mind and heart, thus cleansing the worshippers from “dead works” and equipping them to “serve the living ultimate reality” (9:14).

The author grounded the Jesus event in the writings of the Old Testament. Though in terms of access to the ultimate reality the old covenant is obsolete (8:12), the “oracles of the ultimate reality” remain the grounds for legitimizing and comprehending the new covenant. Thus, the forward-looking Levitical sacrificial system legitimizes Jesus’ death as obligatory in the cosmic reality’s divine plan, the fruition of shadowy revelations (DeSilva 2000:328). Thus, the Levitical sacrificial system or Judaism was considered a *praeparatio evangelica* to the Christian religion.

The oracle of Psalm 40:6-8 is re-read as the ultimate reality replacing the Levitical sacrificial system, because of its inadequacy and as the preparation of a body for Jesus with which to achieve its will in perfecting the people and bringing them into the promised rest. A re-reading of Psalm 110 provides the completeness and permanent effectiveness of Jesus’ sacrifice, after which he “sat down” at the right hand of the ultimate reality. Thus the author of the letter agrees with Judaism that the old covenant contains the abiding revelation of the will of the ultimate reality, though s/he develops a radical re-reading to show how the Christian faith enjoys the true fulfilment of that revelation.

The nobility of Jesus’ death and achievement is suggested in ways recognizable as an encomium to reinforce the readers’ admiration and gratitude toward Jesus. The development of a lengthy exposition of the unsurpassed advantages enjoyed by the readers because of Jesus’ priestly mediation is deliberative. The readers enjoy the cleansing of conscience and direct access to the ultimate reality. DeSilva (2000:328-329) contends that the author exhorts the readers to weigh the advantages against the disadvantages of returning to their former faith, as well as the danger and loss that the dissociation from Jesus and Christian groups would entail against the continued endurance of the opposition from sinners

This central exposition is designed to impel readers/hearers closer to the throne of grace and to counter any centrifugal forces enticing them to exchange such unsurpassed advantages for external humiliation and exclusion from favour. As DeSilva (2000:329) argues, in this way the author equipped them ideologically to sustain their socio-cultural existence as a unique subculture.

Now I turn to a philosophical thought pattern and worldview orientations associated with a postcolonial reading paradigm.

CHAPTER FOUR

READING SACRIFICIAL CONCEPTS IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS FROM A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

A basic block inhibiting such leaps is fear of becoming “out of control”...the question that is masked/unmasked is “Out of whose control?”

-Daly

4.1 INTRODUCTION

How successful was the author of the letter to the Hebrews in achieving the intended goal? Judging from Christian history, the author appears to have been quite successful. The author of the letter to the Hebrews stood out as a great genius and his/her writing provided the very important ideological propaganda for the Christian religion (cf. Fiorenza 1976:3-6). The letter to the Hebrews has had such a profound ideological influence on the course of modern Christian history. The text of Hebrews became the emblem of all that was new, original and unsettling in this Common Era (see Chapter Six for its imitation by Euro-American missionaries). According to Hick and Knitter (1987:16), so strong was the image it created that since the time it was written, there has been an assumption of Christian supersessionism.

The above conviction led to a number of Euro-American missionaries being sent all over the world “to save souls.” It was an unchallenged assumption that the Christian belief was to spread throughout the world, replacing non-Christian beliefs (Richter 1913:540). The Christian belief was characterized as being in opposition to non-Christian beliefs and to be the only way, the only truth and the only life (Dewick 1953:39).

The letter to the Hebrews became one of the theoretical instrumentations for Euro-American insistence on the superiority and finality of Jesus and, subsequently, the Christian belief system. The author’s rhetorical strategy has been seen as having meaning external to the self-understanding and faith experience of the community, which believes it (Ariarajah 1985:3-12).

Unfortunately, the author’s interest in establishing the superior quality and results of Jesus’ priestly mediation over what s/he claims to be a limitation and obstacle to direct access to the ultimate reality under the Levitical priestly mediation has never been seen as an ideological act of expressing the inadequacy of other ideologies simply to promote a sustained commitment to the Christian ideological stance as superior (Fiorenza 1976:3-6). In my view, this was an ideologically motivated presentation of the Levitical priestly mediation, which for its participants may have been spiritually satisfying and more than a mere annual reminder of sins.

The exclusive statements about Jesus' priestly mediation in the letter to the Hebrews (9:1—10:18) - though made in the language of faith and ought to be understood within the context of the Church's faith commitment - have been turned into absolute truths on the basis of which Christian people measure the truth or otherwise of other faith-claims (Ariarajah 1985:13-18). We do not live in a world where one proclaims absolute truths and upholds them. Turning them into absolute truths has resulted in what Dube (1998) calls a "colonizing ideology."

Moreover, Euro-American colonial reading of the ultimate reality as dogmatic is, in my view, a misrepresentation of the ultimate reality. There is a need for an alternative reading, which could possibly establish inclusive conditions for people to speak and listen to one another, and which could guard against domination and exclusivity. As modern society becomes more complex and diverse, Christian supersessionism on the basis of the concept of Jesus is becoming increasingly less plausible and has become obsolete and no longer makes sense to a lot of people, including the Mbire people of Zimbabwe (cf. Sullivan 2002:118; see also 6.4.3 below).

Christian claims to absolute truths about the ultimate reality should be rejected altogether. Firstly, the assumption that in the bible the ultimate reality has nothing to do with people of other faiths (e.g. Hosea's condemnation of Cananite fertility cults or some exclusivist sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John and those made by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews) should be rejected. Secondly, the opposite of it (e.g. Speculations on the "Cosmic Christ" in the prologues to the Gospel of John and of the letter to the Hebrews or the "Christ incognito" based on passages in the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians) should be rejected as well (Ariarajah 1985:3-18).

Christian people should always keep in mind that there are other witnesses to the ultimate reality different from the one that emerges from the bible in general and the letter to the Hebrews in particular. Such a conceptualisation widens our vision to know that the religious laws set by religious traditions are not the boundaries within which the ultimate reality operates. The ultimate reality treats all people on the same basis (cf. Jonah and Acts 10).

This chapter consists of seven parts. The first section makes some introductory remarks with respect to a postcolonial paradigm. This is followed by an examination of its legacy. The third section discusses the resistant nature of a postcolonial paradigm, while the fourth section examines the ideological use of cultural writings in building and sustaining colonial motives, with a critical review of evidence from both ancient Rome and modern Euro-America. This will be followed by examining the ideological use of biblical writings in Euro-American colonization of Africa in the fifth section. The sixth section re-reads the sacrificial concepts in the letter to the Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 from a postcolonial perspective. An examination of the role and nature of

biblical writings in colonial projects will follow this. The chapter concludes with a synoptic summary of the argument.

4.2 POSTCOLONIAL PARADIGM: A PRICELESS LEGACY

Any great discovery in archaeology as in science sets bells ringing down all the corridors of the world. Inevitably, rash statements are made and great temerarious theories advanced. Time gives perspective, the dust is beginning to settle and people can see a little more clearly the real bearing of a postcolonial paradigm.

A number of Euro-American conservative scholars who still cling with blind and touching devotion to the inerrability of a colonial paradigm have subjected the postcolonial paradigm to fierce and vitriolic attacks (see Moore-Gilbert 1998:11-14). These scholars believe that a postcolonial paradigm is a subtle attempt to debase and deprave the pure word of the ultimate reality. This charge can too readily be listened to by simple Christians, whose love of the bible is greater than their understanding of the problems, which the bible presents (Chimeri 1998:75).

In my view, the history of scholarship over the period has seriously misled people on this point. It is absurd to imagine that just because a large number of Euro-American scholars happen to have moved from source to form and to redaction criticism that this is the natural, logical and correct way of proceeding (Pobee 1989:2-3). The idea that the Euro-American colonial theoretical line carried automatic evaluative judgements should now be regarded as decidedly outdated. In Zimbabwe, as in other developing contexts, it has lost much of its power in personal and social transformation (cf. Kurehwa 2000:10-12). By detaching the texts from Mbire life, biblical reading has become trapped in the abyss of an objectified past where the ideology of objectivism has made the researcher accountable primarily to the Euro-American guild of scholars (Pobee 1989:2-3). Thus, many of the questions asked of the biblical texts are not those being asked by Mbire people (cf. Imathiu 2001:29).

The dilemma facing Euro-American colonial scholarship is largely the result of an absence of a real-life context that would serve as a galvanizing orientation point of the research effort (Mosala 1989). The bracketing off of the day-to-day socio-political, socio-economic and socio-religious crisis in Zimbabwe has not only made much of Euro-American biblical scholarship largely irrelevant to the Mbire context, but as Pobee (1989:2-4) argues, it has also the effect of distancing the reading of the bible, entrenching the idea that the bible is the property of Euro-American people and their academy.

A considerable number of what had come to be regarded by various Euro-American people as established principles have been challenged by a postcolonial paradigm. As I have argued elsewhere

(Chimeri 1998), much of what has been done in recent years will be found to be in need of revision. Scholars may find it prudent in future to test more carefully the foundation for any statement they wish to make as to the relations between language and theology.

It is much more difficult to trace the mysterious process by which a whole climate of opinion changes, current solutions no longer satisfy, old forgotten searchings are unearthed anew and a range of fresh questions asked about familiar themes. Such a change never takes place suddenly. Certain restlessness prevails. A feeling of frustration, a sense of having reached the limit beyond which certain lines of investigation are no longer fruitful perplexes the thinker. Then some hand touches a switch. A new door is opened. New perspectives of thought are revealed. Study and investigation renew their vigour and can be prosecuted with hope of fresh illumination. This opens up the door to a period of adventurous discovery.

A colonial paradigm is irrevocably dated. It belongs to a period and expresses an outlook with which postcolonial people can no longer identify. Now the time has come for a concerted effort to rewrite the many stories of reading, to understand what it is really all about and to pose new questions. This study attempts to meet this challenge.

A postcolonial paradigm has great strengths and is ruthlessly honest. It goes in search of a hypothesis, finds one, which is simply in a different league from anything offered by a colonial paradigm and asks crucial questions. A postcolonial paradigm stimulates, even by its negations, a vital interest in aspects of reading and theology, which have been neglected to our loss. All this remains an obligation, which even its critics must thankfully acknowledge. A colonial paradigm has reached a point of development at which it is no longer possible to play tricks with colonized peoples. A new epoch in the field of reading has opened. What we see in a postcolonial paradigm is a radical challenge to most colonial insights.

A postcolonial paradigm as a part of a priceless legacy which scholarship has bequeathed to the twenty-first century calls for closer and more extensive attention than it has hitherto received. I am amazed at the lightness with which it is being dismissed or altogether ignored by most Mbire scholars in particular. Postcolonial values could make a new approach to the ultimate reality possible and open new spaces for theology. Postcolonial values are, in my view, much more appropriate than colonial values with their one-sided emphasis on reason and on linear thinking within a closed view of the world, which insists on absolutes and binding laws (Sugirtharajah 1999:15).

4.3 RESISTANT READING

According to Best and Kellner (1991:1), throughout the social science circles in both Euro-American and non-Euro-American cultures and societies, there is a dramatic shake-up and realignment of ideas and theories as a result of the forceful postmodern and postcolonial whirlwinds, which are sweeping through and challenging the very ontological and epistemological bases of all major paradigms, ranging from liberal-humanism to eco-feminism.

There are many competing schools of thought claiming a postcolonial paradigm for themselves (see Moore-Gilbert 1998:5; Sugirtharajah 1998:15). In my effort to investigate this term, I will focus on the resistant reading aspect of a postcolonial paradigm. This resistant reading is a challenge and rejection of colonialism. Belief in historical and cultural variability, fallibility, the impossibility of getting beyond language to reality, the fragmentary and particular nature of all understanding, the pervasive corruption of knowledge by power and domination, and the need for a pragmatic approach to the whole issue characterizes a postcolonial paradigm as an intellectual moment in the academy (Chimeri 1998:6).

The great masters of suspicion (Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as quoted by Chimeri 1998:6) challenged a colonial reading of the enlightened rational thinker as mythical and even illusory. They contend that the enlightened rational thinker was neither as autonomous nor as critical as his/her pronouncements suggested, but was living out a myth, whose destructive innocence has damaged recent history and obscured actual situations of radical limitation and need for social and individual liberation. These illusions are indeed responsible for the oppressive horrors of the 20th century (Chimeri 1998:6). A postcolonial paradigm has provided a demystifying critique of a colonial paradigm's basic assumptions about knowledge and action.

A postcolonial paradigm has to do primarily with a new view of the nature of reading processes (Sugirtharajah 1998:16-17). A colonial reading intended to replace pre-colonial givenness of reading from the hands of institutional authorities with various ideas of the autonomy of reading. For example, autonomous readings were based on the data of the senses (empiricism), or coherent and speculative thought (rationalism), or special qualities of consciousness (romanticism). Authority lies in science or logic, experience, or feelings for a colonial (modern) reading (cf. Chimeri 1998:7). A postcolonial reading, on the other hand, throws off all givenness of reading, claiming that all reading arises in a historical process, namely in the interplay between the object that reads us and we who read the object. Reality is reading. Ideas of meaning and truth are constructed by readings, and readings read nothing but earlier readings.

The signified is always another signifier; the author is the product of his or her texts; every writing is a rereading; every reading a rewriting, and so forth...There is nothing absolutely primary to be

interpreted since fundamentally everything is already interpretation; every sign is...but the interpretation of other signs (as referred to by Chimeri 1998:7).

The main agenda of a postcolonial reading is the relativization of norms and values of what used to be certainties that are associated with a colonial reading (Fuery and Mansfield 2000:118). As Achille *et al.* argue (as quoted by Chimeri 1998:8), bent on undercutting colonial foundations for any clear and certain knowledge by some correlation of the mind with objective reality, a postcolonial reading emphasizes the power of the imagination to construct a world linguistically. There is no one reality but many realities, which the mind constructs through language. The results are a pluralizing of social and ethical issues, stemming from an impossibility of reaching a binding legitimization of truth on the ground of reason.

A number of Euro-American biblical scholars/theologians are unaware that they have intellectual habits, which postcolonial critics might question. For instance, one of the principal characteristics of my previous colonial reading of the sacrificial concepts in the letter to the Hebrews was the bracketing off the ideological question. A number of Euro-American colonial readings of the letter to the Hebrews typically do not see it as an ideological missionary endeavour (e.g. my colleagues in Chapter Three). It is read as a product of doctrinal, especially christological controversy, and not as a missionary writing to promote the Christian religion and to proclaim Jesus in the ideological language and pattern of the time (Fiorenza 1976:2). Thus, the public-societal dimension of this piece of writing is often absorbed into a congregational-confessional framework.

A further characteristic of my previous colonial reading is its failure to inquire whether this writing reflects any conflict and competition in the face of the Roman colonial context (see my previous chapter). Its focus only on the internal conflicts of the colonized people without suggesting the presence of colonial Rome serves to conceal the exploitation and oppressiveness of colonial Rome on its subject peoples. It lacks respect for the characteristics of the genre of apocalyptic material and the nature of the letter as a whole. Dube (1998:131) argues that this failure to keep colonial Rome in view as a central catalyst and player unwittingly maintains the structures of oppression in the past, the present and the future.

Furthermore, Euro-American colonial reading jealously guards the boundaries, insisting on reading this text within its context without relating it to present global politico-economics. Dube (1998:131) further contends that it is unwilling to cross the borderline of the ancient context and critically assess how this writing informs present global structures of power relation.

Lastly, it is a characteristic of most Euro-American Christian people to read this text in isolation from other secular colonial writings. This serves actually to maintain and perpetuate the colonial power of Euro-America over the non-Euro-American world (cf. Dube 1998:131).

These are some of the problematic characteristics of my previous colonial reading in the letter to the Hebrews in particular and the current academic intellectual world in general. Though some people submit that this is a post-age era, most intellectuals and academics continue to function comfortably along colonial lines (Donaldson 1996:6). This is where a postcolonial reading differs from a colonial reading. A postcolonial reading refuses to disregard the yeast of the colonial context in the letter to the Hebrews, nor to abstract it from present global structures. It refuses also to read this writing in isolation from other secular colonial writings.

Postcolonial readings of the letter to the Hebrews hold that the methodological approach of exalting Jesus to pre-existent settings, to divine status and to superiority above all Jewish cultural figures of note is a colonizing ideology. Adam (1995:22) points out that the assumptions biblical readers make are not eternal truths, but are habits that they have gotten into after an earlier long period in which they had different habits. The impetus toward a postcolonial reading came when critics began to see some of these habits as unnecessary and others as downright bad.

Attridge (1989:55) argues that the reason for emphasizing at every point the superiority of Jesus' priestly mediation over the Levitical priestly mediation is to make the mediation of Jesus more real to the readers/hearers in an attempt to establish Jesus' significance for both present and future readers/hearers by indicating the superiority of the Son to any other agent of the purposes of the ultimate reality.

One might wonder about the contribution of this postcolonial reading to a conversation that has already been significantly advanced by a host of witnesses such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), Dube's *Reading for Decolonization John 4:1-42* (1996) and *Savior of the World but not of This World* (1998), Donaldson's *Postcolonialism and Biblical Reading: An Introduction* (1996), Sugirtharajah's *A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction in Biblical Interpretation* (1998) and *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (1999), and various other scholars who have made a postcolonial paradigm their area of specialization.

Though these scholars have produced major works and articles on a postcolonial paradigm, not one postcolonial treatment of the motif of superiority in the letter to the Hebrews has been written that I am aware of so far. Moreover, very few postcolonial critics have attempted the appropriation of this paradigm to a piece of writing. But even those few who have applied this paradigm to a piece of writing, such as Dube (Matthew and John) and Sugirtharajah (Matthew), have not applied it to the motif of superiority in the letter to the Hebrews. In the whole postcolonial enterprise, no one has attempted to understand the significance of Jesus' superiority in the letter to the Hebrews by coming

to terms with its silencing of the Jewish religion in particular and its implications on non-Christian religions in general. Yet, it is this distinctive characteristic which postcolonial scholarship has chosen to ignore.

My debt to Musa Dube's magisterial works in particular and others in general will be evident throughout this chapter as her 1996, 1998 and 2001 postcolonial readings of John are foundational resources for my postcolonial reading of the letter to the Hebrews. My choice of Dube is deliberate. However, this does not in any way imply that I agree with her in everything. We have our areas of differences as well. Nevertheless, these differences should not blind us from learning from one another.

My choice of Dube by no means belittles the contributions of other postcolonial scholars. The enormous contribution of other postcolonial scholars such as Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Donaldson, Sugirtharajah and many others cannot and should not be dismissed as of any consequence. My choice of Dube has to do with our sharing of similar context as Africans. I found her postcolonial reading more relevant to my Mbire context.

4.4 IDEOLOGICAL USE OF CULTURAL WRITINGS

Ahmad (2003:1) defines colonialism as "domination, oppression, hegemony, suppression, coercion, as well as all forms of imposition of will or ideas on the other in all kinds of situations." He asserts that the term refers to one nation dominating another and to unhealthy power relations and unhealthy practices stemming from the abuse of power, in other contexts, sometimes within the same nation or society. Dube (1996:38) defines it as an ideological expansion, which takes various forms and methods at various times and which seeks to impose its languages, trade, religions, democracy, images, economic systems and political rule on foreign peoples. Mudimbe (1988:1-2) defines it as taking possession of the colonised people's lands, minds, cultures, economics and political institutions and the rearrangement of these according to the interests and values of the colonizing people.

Thus, colonialism entails the control of foreign geographical spaces and peoples. It concerns a relationship of domination and subordination between various countries and peoples with the sole aim of suppressing diversity and promoting a few universal standards for the benefit of the colonizing people. Dube (1996:38) lists these relationships as colonizer-colonized, ruler-ruled, centre-periphery and *developed-developing* and argues that these relationships, though closely related, are not equal and that these are the relationships, which define the present global relations.

Ideological use of cultural writings in building and sustaining colonial motives can be traced as far back as the Babylonian king Hammurapi, who proclaimed himself "King of the Four Corners of the

World” (Dube 1996:38). Since then there has been a chain of successors in Assyria, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman and Euro-American colonial rules. Dube (1996:38) tells of the Roman emperors, who in a tradition akin to that of Hammurapi, proclaimed themselves as “Saviours of the World”. Of interest is the significance of the categories of “world”, “king” and “saviour” in colonial projects. She defines the categories of “world” as symbolizing the claim to unlimited access to foreign geographical spaces; “king” as symbolizing the claim of power by certain persons over unlimited geographical spaces and peoples; and “saviour” as symbolizing insidious power which carries a colonial ideology and which depicts its violence as a redeeming act for the advantage of the colonized people. This brings me to the Roman example.

4. 4.1 Roman Ideological Use of Cultural Writings

An ancient instance of the ideological use of cultural writings in building and sustaining colonial motives – and one that informs the letter to the Hebrews – is Roman colonial rule. The epic of *Aeneid* best illustrates the centrality of cultural writings in colonialism. It mythologizes the birth of Roman colonial rule. The mythological founding ancestor of Roman colonial rule, Aeneas, is assured of his position in a scene where his ships had been wrecked at Carthage (Dube 1998:122):

The creator of gods and humankind smiled...and then spoke... “You shall exalt to the stars of Heaven your son Aeneas...To Romans I set no boundary in space or time. I have granted them dominion, and it has no end...I will foster the nation, which wears the toga, the Roman nation, masters of the world. My decree is made”.

In her reading of the *Aeneid* Dube (1998:123) lists certain factors central to constructing colonizing persons as divine and in relation to physical space. Aeneas is first characterized as exalted “to the stars of Heaven”. Such characterization puts him beyond ordinary humankind and equates him with divinity. Second, Aeneas’ greatness as the founding ancestor of the Romans is characterized in relation to physical space: “The creator of gods” declares “To Romans; I set no boundary in space or time!” The Romans are declared “masters of the world”. As in the case with their ancestor father Aeneas, this characterization puts the Romans above earthly spaces and legitimizes colonial possession of the world.

This, in my view, is the best instance of a cultural writing that legitimizes and promotes colonial motives. In turn, this epic became a conquest strategy for the Romans and subsequently for Euro-American colonialists. According to Dube (1996:39), the travels and triumphs of epic heroes, the characterization of epic heroes as favoured by divine powers, and the negative characterization of foreign spaces and peoples have furnished colonial travellers of various centuries and various colonial rules with a language of representing every land and people until the advent of the novel and the subsequent decline of the epic. She contends that a large number of Euro-American colonial

heroes drew their inspiration to endure travel dangers, regarding themselves as divinely favoured, chosen and destined to conquer at all costs from these epic characters and plots.

In colonialism, colonizing¹³ people's cultures are used to maintain power over the colonized people (Ocallaghan 1977:134). Colonialism entails elaborate programmes of colonizing the conquered people. Colonial governments established networks of roads and sprinkled cities throughout the colonized lands from which to radiate the colonizing cultures. These cities were built at strategic points to serve as both administrative centres and to provide a focus as beacons of the colonizing cultures in foreign lands. Colonial governments pursued programmes of instilling a sense of pride in the colonizing civilisation (Mudimbe 1994:105-153).

Blunt (1994:15-19) argues that such cultural programmes served to tame both the physical and mental spaces of the colonized people. He maintains that the categories of travelling and travellers are never neutral. Colonial travellers have one sole aim of subjugating foreign spaces and peoples. Foreign spaces and peoples are remoulded through cultural writings and through structures like cities, gymnasiums, market and others (Mudimbe 1994:105-153). This brings me to the subsequent use of this conquest strategy by Euro-America.

4. 4.2 Euro-American Ideological Uses of Cultural Writings

A modern instance of the ideological use of cultural writings in building and sustaining colonial motives and the one that informs our time is Euro-American colonial rule. Here the epic of *Heart of Darkness* best demonstrates this exercise. It also mythologizes the genesis of Euro-American colonial rules. Once more Dube's postcolonial reading of the *Heart of Darkness* serves my purpose. Kurtz, the mythological master colonizer, who is supposedly the product of all Euro-America, was to be removed by force from Africa. He is characterized as follows:

He looked at least seven feet long...I saw him open his mouth wide...as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him....

I had ...to invoke him...himself...his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the very earth. Confound the man! He had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air...stare...was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness (as quoted by Dube (1998:122).

In a tradition akin to her reading of the *Aeneid*, Dube (1998:122) lists similar factors central to the construction of space, subjects and colonialism. Firstly, colonizing people are characterized as being larger than life. Kurtz is described as seven feet in height and, like Aeneas, his humanity also

¹³ See Explanation of Terms

borders on the divine. Kurtz's divinity is even more elaborate than that of Aeneas as he is characterized as the "voice" and at his funeral, the narrator comments "it was as though a veil had rent" (as quoted by Dube 1998:123), which evokes Jesus' death. Secondly, Kurtz's exalted status is characterized in relation to space as well: He has "kicked himself loose of the very earth; he has kicked the very earth to pieces; there was nothing above or below him!" Dube rightly argues that this power to kick free of earth, the power to have nothing either above or below someone illustrates the art of drawing colonizing maps. The colonizing people are characterized as above the limitations of boundaries, to have kicked themselves free from the earth in order to "swallow...all the earth." Euro-American colonizing people acting out Kurtz's artistry in Africa are characterized as free from the earth for the sole aim of legitimizing their claims over the entire African world.

Consequently, most Euro-American countries established colonial rules in every part of the known world (Thomas 1994). Their colonial strategies disguised military and economic greed under the smoke screen of evangelical zeal, moral rhetorical claims, and technological, racial and cultural claims of superiority (Lind 1995:31). Though colonized peoples have since attained their so-called independence, Ngungi (1993:12-13) argues that these formerly colonized peoples are experiencing a new kind of colonialism commonly called neo-colonialism or globalization. Lind (1995:31) defines globalization as a process that created a single, international financial market and has landed ex-colonized economies with huge debts and worse situations than in an old colonial era. It is also an instance of a new kind of colonialism, which excludes geographical occupation.

William and Chrisman (1993:273) observe that this new kind of colonialism manifests itself mostly in military, media and ecological and economic domination by ex-colonial countries. Euro-American transnational corporations spearhead this globalization. In this manner, the colonized countries seem to retain their own political jurisdiction.

It is no secret that colonialism has affected and continues to affect people on a global scale. The manner in which colonizing people and colonized people relate to each other and the manner in which their cultural and politico-economic institutions are structured are tied inseparably to colonial strategies, which have been employed to control foreign spaces and peoples (Dube 1996:41). Boehmer (1995:47) argues that various Euro-American colonizing people employed old and familiar writings to tame the new foreign spaces. She contends that writing was made an art of tapping

the energy of metaphoric borrowings and reproductions within the wider tradition of colonial romance and adventure writing. Motifs of shipwreck, resourceful settlement and cultivation, treasure, slaves, and the fear of cannibalism resurfaced time and again in the boys' story...the pairing of white master and black slave/servant became an unquestioned commonplace.

This web of inter-writing production was accompanied by a reproduction of certain cultural symbols and structures (architecture, plantations, magic lanterns, foods, clothes, names) of Euro-American origin, which were transferred to the colonized world (Mudimbe 1994:105-53). In the transference of such cultural symbols and structures and reproduction of the same writing representations, foreign spaces and peoples were colonized (Dube 1996:41).

Most colonizing people bring writings, which they give to the colonized people (Mudimbe 1994:105-53). Ngungi (1986:17) singled out the humanist tradition as an instance of a powerful form of colonizing non-Euro-American students' minds, since it always makes Euro-America the centre of the universe. He argues that the importation of such cultural writings functions to displace local cultural traditions and colonize the minds of the colonized readers.

One of the characteristics of colonizing writings is that colonizing people usually write them at the height of colonialism, mostly but not exclusively. Dube (1996:41) argues that colonizing writings assume various forms and could be written not only by colonizing people, but also by colonized people in co-operation with the colonizing people or yearning for the same power and control as the colonizing people. She singled out the New Testament writings as the best instance of this. Though products of colonized people, the New Testament writings subscribe to ideological expansion to foreign spaces based on relationships of unequal power inclusion. She argues that the characteristics of most colonizing writings, regardless of the author, entail constructions, representations and uses, which authorize taking possession of foreign spaces and peoples.

Classical writings such as the bible, the *Aeneid*, and the *Heart of Darkness* have inspired and participated in colonial projects (see sections 4.4.1; 4.4.2; 4.5). These writings have legitimized and authorized colonial projects. Dube (1996:42) is insistent that in our time writings such as novels, travel stories, anthropological documentation, world maps, missionary reports, paintings, tourist photography, museum collections and intelligence satellite photography authorize colonial projects through various values and strategies.

Dube (1996:42) further argues that the ensemble of these writings glorify militarism and conquest, promote travel that characterizes travellers as authoritatively superior to foreign peoples, and construct foreign spaces and peoples in certain negative ways. These representations sharply contrast the colonizing people with the colonized peoples. The colonized peoples are characterized as inferior, ungodly, helpless and their countries are constructed as full of evil and profitable for the colonizing people. Consequently, as Dube (1996:42) further argues, the colonized spaces and peoples are subjected to the standards of the colonizing people and difference is equated to deficiency.

She further insisted that with this centrality of cultural writings in colonial projects, the battle for liberation then transcends military and politico-economic spheres. She sees a great need for a cultural battle of reader-writers who attempt to arrest this violence of colonizing writings (Dube 1996:42).

Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:1-109) and Said (1993:1-150) described how the centrality of cultural writings in colonial projects had stimulated a response from the colonized peoples in various places and various eras of colonialism. Chinua Achebe (1989:1-20) and Ngungi (1993:12-25) substantiated how the colonized people could re-read colonizing writings and re-write new ones that assert the adequacy of their humanity, the global reality of diversity and their basic human rights to independence. Said (1993:3-43) and Dube (1996:43) urge colonized peoples to start writing in search of liberating ways of interdependence which refuse to depend on relationships which are oppressive and exploitative. Thus, the colonized peoples are advised to constitute communities of reader-writers battling to reconfigure or reconstitute themselves. The colonized peoples' reading and writing practices challenge colonizing academic institutions of cultural writings to expose and reject the cultural writings of colonialism. Said (1993:68) argues that reading and writing for or against colonialism is a posture, which one can never avoid. There is no such thing as a neutral position. This brings me to the Euro-American use of biblical writings in the colonization of the African continent.

4.5 EURO-AMERICAN IDEOLOGICAL USES OF BIBLICAL WRITINGS

This study takes its impetus from what I term “a gross denial of justice” to the African people in particular. For a long time Africa has been at the bottom of the dustbin in relation to Euro-America. It has been designated “dark” and its peoples labelled “primitive” and uneducated (Dube 2001:43). Africa has suffered radical peripheralization even in comparison with other developing parts of the world. For more than four hundred years, colonialism has traversed the African continent and suffused it with its ethos and its ideology. This denial of justice to the African people can be seen more clearly in three crucial phases, namely enslavement (1450-1850), colonization (1885-late 20th century) and neocolonization (late 20th century to the present).

In the colonization of Africa, the bible was one of the most colonizing cultural writings alongside the *Heart of Darkness* and other secular colonial cultural writings (Thomas 1994:68). Ngungi (1993:31) argues that the English, French and the Portuguese came to Africa to announce the advent of the bible and the gun. Ngungi (1986:91) insists ironically “both William Shakespeare and Jesus Christ had brought light” during the colonization of Africa. Thomas (1994:68) makes it clear that in the colonization of Africa the colonial hero par excellence, David Livingstone, never separated

civilization, the Christian religion and commerce. Mudimbe (1988:47) quotes missionary Pringle in 1820 saying:

Let us enter upon a new and nobler career of conquest. Let us subdue savage Africa by justice, by kindness, by the talisman of Christian truth. Let us thus go forth, in the name and under the blessing of God, gradually to extend the territorial boundary also of our colony, until it shall become an empire.

Religion as a form of political reconnaissance was initiated by Napoleon as emperor of France. Wells (1961:741) quotes Napoleon's speech:

It is my wish to re-establish the institution for foreign missions; for the religious missionaries may be very useful to me in Asia, Africa, and America, as I shall make them reconnoitre all the lands they visit. The sanctity of their dress will not only protect them but also serve to conceal their political and commercial investigations.

A.G. Dickens (1967:193), referring to the 1611 King James Bible, noted that, "Without this Protestant text, we can hardly imagine...English imperial expansion".

Sir Harry Johnston in Nyasaland (Malawi) approved missionaries' involvement in colonial administration, for:

They strengthen our hold over the country, they spread the use of the English language, they induct the natives into the best kind of civilization, and in fact each mission station is an essay in colonization (as referred to by Oliver 1959:182).

Under the double aegis of "the bible and the flag," governments, merchants, explorers, adventurers and missionaries were exploiting the aura of ethical responsibility lent by religion to carry Euro-America civilisation to a benighted world (Stanley 1990).

Dube (1996:44) argues that, while David Livingstone and Pringle could be dismissed as overzealous, a person like Albert Schweitzer cannot be easily dismissed as such. His being a biblical scholar did not stop him from acting as a colonial envoy. Academic biblical studies, scholars, their readings and the biblical writings could hardly exempt themselves from the violence of colonialism.

In light of this situation, biblical writings beg to be re-investigated to find out why they are usable in colonial projects. Dube (1998:123) argues that a postcolonial reading seeks to investigate if the ideological framework of biblical writings themselves supports this use. She contends that, though the contexts of colonial rules are centuries apart, nevertheless, there is an art of drawing colonizing maps and peoples. The main characteristics of colonizing people are depicted as befriending divinity and imagining the entire world as lying at their disposal. Most colonizing people are

characterized as larger than life, divine and having a passport to every part of the world (see 4.4.1 and 4.4.2).

When Dube (1998:118) states her experience as a postcolonial subject inhabiting colonial space constructed about her, for her and against her, she was equally speaking the experiences of other colonized African peoples. For a number of African people reading the bible means embarking on a painful trip that spins them back to connect with memories of a colonial era. It is to relive the painful equation of civilization with the Christian religion and paganism with African religions (see section 6.3.1). Like Dube, this is the framework of facts and experiences within which I am situated historically. Thus, I will re-read the letter to the Hebrews as a colonized Mbire person who survived the colonial era, but who continues to battle against a new colonial era.

I want my readers to know that Jesus is not the issue of contention in this study. The issue of contention is the way he has been interpreted by the writers of the bible in general and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews in particular as well as the Christian community over the past twenty centuries. I find it imperative to challenge the writer of the letter to the Hebrews' interpretation of Jesus and possibly position him in his proper place among the other Christs of the world. Like Dube (1998:133), I take biblical writings and Jesus as important cultural phenomena, which are, nevertheless, not superior to or better than or above all others, but among many important cultures of the world.

Thus, this reading should not be viewed as denying the validity of the Christian religion but as a process of liberation from some Christian moorings and concerns, not in complete abandonment of such discourse but in search of other discourses heretofore bypassed and ignored. It does not entail denying cross-cultural exchange outside colonial tendencies. Neither is every effort to influence other cultures equated with a colonial project. This postcolonial reading aim to confront what Dube (1996:45) calls the overwhelming attestation of biblical writings and readers functioning compatibly with colonialism and to investigate the ground of such a marriage.

I hope to interrogate and suggest power relations, which Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 and the whole letter to the Hebrews propose for global cultural relations and exchanges. I seek to unveil religious intolerance and to encourage an approach that celebrates the cultural diversity of the ultimate reality.

4.6 READING FOR LIBERATING INTERDEPENDENCE: *Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16*

The question of religious tension is pertinent to the Mbire context. Most colonial biblical studies claim to be able to train one to become a "critical scholar", who could transcend one's own prejudices and adapt a reading strategy that is objective, value-free and rational (Imathiu 2001:29).

Nevertheless, as Imathiu (2001:29) argues, this is impossible and has the effect of placing greater value on written texts over and above other legitimate traditions.

With the passage of time, I have become suspicious of this approach to biblical studies. It has become clear to me that this is an approach with an agenda that needs to be exposed, challenged and brought to justice. According to Imathiu (2001:29), the product of such an approach is a written and coherent text, which is selective, interpretive, editorial and manipulative of events. The coherence of such writings in turn is grounded on a matrix of meaning which, when interrogated, is found to be deeply located in Euro-American consciousness and imbued with Euro-American values of aesthetics and ethics.

I have come to believe that the letter to the Hebrews was ideologically composed. The reconfiguration of the Levitical priestly mediation succeeded in making the Levitical priestly mediation appear inadequate and invalid. I feel a deafening silence in the gaps in the recorded story, which ignores their story. All these observations and reflections are pertinent to biblical studies, particularly to the motif of power as it is reflected in relationships. There is a challenge of defining power clearly and in terms that help substantiate how power dictates whose voice is to be included and whose voice is to be excluded. Imathiu (2001:29) defines power as a license to construct the picture presented and the capacity to edit, manipulate, exclude and include in presenting what is seen as the other. She defines power as the capacity to choose to name and choose not to name, the capacity to bring change, the authority to speak and be heard as well as the capacity to implement one's ideas in social institutions for public usefulness.

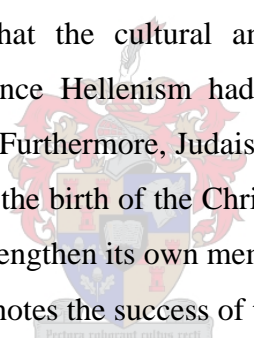
My suspicions about such approaches to biblical studies began when I discovered that some biblical passages that were meaningful in Mbire society were superficially dealt with or totally ignored by a number of Euro-American scholars, missionaries and anthropologists. For instance, while Jesus speaks strongly against divorce (Mathew; Luke), he speaks nothing against polygamy. Ironically, some of the Euro-American people have tolerated divorce in their churches (e.g. the Baptists), but have not tolerated polygamy in their churches nor in African churches (Daneel 1989).

For a long time I have had a high view of Euro-American missionaries and thought Mbire people were mistaken. I thought that these passages and characters were not that important as we had assumed. However, my ten years of pastorate in Harare has radically changed this view. I found Mbire people addressed more in many of the gaps and silences in the text as well as in the peripheral characters of the text (cf. Imathiu 2001:29). This led me to undertake this reading, whereby Mbire people's experience is taken seriously and valued. This reading strategy takes into account a piece of writing's silenced voices and characters, and reads between the lines using Mbire people's experiences as a resource. This reading strategy is very distinct from that of a number of

Euro-American people. For Mbire people the unnamed and silenced voices and characters of any writing are the focal point. There is identification with the other silenced voices and characters in such a reading and a struggle to find the word of the ultimate reality in such a situation (cf. Imathiu 2001:29).

It should be mentioned at the outset that this postcolonial reading attributes the production of the letter to the Hebrews to later generations of disciples in their missionary vision and not to Jesus' first disciples. In this reading, the public-societal dimension of this writing will be regained, since the religio-cultural milieu of the Mediterranean world will not be treated solely as background material. Instead, it will be viewed as grounded in an attempt to attract and convince the peoples of the Greco-Roman world, be they already Christian, Jews or Gentiles (Fiorenza 1976:3). The author of the letter to the Hebrews used the means and methods of Greco-Roman religio-cultural ideology to appeal to the Greco-Roman world. According to Fiorenza (1976:3), the appropriation of such ideological forms was imperative for the Christian religion to survive in the face of competition from other religious and philosophical movements of the time.

Fiorenza (1976:3) further contends that the cultural and political environment for such an ideological activity was propitious, since Hellenism had destroyed prohibitive barriers, which divided peoples, cultures and religions. Furthermore, Judaism had appropriated these Greco-Roman ideological framework centuries before the birth of the Christian religion and had long produced its own ideological writings in Greek to strengthen its own members and win over the gentiles. Philo in the *Life of Moses* (in Fiorenza 1976:3) notes the success of this Jewish missionary ideology:


This [the laws of Moses] attract and win the attention of all: of Barbarians, of Greeks, of dwellers on the mainland and island, of nations of the east and of west, of Europe and Asia, of the whole inhabited world from end to end.

Nevertheless, colonial readings of the letter to the Hebrews often disregard this Jewish missionary and apologetic ideology. They do not inquire into the ways in which the author might have learnt from the Jewish missionary ideology and how s/he tried to distance the Christian religion from the Jewish heritage (see Chapter Three). These readings fail to see that the self-identity of this missionary community is intertwined with its understanding of its mission and the formulation of its own ideological framework. They failed to take cognizance of the relationship of the writing to Jewish ideological activity and the impact of the Greco-Roman religio-cultural and socio-political environment (Fiorenza 1976:3-6). Colonial readings of the letter to the Hebrews seem to have not recognized this interplay between missionary ideological activity and Greco-Roman religio-cultural and socio-political ideological framework.

Thus, in this postcolonial reading of the letter to the Hebrews I will deal with the colonial context, geography and concealment of interest, expansion and the negative construction of the Jewish religion. Particular quotations have been used as subheadings to suggest some of the main colonial ideological constructions of this writing.

4.6.1 The Battle of the Giants: *Now, the first...and the second... (9:1-3)*

The contrast between the first covenant and the second one, which the writer uses as s/he compares the mediation and access to the ultimate reality available under the Levitical priestly mediation and Jesus' priestly mediation, suggests a fierce battle for power and control between Levitical priests and Jesus' disciples. According to Dube (1996:44), this battle for power and control is related to the Roman colonial occupation of Palestine. Historically, this writing is the product of several decades after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE. The destruction of these Jewish central symbols contributed to fierce inter-group conflict and competition for power and control. This conflict and competition for power and control was characterized by negotiation, collaboration and rebellion against Roman colonial rule by national interest groups.

In Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 and the entire letter to the Hebrews, the Levitical priestly group and Jesus' group are, in my view, fighting for power and control. Their conflict and competition are relating more to the Roman colonial presence in their land. Before 70 CE the Levitical priestly group was not only another interest group, but also an officially recognized and authoritative power in Palestine. After 70 CE, the Pharisees survived until 135 CE. The conflict and competition for power and control, and the enmity between the Levitical priests and Jesus' disciples was an old one. This conflict, competition, and enmity had resulted in Jesus' disciples losing their influence. According to Mouton (2004:1), the Pharisees accepted a clause that cursed and banned Jesus' disciples from their synagogues in 85 CE.

The letter or this part of the letter to the Hebrews witnesses the consequences of colonial disruption and inter-group competition. Jesus' disciples are extending their influence to this community, probably outside Palestine, because they are losing the national competition to these Levitical priests. Here one witnesses what Dube (1996:47) sees as colonial subtexts of disruption, alienation and resistance, which have strained the relationship between these groups. This strained relationship is an instance of the way in which colonial rule affected and influenced different people's relationships. Roman colonial agendas and the imposition of its own cultural symbols and power stimulated a response, which resulted in inter-group conflict and competition among the Jewish people (e.g. Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots and others).

Colonial domination, in my view, is central to Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 and the letter to the Hebrews as a whole. This writing is married to the competition for power and control between the

Levitical priests and Jesus' disciples. According to Dube (1996:47), both groups are trying to re-define Jewish identity during the Roman colonization of their land, especially after the destruction of their religious symbols. The competition for power and control between these interest groups is never divorced from the real enemy, the root cause, which is colonial Rome. This writing is an instance of how a colonial paradigm affects people consciously or unconsciously in general. The colonized people could fight back, collaborate with the colonizing people, or fight among themselves (see the previous paragraph).

Jesus' disciples turned to proselytize this community. Their alternative vision embraces what Dube (1996:47) calls a "colonizing ideology" even as they are themselves victims of colonization and are battling for their own liberation. However, their proselytizing of this community could be justified by a negative portrayal of the Levitical priestly religion in order to convert them. This brings me to an example of this reading strategy.

4.6.2 Colonial Ideology of Devaluation of other Cultural Values: *Unable to perfect the conscience of the worshiper... (9:9; 10:1)*

Colonial ideology expounds the notion of inferior knowledge and invalid religious faith of the colonized people. Colonizing people depend very heavily upon constructions of ignorant colonized people. There is a divide between those superior colonizing people and those inferior colonized people. The Levitical priests and their priestly mediation are characterized as religiously lacking and inadequate. They are depicted as "unable to perfect the conscience of the worshiper" (9:9) or their inability to "perfect those drawing near to the ultimate reality" (10:1), who are supposed to enter into the presence of the living ultimate reality. They are blamed for preventing all save for priests from approaching the holy place and all save for the high priest from approaching the holy of holies. They are critiqued for their strict limitation on access to the ultimate reality. They are characterized as perpetuating a limited, graded access to the ultimate reality, but never served to breach the barriers that separated people from the ultimate reality. They are depicted as perpetual reminders of the restrictions on access to the ultimate reality and access to the holy place, which was never broadened to include the worshipers no matter how many sacrifices, and sin offerings were performed.

The fact that priests remained outside the holy of holies and the people remained barred from both holy places is characterized as evidence for the inability of animal sacrifices to achieve the level of cleansing or perfection of the conscience of the worshipers that the ultimate reality is said to desire (10:14). The Levitical priestly mediation and its sacrifices are depicted as serving only to remind people of their sins, but unable to remove such an obstacle between the people and their ultimate

reality (10:1). The annual repetition of sacrifices is considered as a sign of their ineffectiveness and inefficacy of the whole Levitical priestly mediation.

Moreover, the Levitical priests, who stand daily, officiating at their work, are characterized as a sign of the incompleteness of their work. The Levitical sacrificial rites are characterized as “mere regulations of the flesh, prescriptions concerned with food, purificatory washings of the body and drink” (9:10), which are incapable and ineffective of extending sanctifying power to the inner person. They are blamed for doing nothing save to bring to mind one’s stained conscience year after year.

The Levitical priestly mediation is further characterized as “a parable pointing to the time of correction” (9:10) or as “a copy and shadow” of the true heavenly reality. It is depicted as lacking efficacy, vaguely pointing away from itself to Jesus’ rite, which possesses the necessary substance capable of removing sins forever.

Surely, this was an ideologically motivated presentation of the Levitical priestly mediation, which for its participants may have been spiritually satisfying, and not just a mere reminder of sins. This brings me to the colonial ideology of promoting one’s own cultural values.

4.6.3 Colonial Ideology of Promotion of own Cultural Values: *Perfecting the conscience of the Worshipers... (9:14; 10:14).*

Colonial ideology uses the promotion of its own cultural values to devalue and suppress diversity. Consequently, arguments concerning the inefficacy of the Levitical priestly mediation serve to demonstrate the necessity of Jesus’ priestly mediation on which readers/hearers are urged to completely rely on and to risk so much. While the Levitical priestly mediation is characterized as “unable to perfect the conscience of the worshipper” (9:9), Jesus’ priestly mediation is characterized as “able to cleanse the conscience of the worshipers so that they can serve the living ultimate reality” (9:14). While the repetition of Levitical sacrifices is characterized as “unable to perfect those drawing near to the ultimate reality” (10:1), Jesus’ single sacrifice is characterized as having “perfected forever the worshipers approaching the ultimate reality through him” (10:14). Jesus’ priestly mediation is characterized as providing the “image” of which the Levitical priestly mediation was but a shadowy representation.

Jesus’ disciples are characterized as more knowledgeable and powerful and could see and know everything past, present and future. This seems to border on divinity itself. For instance, this author claims to have known and seen Jesus being consecrated to the priesthood after Jesus’ ascension (4:14); to have seen Jesus offering his life as the only acceptable sacrifice (Psalm 40:6-8); to have seen Jesus passing through the heavens to enter the holy place with his own blood; and to have seen

Jesus being invited to sit down at the right hand of the ultimate reality (cf. Psalm 110:1). The author(s) are depicted as having superior knowledge about what is going on with Jesus in heaven. This gives the author(s) authority to teach everyone. The limitations of the Levitical priestly mediation are used here to suggest the surpassing honour of Jesus and the value of having him as one's mediator of divine power.

Furthermore, the "sitting down at the right hand of the ultimate reality" is contrasted with the Levitical priestly "standing" for their ongoing duties to attest Jesus' decisive achievements. This is combined with the promises of the inauguration of the new covenant in Jeremiah, which is equated with Jesus' sacrifice, where the ultimate reality promises never again to remember the people's sins. As such, the author believes that any other offering for sin beyond Jesus' sacrifice is no longer needed.

The comparison of readers/hearers' favoured place in the plan of the ultimate reality by contrasting the access afforded to the people under the Levitical priestly mediation with the access afforded readers/hearers through Jesus' priestly mediation is meant to ideologically arouse a sense of being privileged beyond any of their predecessors in faith. Before the advent of Jesus, access to the ultimate reality is characterized as extremely limited. Now readers/hearers are characterized as accessing the ultimate reality's "throne of favour with boldness", because Jesus has sanctified them for such an access. Readers/hearers are characterized as enjoying an advantage previously unknown to people. They are characterized as having been enabled to access the ultimate reality directly and to seek help and favours directly. The author underscores a more privileged proximity to the sacred enjoyed by readers/hearers under Jesus' priestly mediation than the proximity to the sacred attained under the Levitical priestly mediation.

The argument seems to be that, since the single act of Jesus' sacrifice provided the decisive cleansing that makes possible the decisive removal of sins, there is no longer any need for an offering for sin. Jesus' priestly mediation is characterized as "the correction" which the ultimate reality has provided for access to it, for now the "new and living way" into the holy place (10:19-20) has been revealed to the people to "approach with boldness the throne of favour" (4:14). Jesus is characterized as offering an unparalleled gift of access to the ultimate reality. He is characterized as the first and only person to attain the benefit of direct access to the ultimate reality for humankind.

This characterization, in my view, serves to devalue the Levitical priestly mediation in order to support own ideological stance as superior. This is exemplified by the fact that the elimination of the old barriers and limitations to access to the ultimate reality serve only to erect new strategic ones. Jesus' priestly mediation has its own Priest (Jesus), its own sanctuary (9:11) and its own

sacrificial rites (13:15-16). This attempt to discredit and dismiss the Levitical priestly mediation brings me to the discursive use of the colonial ideology of systematic subordination.

4.6.4 Colonial Ideology of Systematic Subordination: *Superior to...Better than...More excellent...*

Colonial ideology of systematic subordination is characterized by inclusivity but not equality. A tactic more representative of the letter to the Hebrews is to praise the new covenant and its agents, while expressing moderated criticism of the old covenant and its agents through the use of comparative formulae. Of the most frequent of these are “superior”, “better” and “excellent”. Jesus is characterized as superior to angels (1:4), superior to Moses (3:6), and superior to Abraham (7:7). The salvation that Jesus offers humankind is characterized as a better country (11:16) and a better life (11:35). The new covenant is characterized as better than the old (7:22; 8:6), enacted on better promises (8:6), offering a better hope (7:9), through better sacrifices (9:23).

This same point is also made in other words. Jesus is depicted as a more excellent name than that of the angels (1:4) and his mediation as more excellent than Aaron’s mediation (8:6). The heavenly sanctuary is depicted as greater and more perfect than the earthly sanctuary (9:11). Abuse suffered for Jesus is depicted as greater riches than all Egypt’s treasures (11:26).

Dunnill (1992:229-230) argues that these examples are comparisons between the earthly condition of life and the hope of salvation. They also compare the old means of salvation and the new means of salvation. The effects of these comparisons are the same, for in the author’s perspective the Levitical priestly mediation yielded only earthly satisfactions. Though it could point to the better hope, it could not bring it about. The new covenant is further compared with human life which is characterized as unfulfilled and painful to all (10:34; 11:16, 26, 35, 40), particularly for those who have surrendered such earthly goods as they possess in the hope of receiving heavenly security. Elsewhere earthly goods, which included Levitical priestly mediation, are compared with Jesus’ grace. These are presented as goods too, though provisionally good, but still things good in themselves.

However, despite affirming the Levitical priestly mediation, the author asserts that Jesus is to be distinguished from angels, prophets, Moses, Abraham, Aaron and the Levitical high priest and his mediation and sacrifice from theirs in kind rather than in degree. Dunnill (1992:230) argues that the context often indicates the comparative formulae as an understated form of superlative. For instance, no matter how excellent angels are they cannot reach the unique status of the Son (1:4). The extravagant praise of angels succeeds in elevating the Son still higher by comparison. Likewise, the extent to which the heavenly sanctuary is greater and more perfect than the earthly sanctuary

(9:11) is made clearer when it is characterized as the original of which the earthly is only, but a “copy and shadow” (8:5) or only a “parable pointing to the present time” (9:9).

Furthermore, the extent to which Jesus’ priestly mediation is characterized as superior and more efficacious for sins than the Levitical priestly mediation is made clearer when Jesus’ sacrifice is characterized as offered in a superior locale – the “greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not belonging to this creation” (9:11). Moreover, unlike the Levitical high priest who offers animal blood annually, Jesus is characterized as entering the holy place “once-for-all” providing his own blood as the means of eternal redemption (9:12). The extent to which animal blood is characterized as only serving for external purification (9:12) is made clearer when Jesus’ sacrificial blood is characterized as made in the realm of the spirit and as able to provide effective cleansing of the conscience (9:14). Thus, the constant repetition of this relative praise, which favours Jesus’ priestly mediation over the Levitical priestly mediation, accumulates into an impression of a total qualitative superiority.

This comparative formula notably declares the cultural centre of the Levitical priestly mediation as inadequate and replaces it with Jesus’ priestly mediation. This comparative formula maintains the superiority of Jesus’ priestly mediation. This characterization, in my view, shows clearly that colonial universal standards are never intended to create relationships of equals but to win converts (Dewick 1953:39; Richter 1913). The transcendence of the Levitical priestly spaces by Jesus’ priestly spaces is, in my view, an installation of the superiority of the Christian religion, which proceeds by discrediting all other religious cultures for its own interests (Richter 1913). The comparison, in my view, is intended to legitimize control and control depends on unequal relationships.

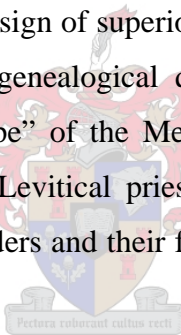
The unequal relationship of the letter to the Hebrews is based on the writing device employed. Jesus is characterized as a very superior person (1:1-4). His superiority is communicated through a writing style, which characterizes his superiority at every stage. He is greater than angels, prophets, Moses, Abraham, Aaron and all Jewish cultural figures of note. He is characterized as an extremely superior person who surpasses all other local and global figures (Dube 1998).

The letter to the Hebrews engages in a long and extended subordination of all Jewish cultural figures of note and the cultural spaces of power associated with them. It begins in the exordium, where it states that, though the ultimate reality has spoken to ancestors through the prophets in past times, these last times s/he speaks of the Son, who is heir of all things and through whom the ultimate reality created the worlds (1:2). Though the revelatory role of the prophets is acknowledged, it is surpassed by the revelatory role of the Son, since he is depicted as “the reflection and the exact imprint of the ultimate reality’s very being, who sustains all things by his

powerful word” (1:3). Jesus is further characterized as superior not only to prophets but also to angels. No matter how excellent angels are, they cannot reach the superior status of the Son (1:4).

This systematic subordination is emphatically repeated throughout this writing with different figures and categories, a writing device designed to characterize Jesus as well above all figures and categories. The comparison is a rhetorical ladder for Jesus and by extension Jesus’ disciples’ elevation. It foregrounds Jesus’ superiority and almost equates him with the ultimate reality, while it derogates the validity of the Levitical priestly mediation. For instance, Jesus is first compared to Moses, a cultural figure of authority in Jewish history and society. The writing technique for subordinating Moses to Jesus includes the characterization of Moses as a faithful servant (3:6) and Jesus as the faithful Son of the ultimate reality (3:6). The writer seizes upon Moses’ servanthood to declare the superiority of Jesus’ sonhood.

Secondly, Jesus is compared to Abraham, a cultural figure of authority in Jewish history and society. Once more, the writing technique for subordinating Abraham to Jesus includes the characterization of Abraham’s apportioning of a tenth to Melchizedek as a sign of inferiority and Melchizedek’s blessings to Abraham as a sign of superiority. The writer seizes upon Melchizedek’s blessings to Abraham and his lack of genealogical qualification to declare the superiority of Melchizedek, who is presented as a “type” of the Messiah to demonstrate Jesus’ superiority to Abraham, the founding ancestor of the Levitical priestly mediation. This serves to subordinate Abraham and by extension all Jewish leaders and their followers to the superiority of Jesus and his disciples.



Furthermore, Jesus is compared to Aaron, a cultural figure of authority in Jewish religious life. He is called, acknowledged and surpassed as well. The writing technique for subordinating Aaron to Jesus includes characterizing one priest as superior to many, the “one-for-all” as superior to the “once-a-year” event, Jesus’ blood as superior to animal blood, and Jesus’ entry into the heavenly sanctuary as superior to entry into the earthly sanctuary. Thus, all the historical and significant cultural figures of note in history and religious life of the Jewish people are cooped into accentuating the importance of Jesus. Dube (1998:127) argues that they are subordinated even in their power over their own followers, the archrivals of Jesus’ disciples.

The subordination of angels, prophets, Moses, Abraham, Aaron and their mediations proceeds first by acknowledging them, then by showing that in fact they testify to Jesus, and then elevating Jesus above them. Their mediations are transferred into the hands of Jesus and his disciples and these figures are relegated to a secondary status (Dube 1998:127). Jesus’ relationship and by extension the Christian religion’s relationship to foreign lands and peoples is unfortunately based on a very unequal foundation as attested by the above portrayals. Accordingly, what seems to be an inclusive

gospel of Jesus is, in fact, the installation of the Christian religion as a universal religion. However, why did the author of the letter to the Hebrews feel that Jesus' priestly mediation possesses such a pre-eminent salvific value? This brings me to the ideology of hierarchical geographical rhetoric.

4.6.5 Colonial Ideology of Hierarchical Geographical Construction: *Through the greater and more perfect tent not human made... (9:11)*

Colonial ideology depends on the rhetoric of hierarchical geographical spaces to claim power and superiority. Jesus is the highest and most authoritative person in the letter to the Hebrews and the entire New Testament (1:3-4). Consequently, a specific geographical space had to be constructed for him. The writer constructed a spatial setting, which disavows earthly spaces. A striking feature of this writing is its opening, which begins by ascribing to Jesus in explicit terms pre-existence, eternity and involvement in creation (1:2, 10-11) as well as divine titles "Lord" (1:10) and "ultimate reality" (1:8). Dube (1998:124) is insistent that the construction of Jesus' origin in outer space serves to lay a claim of superiority on the world. This writing begins and ends in pre-existent spatial settings.

Colonial ideology involves superior persons who represent the superiority of their origins. Dube (1998:124) further compares Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, who was "exalted to the stars of heaven" and Kurtz in the *Heart of Darkness*, who had "kicked himself loose of this very earth" and who had "nothing above or below him", to this spatial construction, which she insists, is meant to claim power and superiority over all spaces and all the peoples on earth. She argues that it is meant to invest certain persons with unlimited powers and superiority over all the peoples on earth. Consequently, the ideological function of the pre-existent spatial setting in the letter to the Hebrews is evident in the exordium, which opens it as follows:

Long ago the ultimate reality spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he [*sic*] has spoken to us by a Son, whom he [*sic*] appointed heir of all things, through whom he [*sic*] also created the worlds. He is the reflection of the glory of the ultimate reality and the exact imprint of his/*her* very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs (NRSV. 1:1-4).

The pre-existent spatial setting is the place and time where the Son was and where the Son was involved in creation (1:2). The Son is not only elevated to pre-existence; he was living with the ultimate reality and is heir of all the things of the ultimate reality (1:2). The Son is further characterized as "the reflection of the glory of the ultimate reality and the exact imprint of his/*her* very being" (1:3). This verse presents Jesus and the ultimate reality as almost inseparable and equal.

As one involved in creation, he is the source of life, and he sustains all things by his powerful word (1:3).

The pre-existent setting explains the origin of Jesus as outside of this world. The pre-existent spatial setting is where Jesus lived with the ultimate reality. Jesus came from eternity. Dube (1998:125) lists two reasons for the inestimable significance of constructing Jesus' genesis in space in these terms. The first one entails the power of the ultimate reality, which lives in the spatial setting. A second one concerns the "spaceless space" of the ultimate reality, which gives Jesus power and superiority over the whole world, since Jesus also originated from the spatial setting as creator and sustainer of the world (1:1-3).

The ideological function of these pre-existent and spatial settings in the exordium serves to invest Jesus with unlimited power and superiority over angels, prophets and all Jewish religio-political and cultural figures and the cultural spaces of power associated with them. The superiority of Jesus and his priestly mediation derive emphatically from his origin in pre-existent spatial settings. Dube (1998:125) contends that pre-existent spatial construction serves to legitimize a systematic subordination of all other individuals or groups together with their works, who occupy the spaces of this world except Jesus' disciples. Consequently, Jesus and his disciples are authorized from above. They are invested with high authority far above any person.

While in the letter to the Hebrews the disciples are rhetorically obscured, they are, nevertheless, on Jesus' side. The writing serves to give them the same right and authority as Jesus. Their authority is derived from and is closely related to that of Jesus. It is authority from above, from the ultimate reality (see previous paragraph).

There is yet another hierarchical geographical construction in this writing. Considering the respective quality of the place of mediation in which the two mediations exercise their mediations further enhances the superiority of Jesus and his priestly mediation. The Levitical priests serve in a material "copy and shadow" of the true holy place in the heavens (8:1-6), but Jesus serves in the superior locale, namely the "greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not belonging to this creation" (9:11). Jesus serves in the heavenly sanctum itself. Here Jesus is characterized as having entered the better and perfect sanctum, the abode of the ultimate reality beyond the material creation and effected the decisive cleansing of the worshipers' conscience. The logic of the argument would then be that since Jesus' origin is in the pre-existent spatial setting; since his priestly mediation serves in the heavenly sanctum itself, his priestly mediation possesses pre-eminent salvific value. Jesus is characterized as serving in that abiding place of mediation, which belongs not to this material, visible world. Consequently, those who serve in the earthly sanctum are of questionable value.

The characterization of the Levitical priestly mediation as serving in a material “copy and shadow” of the true holy place, serves the author of the letter to the Hebrews to assert the religious superiority of Jesus’ priestly mediation, even when the author is discrediting the earthly sanctuary and the Levitical priestly mediation (8:1-6). The Levitical material sanctum pales besides Jesus’ superior immaterial heavenly sanctum itself. That which is heavenly is superior and more real than that which is of this earth. The author subordinates discursive logic to imaginative power.

These hierarchical geographical constructions authorize those persons of superior origins and values (Jesus and his disciples) to control at both local and global levels those geographical areas that are depicted as inferior in their systems and values. Dube (1998:127) argues that the authority of Jesus is emphatically heightened over all other cultural figures of note and their earthly spaces of authority through constructing this spatial origin of Jesus as from the pre-existence. She argues that the function of an out-of-this-world spatial origin is precisely to take control of this world.

The repetitiveness of the letter to the Hebrews and its focused intention of heightening and suggesting the superiority of Jesus through constructing the highest and unique place of origin and service can hardly be overemphasized (1:1-4). The pre-existent spatial settings are places of power, since they are spaces of the ultimate reality. Because Jesus came from the pre-existent spatial setting and because he is the reflection and exact imprint of the ultimate reality’s very being (1:3), the only Son (1:5), and the only better sacrifice, and because Jesus went back to eternity, he became the only mediator to the ultimate reality in this world. He is characterized as the first and only person to attain the benefit of direct access to the ultimate reality for humankind.

The installation of the Christian religion as a universal religion proceeds by disavowing all geographical boundaries in order to claim power and control over the world and to relegate all other religions and cultures to inadequacy (cf. Chapter Six). As is common in colonial ideologies, the lack of explicit admission brings me to the colonial ideology of concealment of interests.

4.6.6 Colonial Ideology of Concealment of Interests: *Let us continually offer sacrifices of praise and good works... (13:15-16)*

Edward Said (1993:9) argues that colonial ideologies often conceal their interests in such rhetorical terms as “duty to the natives” and others. Similarly, the letter to the Hebrews conceals its interests through a writing characterization of Jesus and his priestly mediation. The writing resists an open acknowledgement of any intention by these latter disciples to evangelize both this small community and the world at large. I see the characterization concerning the inefficacy of the Levitical priestly mediation, which serves to demonstrate the necessity and reality of Jesus’ priestly mediation, as an evangelistic endeavour by the disciples of Jesus to win some converts. Notwithstanding this, Dube

(1996:48) contends that the writing construction conceals any intention on the part of the disciples to missionize this small community and the world at large.

However, this is surprising because historically the writing represents a much later vision of mission arising from later disciples and not from Jesus' first disciples. It is thus striking how these later disciples who are most likely the proponents of this missionary vision and authors of this writing portray themselves as obscured. Dube (1996:48) contends that, through such writing presentation, the disciples rhetorically distance themselves from their own vision precisely to conceal their interests to the very end.

However, though the rhetoric of concealment pervades this writing, the writing itself authorizes the disciples to go and evangelize in foreign lands. Within the *paraenetic* context of Hebrews 13:15-16, there is transference of power and superiority to the disciples and readers/hearers and an insistence on the continuation of non-material sacrifices. This writing is concluded just as it was begun with a reference to sacrifice. However, instead of recalling the sacrifice of the Son, the readers/hearers are encouraged or rather commissioned metaphorically to continually offer up "sacrifices of praise and good works to the ultimate reality through Jesus" (13:15-16).

This is central to the entire letter to the Hebrews. This encouragement/commission provides an interpretive grid through which the disciples/readers must understand their mission. Like Jesus, who offered himself as a sacrifice, they must also offer themselves as sacrifices. As Dube (1996:48) argues, here Jesus and his disciples/readers enter into a relationship modelled closely on the Father-Son relationship. In this way they are authorized to go and teach other nations. In this verse the rhetoric of interests and power is articulated, yet remains concealed by an ideology of disinterest.

It seems to me that the author of the letter to the Hebrews spoke of the inadequacy of the Levitical priestly ideology simply to promote the ongoing commitment of the readers to their own new ideological stance as superior. The author(s) engages in this colonial ideology to support her/his definition and legitimization of the Christian religion as the correct manifestation of Old Testament religion. The vision of the writer(s) is thus modelled in terms of colonial goals, strategies and values. For instance, the writer does not in anywhere indicate that the concepts of priestly mediation, temple and sacrifice are superfluous. Rather the author's conviction regarding the continuity/discontinuity between the covenants makes it clear that Christians do have Jesus as their high priest (8:1), the heavenly sanctum itself as their temple (10:19), and praise and good deeds as their sacrifices (13:15-16). Thus, even as the Levitical barriers and limitations to access the ultimate reality are characterized as eliminated in Jesus' priestly mediation, new ones are strategically erected. These are characterized as superior because of their spiritual nature, which implies a permanence for which any material cultus is unsuited.

Dube (1998:130) concludes that such transference of power and superiority to the disciples/readers (church) gives them power and authority to travel into all other cultural worlds and spaces with the same power, authority, superiority and methods of devaluing and subordinating differences that characterize Jesus in the letter to the Hebrews and the whole New Testament.

Dube (1998:128) is insistent of the temptation to locate the battle for power and control in such writings as a reflection of conflict and competition between Jewish national groups claiming allegiance to the same cultural spaces and historical subjects or within this small community itself without taking cognizance of the presence of colonial Rome as a significant factor. Postcolonial readings view these battles as the response of the colonized people to the impact of colonial Rome. They are responses of those whose cultural-political, socio-economic and socio-religious boundaries have been entered by a powerful colonial power controlling them mainly from without. She further argues that the presence of colonial Rome was a catalyst that leavens the whole bread and breeds vicious conflicts and competitions as local groups responded by trying to redefine their culture and provide answers.

As argued by Dube (1998:129), the christological focus of the writer attested to the colonial context and attracted the colonized Jewish people's concerns and hopes. Nevertheless, these colonized people responded to their colonization by taking conflicting positions at various stages of their colonization. Their responses range from partial acceptance, complete acceptance and complete denial (rebellion). All these responding stages occurred simultaneously. Moreover, the battle for power and control is not only confined to the colonized people against the colonizing people. According to Overman (1990:66-68), the colonized people compete among themselves as various interest groups (political or religious) scramble to define reality within their invaded boundaries and fight for the attention of the colonizing people to whom they have lost power and control. As Dube (1998:129) further argues, in the process of resistance the colonized groups could imagine themselves in power and control on equal terms as the colonizing people.

If the letter to the Hebrews is situated within the context of the colonized people, then the writing reflects not only conflicts and competitions among the colonized groups, but assumes a writing design, which propounded colonizing ideologies. The strategy of comparing and contrasting Jesus' priestly mediation with the Levitical priestly mediation, emphasizing at every point the superiority of Jesus above any other cultural figure of note among the Jewish people and in the whole world, is an instance of what Dube (1998:129) calls a "colonizing ideology."

The rigorous elevation of Jesus by the writer in space and time serves to subordinate not only Jewish places and peoples, but also claims power and superiority over the entire world (Dube 1998:129). Jesus becomes the creator of the world (1:2), the only mediator of divine power (9:15),

who sat down at the right hand of the ultimate reality after he had made purification for sins (1:3), the exact imprint of the ultimate reality's very being, that is, the ultimate reality itself (1:3), and is superior to all things (1:4; 3:1-6; 7:7; 8:6; 9:11, 23, etc.).

As Dube (1998:129) contends, the superiority of Jesus did not end in this community of the letter to the Hebrews or with the colonized Jewish interest groups in conflict and competition with each other for power and control. It exploded over the boundaries of its origins, its immediate context and laid claim to every part of the known world. Euro-American missionaries in non-Euro-American contexts with unmitigated savageries have acted out the artistry of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews.

4.7 NATURE AND ROLE OF BIBLICAL WRITINGS

It is imperative to explore the question of the role and nature of biblical writings in authorizing a colonial paradigm in Africa in general and in Zimbabwe in particular. The reason is that the Mbire and other African peoples experienced colonization as both a military and writing exercise of subordinating differences (see section 6.3.2).

Though several scholars have done excellent literary-rhetorical studies of the letter to the Hebrews, the question of this writings' role in sanctioning Euro-American religio-cultural colonization is hardly ever raised (see Dunnill 1992; Attridge 1989; DeSilva 2000 and Koester 2001). These works offer excellent studies of this writing and I have benefited greatly from them.

Nevertheless, these works only focus on literary-rhetorical aspects of this writing. They bracket off the ideological question. Since the writing was produced under Roman colonial context, one could have expected this colonial context to be taken into account seriously. Unfortunately, my colleagues presume the absence of any colonial power and never inquire whether this writing reflects conflict and competition in the face of a central colonial Rome, which was a central enemy.

Dube (1998:130) urges us to inquire whether the writing focuses also on other victims of a colonial paradigm. If it does, how was the writing's perspective to be used in subsequent generations and centuries? Does the writing's perspective serve or has it served as an anti-colonial or pro-colonial writing?

Consequently, most scholars studying the letter to the Hebrews do not seek to understand how the response of this community to colonial Rome is related to the bible as a writing of Euro-America and Euro-America as a colonial centre (Dube 1998:130). They focus only on internal conflicts and competitions among the colonized Jewish people without suggesting how the presence and role of colonial Rome conceals the exploitation and oppressiveness of colonial Rome on its subject peoples. Dube (1998:131) argues that this failure to keep colonial Rome in perspective as a central

catalyst and player unwittingly maintains the structures of oppression in the past, the present and the future.

Colonial academic readings of the letter to the Hebrews tend to read it as if it only refers to ancient times and has nothing to do with our present times. Mazrui (1990:1-18) argues that the unwillingness to cross the borderline of the ancient context and critically assess how biblical writings hand-in-hand with other colonial writings inform present global structures of power relation is an instance of biblical scholarship acting as a colonizing body of knowledge. Dube (1998:131) argues that biblical scholarship jealously guards the borderlines, insisting on reading biblical writings within the context without assessing and relating them to present global politico-economics. In addition, biblical writings are never read together with secular colonial writings. She concludes that this methodological framework actually serves to maintain and perpetuate the colonial power of Euro-America over African people and cultures (Dube (1998:131).

This realization is a call upon Mbire and other African scholars/theologians to go beyond just a mere expounding and explication of the literary-rhetorical construction of this writing to its ideological construction. This call is to read the text to challenge its colonizing ideology. It is also a call to read for the reconstruction of colonized and devalued religions.

There are three main reasons for a postcolonial exercise in biblical writings. The first one is that the bible has exerted more cultural influence on Euro-America than any single other document (Aichele *et al.* 1995: 1). The second one is that colonial Euro-America has colonized the world through both violent devices of subjugation and cultural writings (Said 1993:12-14). The third one is the hand-in-hand operation of the Christian missions with the colonizing institutions and other agents in present global structures (Mudimbe 1988:44-64).

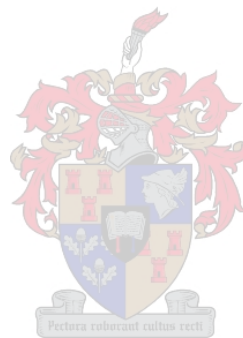
I concur with Dube (1998:132) that the issue of why and how the letter to the Hebrews, as well as other writings in the New Testament, have been usable in colonial projects and how Mbire and other colonized people could read them can no longer be bracketed off in biblical scholarship.

4.8 SUMMARY

This chapter began with introductory remarks on a postcolonial paradigm. This was followed by an examination of its legacy. A brief discussion of the resistant nature of a postcolonial reading paradigm followed this. Then it discussed an ideological use of cultural writings in building and sustaining colonial motives and their strategies of subjugating foreign spaces. This includes biblical writings as well. A postcolonial reading of Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and 13:15-16 followed this. It indicated the text's colonial art of drawing spaces and persons in accomplishing its goals. From this reading perspective, the exalted space of Jesus by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews is shown to

be a colonizing ideology, which, in my view, claims power, authority and superiority over the entire world. This might not have been the ontological perspective of Jesus' position, but rather how the writer has read Jesus.

Now I turn to some aspects of Mbire religion in order to provide the contours of the morphological group of people called the Mbire as a background against which to mirror the twin readings.



CHAPTER FIVE

ASPECTS OF MBIRE RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The twin readings of colonial and postcolonial interpretation in the previous two chapters could lead to two distinct assumptions about Jesus and the Christian religion. However, before engaging actively in a critical evaluation of these assumptions and their relevance to the Mbire people, I intend to provide the contours of the morphological group of people called the Mbire as a background against which to mirror the relevance of this evaluation

The developmental map of the world's religious system seems to have been drawn without the Mbire in mind. This is particularly evident when one considers the environmental context to which Mbire religious practices have been relegated and viewed as an impediment to development. For many condescending Euro-American people and their Mbire adherents, Mbire religious practices stood to militate against the desired mental illumination that would further Euro-American socio-political and socio-economic hegemony.

In order to appreciate the significance of Mbire religious practices in Zimbabwe it is imperative to trace some of the historical contours of these religious practices before colonial rule and the ensuing developments to date. This will enable a thorough grasp of some aspects of Mbire religious practices and the level of organization and sophistication of the religious agenda.

The Mbire people are best understood when one comes to terms with their complex and elaborate religious concepts/symbolism and ideology, which provided a kind of legal system, which ensured cohesion within the Mbire society. This is connected with their worship of Mwari, their ultimate reality. Samkange (1971:174) is insistent that, since the power of Mbire rulers was ultimately based on the influence and sanction of Mwari, the religious apparatus through which communication between Mwari and the people was maintained furnished a potent instrument for the integration of socio-political, socio-economic and socio-religious factors in Mbire society.

Therefore, the best way to understand the contours of the morphological group of people called Mbire is to understand what is intrinsic to the service to the living-timeless¹⁴ in the life and thought of these people by discussing their morphological constructs for Mwari. How Mwari is perceived in terms of the living-timeless and the living-timeless's relationship to the Mbire people is the most important sphere of cultural activity that nursed the health of the Mbire nation. These relationships have significance in family, civic and national affairs. Mbire religion is so constructed that it is

¹⁴ See Explanation of Terms

integral and inseparable from societal and personal human life. The central focus of Mbire religion is on communal and individual practical faith imbued with certain concerns and right actions for the social welfare of the people. The talk of Mwari and the living-timeless always relate mainly to the Mbire people themselves within the context of their own collectivities. Zahan (1979:5) asserts that,

All African spiritual life is based on this vision of *humankind's* situation and role. The idea of finality outside *humankind* is foreign...*Humankind* was not made for God or for universe...It is not to please God or out of love for God that a African person prays, implores or makes sacrifices, but rather to become himself [sic] and to realize the order in which he [sic] finds himself [sic] implicated (italics mine).

5.2 THE ULTIMATE REALITY AND THE LIVING-TIMELESS (MWARI NAVADZIMU)

The Mbire people view religion in terms of how the world of transcendence enhances people's lives here on earth. People are at the heart of everything, with all factors contingent in serving this goal. This human-centred concern means that in times of trouble, their sacrifices to Mwari and the living-timeless are to implore blessings from them to give relief to the people in troubles, not to appease Mwari. Worship of Mwari and service to the living-timeless are enacted to serve people. The object is to deal with people or human welfare. As Onumura (1991:68) notes, "no one prays to God...to be accepted or enraptured".

As I have argued elsewhere (Chimeri 1998:50), Mbire people give recognition to Mwari in terms of an awareness of a transcendental Spirit reality. Mbire religion is not credal. Thus, the use of belief systems usually devised by Euro-American theologians is foreign and a departure from Mbire morphological constructs and perceptions of Mwari. Mbire concepts of Mwari are dynamically encapsulated into belief systems. The mystique of Mwari articulated in Mbire anthropomorphic terms cannot be construed within Euro-American mindsets. Euro-American explication of the ultimate reality in terms of monotheism, polytheism and animism are misleading. The cosmic dimension for the Mbire people of Mwari's transcendence is impregnated in the eco-system of the phenomenological world. Every aspect of what is seen in the world is leavened by transcendence. Mbire theology is viewed dynamically within human life. A paradox of transcendence and immanence is witnessed here.

According to Mugabe (1993:23), the characterization of Mwari, who is integral to the natural world, is also a portrayal of the geographical contours of the Mbire country's landscape. Mwari is the vibrancy of the ecological reality. Mbire theology has to do with Mweya, the wind-spirit of the eco-system of the Mbire country. Explaining this in terms of pantheism or animism would be a perversion of Mbire morphological understanding. This should be viewed as the 'gestalt' of all that adheres together within the complex of Mbire life.

Aschwanden (1989:200) agrees that Mbire understanding of Mwari, the creator, is marked by holism and complexity. The epithet 'High God' should not be used in reference to Mwari. This would be a misnomer, since Mwari is never far removed from the realities of this world of living people and things. As Ukpong (1984:187-203) argues, the use of this epithet when applied to Mwari reflects an uncritical application of Euro-American Christian thought patterns imposed on Mbire religious phenomenon. Despite calling Mwari a High God, Daneel (1971:81) later rejected that categorization:

Far from being a *deus otiosus* or *deus remotus*...Mwari was believed to control the fertility of Shona-occupied country, to give rain in times of drought and to advice on the course of action to be taken during times of national crises. Especially at times when invasions and occupation by foreign powers threatened the national identity of the Shona, Mwari's presence was felt to be very near and his demands particularly compelling.

I would like to maintain that Mwari is neither far nor remote nor pushed through the sky and lost sight of. It would appear that the living-timeless are more prominent, with Mwari enshrined within these living-timeless assumptions. This interfluence is reflected in the social norms and etiquette in Mbire society. The Mbire people always approach an elder or someone in authority through a mediator. Failure to do this is viewed as disrespectful. The living-timeless serve the role of mediators between Mwari and the people. Gombe (1986:59) notes that, "If you approach Mwari directly...you display a lack of manners and your prayers mean nothing." Mwari is given due respect when the living-timeless are honoured. Nevertheless, the living-timeless are also honoured in their right. In fact, everything is so clear that the Mbire people could never see someone pushing Mwari to the background. To think that Mwari can be pushed into the background negates the Mbire pantheistic and panpsychic understanding of Mwari.

5.3 MBIRE RELIGIOUS REVELATION

Revelation is viewed as self-evident in Mbire life, thought and practice. To make an issue of revelation is never deemed necessary, nor is revelation as a theological idea ever explored as a separate category. Revelation relates to what is known of Mwari through the phenomenological world as a whole. This knowability of Mwari in creation means that the world of phenomena always points the Mbire people to the creator. Daneel (1970:11) rightly observes that these conceptions of the creator relate to the Mwari of life, the one who speaks where phenomena are celebrated as a sacred shrine. Mwari is never silent. According to Mugabe (1993:23), the mystique of transcendence within the natural world is a kind of quantum physic, which is always breaking through into human awareness, attempting to say something to the Mbire person in everything that happens. Because the Mbire person is integrally enmeshed within the natural environment from

cradle to grave, this dynamic constitutes in a Mbire person a type of 'imago Dei', which enables a Mbire person to hear and respond to Mwari.

The Mbire people have the perception of transcendence both in matter and in the psyche. Mwari is the subject of all created things and all created things are subjected to the logos, the purposive voice of Mwari to which the living-timeless belong. The mystery of birth, the trauma of human existence, and the mystery of death all feature within the language and epistemology of human existence among the Mbire people (Mugabe 1993:23).

Mwari is always integral to life. No part of life can be thought of without the idea of Mwari. As Mugabe (1993) further argues, no conception of Mwari as ontological reality is feasible apart from Mwari's being flesh of Mbire flesh, bone of Mbire bone. Mwari is never a detached abstraction. Mwari is always thought of in anthropomorphic terms. However, this should not be viewed in terms of an allegorical understanding, but as intrinsically belonging to the natural world of phenomena itself. Mwari belongs to the anatomy of life and the physiology of life depicts the activity of Mwari's dynamic presence. This perception of Mwari is not generalized, but is constructed and elaborated within the specifics of the traditions of the Mbire experiences. Meteorological and ecological factors are inextricably one, with Mwari holistically understood within events and occurrences in the empirical world.

Because of the complexities of the world, the precariousness of existence and the ambiguities of human life, certain people tower above others evolved as prophets (masvikiro), doctor-prophets (n'angas) and wisdom teachers. Consequently, certain women and men in Mbire society are always recognized as having outstanding intuitive wisdom into the realities of the transcendental world. They are acknowledged as mediums that have the capacity to communicate with Mwari, with the living-timeless and with people (Chimeri 1998:52).

Mwari is revealed through a 'voice' among the Mbire people. Mbire traditionally believe that they were led by "the voice of Mwari" as a nation when they moved from Guruuswa, the legendary place of Mbire origin, somewhere in the north of Zimbabwe. Hodza and Fortune (1979:10) note that as a 'spirit and voice' speaking from the sky, Mwari led Mbire people from Guruuswa to the country where they live today. The voice of Mwari is still heard at the sacred shrine at Matopo Hills, known as Matonjeni or Mabwe aDziva (The Rocks of Dziva, another praise name of Mwari). Mwari speaks through the "voice", because Mwari cannot speak as a detached oracle, but must become audible through the voice of mortals. The 'voice' of Mwari, a female oracle, remains hidden in the caves, while worshippers sit in front of the cave with their backs to the cave. As Wermter (1989:160) correctly observes, they hear the voice but do not see the female oracle. I shall return to this issue of a female oracle later in this chapter under the role of women in Mbire religion.

The original chief shrine of Mwari was Great Zimbabwe. It was set up on a high rocky hill close to the Nyamungwe River in an oasis-like area that enjoys a consistently high rainfall (Ransford 1968:25). Great Zimbabwe probably originated as a shrine of the Mwari and later became the political capital of the Mbire Empire. It is spread over some sixty acres. Three main features still stand above ground. The first one is the Hill Complex, a series of immensely thick walls built on a giant granite hill. The second one is the Great Enclosure, with free-standing, elegantly patterned walls thirty-five feet high and fifteen feet wide. The third one is a curious Conical Tower believed to be a fertility symbol, built evenly and neatly of stone bricks without mortar.

It seems that all the miscellany of buildings on the Hill and in the Valley was erected there because of the special sanctity of the site. As Daneel (1970:23) rightly points out, some were possibly royal, administrative and trading buildings, all crowded around the sacred area.

According to Daneel (1970:23), rituals were conducted at the eastern side of the Hill Complex and within the Great Enclosure. Every second year after harvest, a big meeting was held at Great Zimbabwe. A black cow was offered to Mwari at the Hill Complex with a plea for rain. Two more cows were killed, one for the priests and the other for the wild animals in the forest. The carcass of the latter would be left in the bush near the Great Enclosure. If signs of scavengers could be seen at a later stage, it was believed that Mwari and senior Mbire patriarchs/matriarchs had accepted the offerings.

During this ritual, a high priest (svikiro) entered a special cave on the Hill Complex, where a pot of beer had been placed for the occasion. The beer was then sprinkled at the mouth of the cave, and a plea addressed to Mwari to keep the people healthy. When the high priest ultimately reappeared from the cave, he would greet people outside with the assurance that Wokumatenga (the One Above) would take care of their needs (Daneel 1970:23).

The cult's hierarchy and organizational structure resemble those of an emperor's court. The addressing of petitions to one official, the issuing of edicts by another, a secret intelligence service and numerous courts were a common form. At the central shrine at Great Zimbabwe, the highest and most important priestly offices were those of maziso (eyes), nzeve (ears) and muromo (mouth). With regular reports coming in from the various districts of the empire, these offices became of vital importance for the interpretation of messages and the transmission of Mwari's commands to the messengers. The religious messengers gradually became invested with a second political function as spies and informers of the secret intelligence service (Ransford 196:26). In this way, Mbire emperors were able to combine religious authority with political sovereignty over their vassal states (Daneel 1970:23-24).

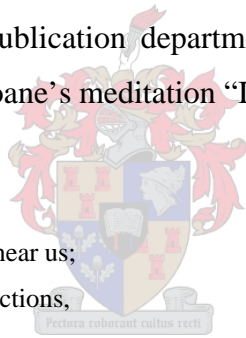
The Mbire language is descriptive in its vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, which reveal the Mbire philosophy of life and its perceptions of Mwari. This Mwari is revealed in the created order, in something within human nature, through mediums and prophets (masvikiro), and in the acts of Mwari, who has been with the Mbire since their pilgrimage from Guruuswa. Mwari is the sole proprietor of life. Mwari is the giver of life, rain, light and all life's good things. Mwari is the Musiki (the creator), who sustains all creation. The Mbire people and communities consequently lived, moved and had their being in Mwari.

5.4 THE ROLE OF LIVING-TIMELESS IN MBIRE SOCIETY

The living-timeless in Mbire society are progenitors of life and guardians of the country. But what constitutes a living-timeless in this society? Parents are expected to take care of their children as best as possible. This caring does not stop at the grave but continues beyond. Thus, service to the living-timeless is integral to Mbire religiosity.

A Ghanaian woman best articulates the importance of the living-timeless in Mbire society when she claimed "to take the *living-timeless* away from the African is to rob him/her of his/her personality". This statement was made when the publication department of the World Council of Churches omitted the following stanza from Setiloane's meditation "I am an African" (1978:407):

Ah... Yes... It is true
They are very present with us
The dead are not dead; they are ever near us;
Approving and disapproving all our actions,
They chide us when we go wrong,
Bless us and sustain us for good deeds done,
For kindness shown, and strangers made to feel at home.
They increase our store and punish our pride.



That this Ghanaian woman wondered and reacted is no surprise, for the meditation goes to the very heart of Mbire and other African ethics, religions and spirituality. It is sad that this aspect of the Mbire has been demonized, repressed and ridiculed by ill-informed and prejudiced Euro-Americans (Commission 1991:67).

As Bourdillon (1987:199) observes, every person who has procreated children is considered to be a living-timeless after death. The spirits of the living-timeless are so much part of Mbire life that they can be aptly called spirit elders, senior members of the society, who now act as spirits.

The living-timeless are the natural patrons of families, guardians of family affairs, morals and traditions. They make sure that taboos are not violated. The living-timeless take care of their children and have power either to bless or punish them. The powers that the living-timeless have

over their children are a continuum of the same powers and authority that parents have over their children when living. Children are always answerable to their parents no matter how old they are.

There is confusion between the living-timeless and other spirits among Euro-Americans. The epithet 'ancestral spirit' should be avoided in reference to the living-timeless as it fails to communicate the Mbire understanding of the living-timeless. It is insufficient and misleading. The living-timeless are a mystery and defy any simple definition. They are both human and spiritual. There is also a very close tie between elders and the living-timeless in Mbire thinking. Elders are metaphorically referred to as the living-timeless, and assumed to be imbued with some mystic powers. Mbire youth are always admonished to take care of their elders because they are their living-timeless. The living-timeless are qualitatively distinct from elders, but elders are so imbued with the authority of the living-timeless that the youth can refer to them as their living-timeless.

In spite of the fact that the living-timeless are regarded as having attained a higher degree of human power and authority, they retain many human proclivities and weaknesses. Thus, there is complete interdependence and mutuality between the living-timeless and the living. Canaan Banana (1991:22-23) asserts that,

A Shona...society is a community of the living and the living-timeless who have a mutual commerce between one another. The living and the living-timeless depend on each other for their existence, which cannot be separated from each other. The living-timeless protect their descendants who in turn offer their gifts and thanks-giving sacrifices.

There is mutual interdependence and interfluence between the living-timeless and the living, and the one cannot do without the other. The living needs protection, care and blessings from the living-timeless. The living-timeless are dependent on certain rituals and sacrifices, which are performed by the living, such as the kurova guva ceremony. This ceremony enables the deceased to become living-timeless, without which the dead person is believed to be doomed. When the living has played their part, they expect the living-timeless to do their part.

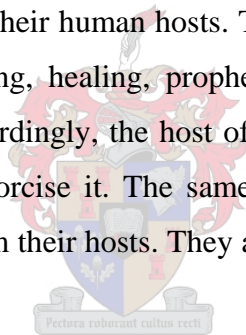
Mostly the living-timeless are considered friendly and helpful as long as the living play their part by honouring the living-timeless regularly. It is when the living-timeless are offended by their children, namely by failure to honour or remember them that they may send an affliction as a mild reminder. This is not a punishment.

The living-timeless are quite distinct from the other types of spirits in which the Mbire believe. They believe in ngozi, the aggrieved spirit of someone who was grievously offended during their time on earth or after death, or murdered. Ngozi is the precarious element in life, believed to afflict individuals and families. The spirits in this category include those of abused spouses or strangers, creditors who were not paid back and of murdered people (Gelfand 1959: 153). The only solution to

placate an avenging spirit is by costly payment to the wronged person's family. Sometimes the payment is not only made by the offender, but by the whole family or kin-group. Sometimes the payment is accompanied by humiliating acts. As Bourdillon (1987:235) rightly observes, the idea of an avenging spirit does not refer so much to a type of spirit but to its supposed action, namely death and destruction of or in the victim's family or kin-group.

An avenging spirit is a frightening idea among the Mbire. Thus it is to be avoided at all costs, analogous to the fear of hell among Christians. Like the fear of hell among the Christians, the fear of an avenging spirit contributes to ethical behaviour. The wisdom of Mbire living-timeless says that the remedy of an avenging spirit is payment (Hodza 1991:28-30). An avenging spirit haunts and torments its victims. The belief in an avenging spirit ensures harmony, because it discourages cruel and unbecoming behaviour in the society.

The Mbire people also believe in another category of spirits called mashavi (sing. shavi). Mashavi are stranger spirits who are not tutelary, which possess a human host (Hodza 1991:6-8). Mashavi may be spirits of baboons or Euro-Americans among a host of other things. These spirits are believed to impart skills and talents to their human hosts. These talents include qualities associated with activities such as hunting, dancing, healing, prophesying and others. But what remains a mystery is the origin of mashavi. Accordingly, the host of a shavi can get rid of it. Mbire doctor-prophets or Christian exorcists can exorcise it. The same is not true of the living-timeless. The living-timeless cannot be exorcised from their hosts. They are not foreign or alien spirits, which can be exorcised.



Besides the category of family living-timeless, there is the category of national hero living-timeless such as Chaminuka (male) and Nehanda (female). The national hero living-timeless transcend local lineage and thus provide a basis for the unification of the various Mbire groups. I shall come back to national hero living-timeless later in this chapter.

5.5 SERVICE TO THE LIVING-TIMELESS (KUPIRA VADZIMU)

Mbire people themselves reject the idea of kupira vadzimu as referring to the worship of the living-timeless. According to Nyevera (1983:23), the Mbire term kupira has no English equivalent. Worship is misleading since kupira is never used in relation to Mwari. The Mbire term used in relation to Mwari is kunamata "to worship" or "to pray." The so-called worship of the living-timeless is not worship at all in the Christian understanding of worship. Worship of the living-timeless has pejorative connotations. It is a derogatory term used by Euro-American Christians to speak disparagingly of any service to the living-timeless. Setiloane (1988:18) uses the word "service" to translate the Tswana word tirelo.

Africans, unless they have grown to internalize the Westerners' views of themselves, strongly resent the suggestion that they worship Badimo. They argue that the European word worship does not properly convey the same meaning as that service tirelo which they perform in relation to their ancestors. That service which is rendered to Badimo is in fact of the same quality and level as that rendered to one's parents while they are living. In SeTswana: Re direla Badimo; we serve (fulfil all proper duties towards, that is, provide them with the necessities of life, food, clothing etc) but Re rapela Modimo: We pray to Modimo.

Though this refers to the Tswana, the word "service" is the best rendering of the Mbire term kupira. The word kupira does not stand alone. It is always an action toward someone or something. Kupira always stands with vadzimu (the living-timeless) but never with Mwari. The living-timeless still have desires and needs they want met. They are fed and remembered by the living. According to Jongwe (1983:36), the living-timeless are feared, but not as Mwari since they can be scolded if they failed to fulfil expected duties. It is noteworthy that this would not be common in the Mbire relationship with Mwari.

In order to put service to the living-timeless in its proper context, I will discuss the Mbire understanding of death and associated rituals.

5.5.1 Death (Rufu)

The Mbire do not understand death as the cessation of life but as a transition into another kind of existence. Death is a rite of passage, a process of the journey through life. The deceased are buried together with their belongings, expressing the idea that the deceased have fully departed. The death of a person is not sharply expressed, but referred to in some euphemistic words and phrases: Watsiya (s/he has left us behind), Watungamira (s/he has proceeded), Watorwa (s/he has been taken), Wapfuura (s/he has passed on), Waenda (s/he has gone) and others. All these terms suggest a continuity of life.

When a person is about to die, the dying person is removed from the homestead to a prepared place outside the home. According to Edwards (1929:34-35), immediately after death the body is returned to the home of the deceased. The deceased's last words are valued very much. As soon as one experiences the death pangs, the deceased's eyes are closed, the body is placed on the right side, and legs bend upwards, arms folded with hands below the chin. The body is then wrapped in a new cloth and laid on a sleeping mat or bed until a coffin is made. It is important that the next of kin be informed immediately to avoid bad omens. The headman is informed, the official mourning is permitted for a certain period, and if it continues, the deceased's spirit is believed to find it hard to proceed on the journey.

Edwards (1929:35) observes that death is a communal issue among Mbire people. All people, relatives, friends and neighbours come to pay their last respects or tribute to the deceased. The body of the deceased is washed and anointed with oil in preparation for burial. Before the body is shrouded for burial, all relatives and friends of the deceased enter the house to pay their last respects to the deceased. A white cloth is used as a shroud.

It is the duty of the community to console and calm the bereaved. Every community member is mourned without reservation. The Mbire have no equivalent of hell in the hereafter. The widespread feeling is that there is an element of trial and judgment of life itself.

5.5.2 Burial (Kuviga)

Every community member is entitled to a proper burial. Cremation is foreign in Mbire society. The body is buried to keep it away from witches (Aschwanden 1987:247). Elders or the deceased usually choose the site of the grave before death. Usually each family has a piece of land reserved for their family graves. Graveyards are considered sacred. When the burial place has been chosen, the son, husband or brother will mark the place or spot by digging once with a hoe (Edwards 1929:35). Helpers will then complete the digging. Usually a rocky kopje or an anthill is chosen for a gravesite. According to Gelfand (1962:124), chiefs are buried in mountains and children are buried in the riverbeds to avoid drought. Once the grave is dug, a niche is carved into the bottom of the grave, which corresponds to the exact size of the coffin. The grave is called guva (pl. makuva) in the Mbire language. The niche is called imba (house).

According to Maraire (1990:107), before they take the deceased for burial, the body is spoken to and most of speeches are to bid farewell. The family head will request the deceased for permission to carry her/him to the grave, which is now her/his, house. At this point, the body is carried out of the house. The body is carried on a stretcher for the burial place. The elders walk in front, followed by pallbearers, who are usually surrounded by relatives crying and others singing. All adults take part in the procession to the grave. It is an honour to carry the body, so the next of kin usually carry it. On the way, they rest three times. Several meanings are attached to this. According to Aschwanden (1987:256), this may signify that they are not in a hurry to get rid of the deceased. It may also signify that the deceased needs rest, so that when the spirit of the deceased comes back to possess someone, the spirit will not exhibit signs of thirst and fatigue. Lastly, it may symbolize the three stages of birth (Aschwanden 1987:262). This is consistent with the Mbire belief in the oneness of body and spirit.

According to Gelfand (1966:81), on arrival at the grave, the crying and singing stop and the burial takes place in silence. The coffin is taken and placed in the grave, where the coffin is fitted into the niche carved out at the bottom of the grave. That is now the house of the deceased. Burial always

takes place either in the morning or late in the afternoon, but never at noon. A person must be buried facing the east and the head pointing to the west. Once the coffin is in position, it is sealed off with earth and stones. The bier poles are broken and thrown into the grave together with anything associated with the funeral. Every relative present throws a handful of soil in the grave. According to Aschwanden (1987:262), some of the deceased's personal objects are placed in the grave and the deceased is told to use them on the journey. The grave is then filled with earth. In rocky places, a mound of stones is made over the grave with a large stone at the head. All those who arrive late for the funeral place stones on the spot marking the head.

Aschwanden (1987:263) observes that after burial all who took part in the funeral go back to the homestead, where food is provided. Usually a beast is killed to provide meat for all the mourners. People who come to the funeral bring a gift called chema (a token of grief). Before returning to the homestead for food all the people who took part in the funeral are cleansed by washing their hands either in a river if there is one nearby or a bowl of water mixed with crushed leaves of certain trees.

A branch of a mutarara tree is usually left on top of the grave, which serves two purposes. It keeps livestock away, and it misleads witches looking for human flesh. When all the people have gone, the family elders clean the surroundings and remove all tracks. For some days, the family elders continue to visit the grave to check the tracks and to see if the grave has been disturbed. If the grave has been desecrated, a doctor-prophet is consulted.

A ritual to introduce the living-timeless about the coming of another living-timeless and to request them to welcome the deceased is performed by the family elders before leaving the grave for the homestead. Mandaza (1970:54) asserts that,

When burial is complete, everybody goes away while the old men of the clan gather round the grave and hand over by prayer the spirit of the dead to the *living-timeless*. They all clap and the head of the family says, "Here is your person whom you have taken from us. We now hand him to you, welcome him in the spirit world and also look after us who are left outside.

Other rites are performed at the homestead. The deceased's possessions are sealed away until after the kurova guva ceremony, after which they will be available for use. According to Kumbirai (1977:123), during this period, the spirit of the deceased is believed to be in a transitional state between that of the living and that of the living-timeless. It is outside and wandering. While it is in this state, it is not ready for admission into the world of the living-timeless.

5.5.3 Post-mortem and Associated Rituals

These days there are two types of post mortem that are carried out in the Mbire society. An autopsy is done by hospitals. Doctors trained in Euro-American medicine perform the autopsy. The autopsy would be sufficient for Euro-Americans and a few christianized Mbire people. The traditional type

of post mortem is done by a Mbire doctor-prophet after the body of the deceased has been buried. According to Mutizwa (1984:19), this post mortem is grounded in the Mbire belief that nothing happens by chance. There is always a cause for everything. Therefore, a delegation must be appointed to go and consult the Mbire doctor-prophet on the cause of the death. It is customary to choose a Mbire doctor-prophet who lives some distance from the deceased to avoid the possibility of prejudice.

Normal death is more accepted than that from witchcraft, murder or suicide. Mwari is not the cause of death, although Mwari lets death happen. Thus, Mwari is ultimately responsible. Banana (1991:27) argues that death is timely when it comes at a senile age. Nevertheless, Bourdillon (1987:206) contends that death is never fully accepted. Witchcraft is believed to be the commonest cause of death even among those who believe that a purely natural death is possible. Whenever there is a death, a witch is always accused. Banana (1991:27) summarises this Mbire attitude towards death,

The Mbire ...people have a mix paradoxical attitude towards death. Although death is viewed as a gateway to the next life, they nevertheless do not readily accept its occurrence. The pain of parting with their loved ones in the physical form leads them to speculate upon the cause of their fatal break of their physical ties in their family. Death is never acceptable as inevitable. The Mbire...literally do not want their kin to die.

Therefore, every cause of death is investigated to prevent the continuance of death among the living. Even in cases where death is the result of HIV/AIDS, it is investigated for other causes besides HIV/AIDS. A witch could be accused even in these cases. Aschwanden (1987:214-215) asserts that,

Therefore, the Mbire investigate every death thoroughly, even an apparently natural one, for they want to know what or who has killed and what one can do to stop it "so that it does not return to us and does not kill others among us"...So when they say to the dead at his burial: "Do not return to us ...they mean, in particular, the evil that killed him/*her* and the deceased *self* (italics mine).

If the death was the result of an avenging spirit, then the spirit must be appeased. The living-timeless are believed to cause no death in their families. Nevertheless, if they are displeased about something, they may withdraw their protection for witches to do harm. Witches are the equivalent of the demonic in Christian understanding. Mbire religiosity has no devil figure save witches. Witches are believed to harm you only if the living-timeless allowed it. This is a significant motivating factor for morality in the service to the living-timeless.

Usually a number of Mbire doctor-prophets are consulted to see if they agree. Mbire doctor-prophets are always viewed with suspicion, though they are highly esteemed. Malpractice is also present among Mbire doctor-prophets. They rarely accuse anyone of being a witch directly. In spite

of the Witchcraft Suppression Acts, which make it a crime for anyone to practice witchcraft or accuse anyone of being a witch (Chavunduka 1977:145), the Mbire people continue to consult Mbire doctor-prophets for the cause of death.

After discovering the cause of death, the doro remvura ritual follows. This ritual is based on the Mbire belief that the deceased at first just wander about in a land where there is no water. Beer is provided for the deceased to quench the thirst. Other than cooling the spirit of the deceased, the ceremony also serves to thank the community for their help in the burial of the deceased. It also officially marks the end of the mourning period. According to Gombe (1986:81), this is the time when the delegation that went to consult a doctor-prophet on the cause of the death reveals its findings to the gathered kin so that a collective decision is made and collective action is taken. Someone is also chosen to take care of the deceased's family at this gathering.

5.6 KUROVA GUA CEREMONY

The most important post mortem ritual is the restoration and installation ritual called kurova guva ceremony. This ritual takes place a year after burial. Kurova guva literally means, "to beat the grave" but metaphorically means, "to put the spirit of the deceased to rest". According to Daneel (1971:101-102), the ritual is believed to give birth to a new being as the deceased acquires full status as a living-timeless through this ritual. The purpose of this ritual is to bring back the roaming spirit of the deceased. It is a restoration of a living-timeless to come and live with the family as well as an installation to service. The deceased now has permanent residence and no longer wanders out in the veld. Daneel (1971:101-102) asserts that,

If this ritual is not performed, the spirit remains outside...without officially recognized status; an incomplete spiritual being whose name is not mentioned during family rituals.

The deceased will be able to extend protective powers to the living only after this ritual. The ability of the living-timeless to play their role is conditioned by the faithfulness of the living. If rejected, the living-timeless would send a reminder by causing various troubles. Maternal living-timeless are the only ones believed to kill when they are angry. This ritual is not performed for everyone. Children, those who die single, the witches and others, do not deserve this ritual. Beer is brewed and food is provided for everyone present. According to Banana (1991:30), an old woman beyond childbearing age brews this beer. A young girl before the age of puberty, who has not yet developed breasts or started menstruating, assists her. Meat and beer are shared together and there is communion with the living-timeless. Some beer is poured on the ground; meat is roasted and eaten unsalted. Zvarevashe (1970:46) describe the role of the living-timeless as:

The work of vadzimu is to protect their descendants. They are more interested in their own children than in anyone else. They guard their people wherever they may be. Nowadays we find

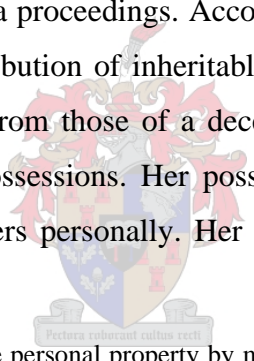
members of a household scattered everywhere, some may be studying in America, England and India, but the vadzimu still sees these people and protect them.

However, if the vadzimu are offended by having their needs neglected, they may punish the family with illness or death. The family must remember the vadzimu and honour them by having ceremonies for them and dedicating animals to them. If a person's illness is caused by a vadzimu, a doctor will not be able to cure it. Only a doctor-prophet has the power to diagnose such an illness and prescribe the appropriate ritual to appease the vadzimu.

Generally speaking, the vadzimu are all the deceased relatives in a family: cousins, brothers, sisters, parents, aunts, uncles, etc, and can be divided into matrilineal and patrilineal vadzimu. Patrilineal vadzimu want to eat and drink, to be honoured by many people at ritual feasts. They look after their children and afflict them, but do not usually kill them because they want their clan to multiply.

The living-timeless are believed to care for all the living. Anyone can be chosen as a medium (homwe) regardless of age. Usually parents possess their grandchildren, not their children.

Another ritual is the name-giving ceremony, the succession to the deceased's name. This takes place on the last day of the kurova guva proceedings. According to Holleman (1952: 318-368), the last thing done on this day is the distribution of inheritable property. A deceased wife's personal belongings are distributed differently from those of a deceased husband. The deceased woman's blood relatives take care of all her possessions. Her possessions consist of her clothes, kitchen utensils, cattle or anything that was hers personally. Her husband has no say over her property. Holloman (1952:321) asserts,



A married woman could also acquire personal property by making a special effort apart from her duties and children. When these activities did not interfere with her normal obligations as a housewife, her husband had no right whatever to any property, which she acquired by making pots, acting as a midwife, or by growing surplus crops.

It should be noted that property so acquired by a woman did not form part of the estate of her husband's family and the husband therefore had no control over it. This property was vested in the woman as a member of her own matrilineal kin-group. Neither her husband nor his paternal family had a claim to it after her death. Only her own kin-group (i.e. in the first place her children and her full brothers and full sisters) was entitled to claim.

Usually, the property is given to the deceased woman's children or divided among her relatives.

On the other hand, the distribution of a man's property is an involved and complex process. They first decide what to do with the deceased's wife/wives. The wife decides what she wants. She may decide to be an inherited wife by one of the deceased's agnates, or she may decide not to be inherited. The woman is not forced against her will. As Aschwanden (1987:313-314) correctly observes, the fact that a wife can be inherited does not mean she is property. It is a complete

fabrication and misrepresentation of facts to think of a deceased man's wife as part of his material belongings. A Mbire woman always belongs to her people throughout her life. Gombe (1986:84-85) argues that Mbire women have identity in their own right of personhood, not as utilities or property. A Mbire woman has a choice and cannot be inherited against her will.

The rules of succession are based on the Mbire law of inheritance. Holloman (1952:330) asserts,

Mbire law of succession is based upon one fundamental principle which may be formulated as follows: the oldest surviving son succeeds (kugara nhaka) to his father's name and assumes control of the estate of his deceased father's house for the benefit of its members, subject to the supervision of the representative head of the wider patri-group of which the deceased's house is considered to be a component part.

The first point to be noted is that the heir does not acquire his father's estate in his individual capacity but as the senior representative of his father's house. As a member of this house the heir obviously also has an individual share in the estate but being placed in the position of his father, he assumes his father's rights and responsibilities amongst which is the responsibility to provide wives for his young unmarried brothers and half-brothers. In this connection he will, as far as possible, recognize any preferential claims they may have with regard to particular assets of the estate, and he must also duly consider such demands as may be made upon the estate by the head of the wider patri-group on behalf of any of the latter group's needy members.

Usually they make sure all the agnates inherit something, no matter how small the item might be. Its value would be symbolic and sentimental, but it is also representative. Nevertheless, relatives sometimes fight for the deceased's wealth. But all possessions left by the deceased man are for his children and wife/wives. Taking them away from a bereaved family is greed at its worst and is not part of Mbire custom.

5.7 MBIRE SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION

The Mbire people believe in a spiritual form of resurrection. Banana (1991:31) asserts that the living-timeless resurrect to protect their children.

The living-timeless are not dead but exist in the spiritual form although they cannot be seen by the physical eye. They have physical traits because they can assume a physical form through their possession of spirit mediums.

Banana (1991:31) is also insistent that resurrection in Mbire religion is not a bodily resurrection, but a "reintroduction of the living-timeless into the ranks of the family through spiritual presence." Another Mbire ritual gives the name of a living-timeless to a bull. The bull is a symbol of the presence of the living-timeless. The living-timeless are honoured in these bulls as providers and protectors of their people. These bulls are believed to prevent coming disasters by behaving strangely. As Aschwanden (1987:133-134) rightly observes, these bulls are also believed to raise

the alarm at night when witches approach the homes. These bulls cannot be castrated, nor used for ploughing or anything. They are treated with great respect.

Children are also symbols of the living-timeless. The living-timeless resurrect and continue living through children bearing their names and traits. The bull and the child are symbols of the living-timeless' presence. The same ritual performed when giving the name of a living-timeless to a bull is also performed when giving the name of a living-timeless to a child. Usually a living-timeless does not demand his/her name to be given to a child, but the deceased's son/daughter of his/her own accord will give the name of his/her deceased father/mother to one of his/her sons/daughters as a living symbol of the living-timeless (Aschwanden 1987:339). The Mbire are comforted by the deceased's presence in a child. This should not be viewed as a reincarnation, but as a Mbire form of resurrection. Resurrection relates to the features of the living-timeless which are perpetuated in the behavioural patterns of their children's children. But in spite of these traits of the living-timeless, the two are two separate personalities. Let me now return to the issue of national hero living-timeless.

5.8 NATIONAL HERO LIVING-TIMELESS: CUSTODIANS OF ECOLOGICAL SURVIVAL

What have been discussed so far are family living-timeless chiefly concerned with a particular household's welfare. In contrast to family living-timeless are national living-timeless, who are concerned chiefly with the community's welfare. As Daniel (1971:93) observes, their involvement in the lives of the people is of multi-ethnic significance. These national living-timeless (mhondoro - lion spirits) are concerned with the community or nation as a whole. Gelfand (1974:95) observes that in Mbire society these mhondoro may reside in actual lions, which are believed to be harmless unless provoked. According to Daniel (1971:93), mhondoro are custodians of ecological survival and their responsibility is to mediate between Mwari and the community when rain is needed or other national issues need to be addressed. Klostermaier (1973:134) argues that Mbire religious urges have a very significant ecological element. This is evident in how the Mbire attitude towards nature determines the use people made of the environment, particularly the "land". Hodza (1979:14) highlights this Mbire relationship to their environment as follows:

The world of the *living-timeless* is referred to as Pasi (the ground, the world below). Pasi connotes at least those *living-timeless* whom the people remember, and with whom they are in effective contact. The fact that the founding father [sic] has kept his [sic] descendants their land, and that he [sic] and other *living-timeless* lie buried in it, constitutes a very real bond between the clan and its territory. A man [sic] in his own country is called mwana wevhu (child of the soil), and this name distinguishes him from those whose links with the land are not so close.

The founding fathers [sic] and the other *living-timeless* live on with their descendants in the same land, and communicate with them through spirit possession, dreams, and other types of visitation, such as sickness, which require interpretation of a diviner. Communication is made according to the degree of the relationship and the seniority of the *living-timeless*. The *living-timeless* who are related to the whole of the clan, as opposed to smaller lineage groups, communicate with their descendants through a tribal medium selected by them and of a different totem.

According to Klostermaier (1973:136), Mbire people live with the environment as if it were a living being with feelings. They see themselves as part of it but respect it greatly, because they sense something mysterious about the environment. There is a wholeness and togetherness in all parts of the environment, because the land, mountains, rivers and forests are linked closely to Mwari and the living-timeless. Mbire religious observances, taboos and totems work for the preservation of the environment. The fact that the living-timeless, particularly chiefs, are buried in mountains creates deep emotional attachment to the land and the entire environment, and this creates respect for it.

While Euro-Americans have attempted to control and overpower the environment (Klostermaier 1973:134), Mbire religion helps its members to adapt to the environment and its mysteries. According to Daneel (1991:14), Mbire environmentalism grows out of the need to survive, not for nature's sake. Aesthetic considerations were secondary. This has caused a clash between Euro-American and Mbire environmentalists. Euro-American priorities and values concerning the environment were imposed on Mbire people and Mbire people were refused the right to determine the environmental policies that best suited their context. Those of Euro-Americans are overshadowing Mbire views on the environment. Daneel (1991:14) further contends that this is caused by a Euro-American sense of cultural and moral superiority, which led them to adopt a paternalistic attitude in dealing with Mbire people. But before the advent of Euro-Americans in Zimbabwe, Mbire farmers and pastoralists acted as caretakers of the environment. For centuries, they succeeded in balancing their subsistence needs while protecting the local eco-system.

The environment was safeguarded by communal ownership of land. According to Chapeyama (1987:18-22), if the environment is harmed, it would result in a chain reaction which would work against the community interest. Consequently, Daneel (1991:100) advocates for a Mbire theology of the environment:

If we are to develop a realistic, praxis-oriented Christian ethic aimed at the liberation of nature/creation, we have to probe the wisdom of Shona, and seek the intuition that has laid at the roots of earth-keeping in Shona... religion and philosophy all along.

To understand the role of national living-timeless as guardians of the land, I will discuss pre-colonial Mbire ownership and use of the land.

5.9 MBIRE LAND OWNERSHIP AND USE

One needs to understand the distinction between “ownership” and “possession” rights to understand the pre-colonial Mbire attitude towards land and its natural resources. The two ideas constitute the socio-legal framework for individuals and groups. According to Omari (1990:167-175), the group owns the entire land/country and the individuals exercise possession rights over little portions allocated them. The social group was the owner of the land. Moyana (1948:13) asserts,

In Shona cosmology such an important natural endowment as land does not have a marketable value. Prior to the advent of colonial rule in the country now known as Zimbabwe, the prevailing Shona land tenure system vested land rights in a corporate group, which had overriding rights over those of the individual...Chief served as the Trustee who allocated land to newcomers and ensured that its use was in harmony with the traditional land tenure formulas. The traditional land tenure system also accepted that land rights were inalienable. Land belonged to the living and to the unborn as well as to the dead. No member of a group could sell or transfer land to an outsider as land was considered a natural endowment in the same category as rain, sunlight and the air we breathe. In this economy, there could be no commodity more valuable than land and no circumstances in which it could be profitable to dispose of it. In short, land had no exchange value...The belief that to dispose of land was sacrilege, was widely held. Individual ownership was inconceivable as every *person* was and still is entitled to the natural endowment mentioned above.

Land belongs to the community. It was communal property belonging to the living and the living-timeless. Nevertheless, individuals had possession rights to those pieces of land apportioned to them, while the community had ownership rights over all the land that belonged to it. Mountains, forests, trees, rivers and water holes were all sacred places, which belonged to the community. The chief, who was the religio-political head, was the custodian of the land. The chief was never the owner of the land. Land belongs to the living-timeless and ultimately to Mwari. The duty of the chief is to oversee all matters concerned with proper use and management of the land. A chief's area is divided into districts, each composed of villages. The village in turn had hamlets. Hodza (1979:15) describes the chief's area as:

The Mbire nomenclature reflects the structure. The chief (ishe) of a territory (nyika) is called sanyika (master of the land). The administrative head of a district (dunhu), normally a kinsman, is called sadunhu. The head of a village (musha) is called samusha or, because he keeps the tax register, sabhuku. The head of a hamlet is called samana, and household head saimba. If vatorwa (non-ruling elite member) form a sufficiently numerous group, they may constitute a dunhu with a sadunhu of their own lineage. The qualification of these positions of leadership is lineal seniority in the group concerned, though disabilities of age may be a limiting factor.

The fact that these leaders would possess larger portions of land than others did not mean that they owned the land, but that they had great responsibilities. When white colonial settlers came to

Mbireland, the Mbire did not resist to the point of shedding blood, because they thought that they were just gold miners. According to Samkange (1980:56), it was only when the Mbire realized that these settlers had taken the “untakeable land” that there was the first Chimurenga (uprising) of 1896-1897. This “untakeable land” was also the cause of the second Chimurenga, which eventually resulted in the political independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. It is the cause of President Robert Mugabe’s controversial land reform prevailing in Zimbabwe today as well.

Today even Mbire people residing in urban areas still have homes in communal lands. They always want to be buried on the land of their living-timeless. Many Mbire people never view the city as a real home (musha).

5.10 NATIONAL LIVING-TIMELESS: GUARDIANS OF MBIRE ENIRONMENTAL RELIGION

Schoffleers (1978:2) sums up this ecological value of Mbire religion in this manner:

In Central Africa concern with ecological matters is distributed through a number of religious institutions. Lineage cults, having to do among other things with the holding of stock and land, obviously have an ecological dimension and so do the professional cults of hunters, fishermen and others. Throughout Central Africa exists a type of cult which functions for the whole of the community rather than for sections within it and which is at the same time profoundly ecological. It is this latter type we have in mind when speaking of territorial cults. Characteristic activities of territorial cults are rituals to counteract droughts, floods blights, pests and epidemic diseases afflicting cattle and man. Put positively, the territorial cults function in respect of the well-being of the community, its fields, livestock, fishing, hunting and general economic interests. Apart from engaging in ritual action, however, they also issue and enforce directives with regard to a community’s use of its environment. Finally, they provide schemes of thought in which myths; rituals and directives for actions appear as part of a coherent worldview. What sets territorial cults apart from other religious institutions is the combination of communal and ecological concerns and the primary accorded these concerns.

What follows are Mbire religious practices and taboos, which contribute to the protection of the environment.

5.10.1 Totems and Taboos

The Mbire totem system is based on wildlife and it regulates their social life such as marriage and food, which they may eat as well as their succession to chieftainship. Sebahire (1990:71) asserts,

By totemism we mean the belief in the relationship between an animal or vegetal species and a kinship group, in particular the clan. Belief in totems seems to us to be symptomatic of a remarkable fact, i.e. that man, in order to identify himself as a group, more or less projects himself in nature which has become his mirror, thus recognizing that he shares the basic biological attributes. One of the consequences is that he feels obligated to respect this same nature. In

concrete terms, it means that he is forbidden to kill and eat certain species with whom he enjoys a quasi-ontological relationship.

Each individual has a totem animal, bird, or part of an animal, which is one's totem (mutupo). This mutupo gives identity and provides collective aspirations. The Mbire totem system is paternal. Eating your totem animal is believed to leave one vulnerable to misfortunes. Tobayiwa (1985:229-236) reminds us that it is never done (zvinoera). Most totem animals exhibit elegance, dignity, strength or other positive features.

The totem system is friendly to the environment as certain game is protected. Every youth in Mbire society is taught how to behave in the forests. Forests should not be angered, otherwise one will be vulnerable to wildlife or one will get lost in these forests. It is also a taboo to despise the animals one sees and the fruits one eats in the forest, because one should not despise what the living-timeless have given one. Cruelty to animals is prohibited. It is a taboo to kill animals such as baboons while in their natural habitat (chiro). The same is true of snakes. It is in hunting and fishing that we see clear ecological concerns. There are ritual ordinances, which regulate these activities.

There are forests, which are prohibited to be cut. These include holy groves dedicated to local living-timeless (masango anoera). It is a taboo to hunt or cut trees in these sacred groves. This maintains a natural preserve where traditional plants and wildlife survive unhampered and undisturbed. There are also certain sacred mountains, caves and wells dedicated to spirits of local chiefs and other high-ranking people believed to reside in animals, such as lions (mhondoro) and others. These animals, which are believed to be harmless, are believed to drink from sacred wells. As a result, certain containers are prohibited such as metallic ones or pots with soot. Only traditional containers are permitted.

During the second Chimurenga, the living-timeless were believed to have given security to people who went to hide in certain mountains, which are always covered with mist (mhute). Enemies were confused and lost direction. Certain herbs and grasses are also protected and people pulling out certain roots and destroying wild plants are warned that they will be struck by lightning if they continue to destroy Mother Nature. Certain trees were not to be cut as well, especially those providing landmarks (muhacha, muonde and muchakata). These trees are not to be cut down, because their evergreen foliage was a symbol of protection by the living-timeless for animals and people. Important community gatherings were held under these trees. Certain trees are prohibited from being used as firewood, especially the mushozhowa tree, which is used to exorcise spirits. Using it as firewood is believed to result in the home-coming of the exorcised spirits.

Mountains evoke the sacred among the Mbire people. They inspire them to experience the wholly others. Mountains always arouse feelings of overwhelming devotion, awaken an overwhelming

sense of the sacred and embody and reflect the ultimate and most central of values of religion globally. Bernbaum (1990:10-12) asserts that,

Like the sacred values they express, the mountains revered by cultures around the world appear infinite in number and kind. They range from the highest peaks of the earth to hills that barely rise above surrounding landscape. They are regarded traditionally as places of revelation, centres of the universe, sources of life... abodes of the dead, temples of the gods, expressions of the ultimate reality in its myriad manifestations.

Mountains, though losing most of their sanctity, are the very presence of divine power; they remain an unspoken presence.

5.10.2 Mhondoro Cult

Mhondoro cults are central to Mbire “eco-religion” of communal modes of production. Gelfand (1962:13-16) observes that they hold important rituals at the onset of summer to request sufficient rain. Rituals for rain are very important. When people are approaching summer, they hold these ceremonies known as mukwerere. Well-known Mhondoro cults are those of Dzivaguru and Karuva among the Mbire of northern Zimbabwe. They are renowned for producing rain in periods of severe drought. A virgin girl is dedicated to Karuva and she lives in Karuva’s sacred grove. If a man seduces her, it is believed that drought will result and this man will be burnt to death for such a crime.

People usually honour the Mhondoro in their chiefdoms. However, Bourdillon (1987:255, 258) correctly observes that people from all over the Mbire country honour Dzivaguru and Karuva. Their influences cover a wider area. It must be noted that rituals of rain (mukwerere) have endless local variations among the Mbire people. There are also rituals of thanksgiving after harvest called marombo (blessings).

5.10.3 Mwari Cult

The Mbire people believe in one ultimate reality, the creator, whom they call Mwari. The Mwari cult gives evidence that, in spite of a need for mediators, Mwari is active and involved, existing not only in the mythical past of creation, but also present among the people today. Because Mwari is the final authority figure beyond the living-timeless, Mwari regulated the fertility, both human and agricultural, throughout Mbire country and as the ultimate source of rain. Thus, Mwari’s help is sought in not only time of drought, but also when other crises threaten the nation.

Consequently, seeds were taken to the central shrine yearly, where they were blessed by the cult’s priesthood and distributed to all areas to be mixed with other seeds for planting to ensure good crops (Bourdillon 1991:123ff). Even when the Zulu-speaking Ndebele overthrew the Mbire-Rozvi Empire, the cult did not only survive, but became a central feature of the religious orientation of the

entire area. Bhebhe (1978:289) observes that the Ndebele acknowledged the cult's control of the fertility of the land and they sent gifts for sacrifice. They consulted the shrines as the centre of prophecy and observed all the rules and regulations concerning the sanctity of these temples.

While the arrival of the Nguni in Mbireland heralded a new phase in the evolution of pre-colonial formations, new elements of political and ideological legitimization, which later became focal points of unity between the Mbire and the Ndebele people, were introduced. The common belief in Mwari and prophets (masvikiro) became a rallying-point for the early struggle of the Mbire and the Ndebele against the establishment of colonial rule.

Though Mwari is rarely mentioned in the family rituals, nevertheless, Mwari is mentioned when a senior national medium (mhondoro) is requested to plead for rain through those (living-timeless) whose names have been forgotten to the great Mambo (King) behind them (Daneel 1971:84).

5.11 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MBIRE RELIGION

The story of Mbire religion is incomplete without discussing the role of women. While Mbire women were oppressed then and are still oppressed now, it is no exaggeration to argue that these women were and are still not eliminated from the official religious structures as was and is the case in most Christian writings and institutions. It could fairly be argued that Mbire women were playing and are still playing a leading role in Mbire religion. What has not been clearly discussed in all studies of Mbire religion is the leading role of women in this religion. I shall substantiate this point by briefly examining the central role of women at the central shrine both at Great Zimbabwe then and at Matonjeni near Bulawayo now.

The leading role of women in the Mbire religion has not been properly told. Daneel (1970:42), who is acclaimed as one of the gurus of Mbire religion, has greatly misrepresented the Mbire religion in this regard. Like the colonial government of his day, he recognizes only male figures and female authority figures fell behind in the new religious economy. His acclaimed studies of Mbire religion at Great Zimbabwe never mention the role women played there at all. All we are told is that the principal mhondoro of the Mbire people is Chaminuka, who somehow became the spiritual "son of Mwari" (Daneel 1970:24). Chaminuka's prophet (svikiro) at Great Zimbabwe is said to have resided within the Eastern Enclosure of the Hill Complex, where he is said to have communicated the messages of his close associate Mwari to the outer world and also interpreted the squawking of the ancestral hungwe (fish eagle) bird on its annual visit to the shrine as pronouncements of the deity.

Daneel also watered down the role of Mbire women at Matonjeni, though recognizing them there. I would like to contend that what we see at Matonjeni is a continuation of what was happening at

Great Zimbabwe. At Great Zimbabwe the concern with the approach of Mwari through an officially recognized high priest (svikiro) was well developed. It is clear that the function of the high priest (svikiro) was a prominent feature of the Mbire religion at the central shrine and that of the prophet (svikiro) elsewhere. Mwari has become Mwari of the priests and chiefs first at Great Zimbabwe and later at Matonjeni.

Daneel (1970:24) is quite right in arguing that when the Mbire Empire was at its peak, which was reached at Great Zimbabwe, the Mwari worship consolidated its wide influence. Its political significance also grew as it became increasingly important for affiliated Mbire chiefs to show their loyalty to Mbire emperors. One of the ways of doing so was by regularly sending vanyai (messengers) to Great Zimbabwe and later to Matonjeni to petition for rain, to consult for succession of chieftainship and to dedicate mbonga (female dedicated to Mwari) and hossanah (male dedicated to Mwari) from far-of districts to the service of Mwari.

While Daneel (1970:37) acknowledges that the Mbire Mwari had attained female and sexual connotations, he continues to accord wrongly the highest priestly position to male figures of the Mbire priesthood now at Matonjeni. This is a misrepresentation of the hierarchy at the central shrine. Daneel failed to recognize that at the apex of the cult hierarchy is the female oracle, who represents Mwari's Voice in the cave. This female oracle is the key and highest priestly position at the central shrine, since she impersonates Mwari, being identified as Mwari's Voice in her ritual capacity. She is, in fact, the high priest (svikiro), who communicates with Mwari on behalf of the people. In the manner that the prophet (svikiro) of a national living-timeless becomes a prophet (svikiro) when s/he is possessed, so this female oracle becomes Mwari's Voice when she speaks from the cave. Nevertheless, her position is not quite the same as that of the ordinary prophet (svikiro). She is the mouthpiece of Mwari, though her authority is not absolute.

A number of senior and junior functionaries who live at the central shrine assist this female high priest (svikiro). There are two offices of these functionaries or assistants. The first one is the office of mbonga-svikiro (female), while the second one is the office of hossanah-svikiro (male). As we have seen above, both mbonga women and hossanah men were dedicated to the service of Mwari while they were young. They become known as the children of Mwari.

As Daneel (1970:49-50) observes, once at the central shrine these mbongas and hossanahs undergo special training in taboos and in their relation to the opposite sex. They also learn special duties. Mbonga women sweep the entrance of the shrine and farm pieces of land allotted to them, while hossanah men learn to dance in honour of Mwari during ceremonies and festivals. Hossanah men are also messengers to distant districts and surrounding villages.

In most cases, though not always, the mbonga women marry the hossanah men. When a mbonga is married, the female oracle determines the bride price (roora), a factor which enables the Mbire priesthood to exert its influence over mbonga women who happen to have been married off to men living in other areas. Daneel (1970:49) further observes that mbonga women, wherever they live, are required to come to the central shrine to participate in the annual ceremonies and rituals. By the time a mbonga woman gets married, she is well schooled in the activities of the central shrine. A mbonga woman could now become a prophet (svikiro) of a national living-timeless (mhondoro) of her district or of any of the Mbire national living-timeless.

Once a mbonga woman passed child-bearing age, she enters the most important phase of her life. She is now allowed to brew the sacred beer for the ritual ceremonies and if she is fortunate, she becomes eligible for the highest priestly position of the Mbire religion only achieved by mbonga women, namely that of the 'Oracle Voice' itself. As Daneel (1970:50) correctly observes, only mbonga-svikiro succeed to the office of the 'Oracle Voice' after the death of the previous female oracle. There is always one mbonga woman who attends all consultations at the cave as the female oracle's understudy and future representative of the 'Oracle Voice'. Another mbonga woman acts as the female oracle's interpreter and sits at the mouth of the cave, where she communicates with the 'Oracle Voice' in the cave and the people outside. This mbonga woman is the closest person to the female oracle in her ritual role as the interpreter.

Contrary to Daneel's reading (1970:37) of the hierarchy at the central shrine, the hossanah men whom he sees as high priest and priests respectively are actually assistants to the female oracle. The terms, which Daneel mistranslates, are mupinzi webasa (one who allows people's requests) and muchengeti weMatonjeni (one who keeps the place) do not refer these male figures as "priests" but as assistants. Another term mufambiri (a messenger) was also mistranslated to mean a "second priest."

The hossanah men are mostly hosts of jukwa spirits, which are believed to have emanated directly from Mwari and are believed to bring rain (mweya yemvura). However, national living-timeless (mhondoro) sometimes possess a number of them. Thus, it can fairly be argued that the mbonga-svikiro office is the priestly class analogous to the Jewish Levitical priestly office, while the hossanah-svikiro office constitutes male assistants to the female priestly class.

Consequently, Daneel (1970:50) is correct in contending that the central shrine emerges as a replica of the Mbire spirit world. Mwari and her/his close associates are represented in the earthly priesthood, as they are believed to exist in the spirit world. This is best illustrated on the days of ritual festivities, when the closest possible identification with the spirit world is achieved. This identification is ritually enacted when the female oracle's voice in the cave becomes the 'Voice' of

Mwari, the possessed jukwa dancers become the rain-bringing jukwa spirits themselves, and the mbonga-masvikiro speak to the gathered people as the national living-timeless. Each important spirit has a counterpart in the realm of the living. Daneel (1970:52) argues that, though the whole hierarchy of spirits may never be fully represented during a ceremony at any one time, some of the most important ones are always present on such occasions. Considering the present-day continuation of the mbonga system, the Mwari worship's present and potential future influence is still considerable.

Besides mbonga-masvikiro at the central shrine, Mbire women in general play a leading role in Mbire religion. They were and are still prophets (masvikiro) and doctor-prophets (n'anga). It is not an exaggeration to contend that in most Mbire societies women were/are spiritual leaders. This is in contradiction to most Christian religious institutions. One of the Mbire proverbs says that the best doctor-prophets (n'anga) are women.

In Mbire society, Mwari is portrayed neither exclusively as Mother nor as Father, but considers the whole humankind. As Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:115) argues, in Mbire religion the qualification for being a living-timeless does not recognize the sexuality of a person, but takes into account ungendered issues like parenthood, good morals, death and various other aspects. One of the most senior living-timeless of all time in Mbire history is a woman called Nehanda. She was the religious and political leader of the first Chimurenga against the British settlers in 1896-7. Consequently, the British settlers in Harare hanged her. She is commemorated in national songs as a hero.

In Mbire religion, Mwari is neither a woman nor a man. The anthropocentric images of Mwari are there to help their conception of Mwari, especially in view of how Mwari relates to humankind. It is not a question of allowing Mwari's femininity to supersede as the masculinity of the ultimate reality has done in the Christian religion. That the Mbire religion has a balanced view of the ultimate reality can hardly be overemphasized.

5.12 MISCONCEPTION ABOUT MWARI-MHONDORO RELATIONSHIP

Since the colonial era, there has been an assumption of two different religious systems in Zimbabwe, namely the Mwari cult associated with the Rozvi Kings and the Mhondoro cult associated with the Mutapa Kings (Daneel 1995:217-218). The central problem of this distinction is ignorance of the Mutapa-Rozvi relationship. It should be noted clearly that the Mutapa-Rozvi empires were phases of the same Mbire Empire brought about by internal revolutions that toppled one Mbire House and replaced it with another Mbire House.

According to Samkange (1971), from about 1685, a civil war is said to have broken out between the Mbire Houses for national paramountcy. The ruling House is said to have been Soko. The

challenging House is said to have been Moyo. By the end of 1690, the challenging House is said to have won the civil war and the national paramountcy transferred from the Soko House to the Moyo House.

Zimbabwe seems to have been occupied and dominated socio-politically and socio-religiously by one family for a thousand years. Power has changed hands from one House to another from time to time because of internal upheavals. However, no invading foreign power has been able to defeat the country and influence events in any significant way before the Nguni invasions of the 19th century. Thus, the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-religious development of the Mbire living-timeless has taken a normal evolutionary course for a thousand years.

The establishment of a powerful and reasonably centralized state up to about 1500 CE seems to have enabled the Mbire founding fathers/mothers to establish national socio-political and socio-religious control over the whole country. Samkange (1971) argues that there was no other country in Africa that had a centralized socio-religious hierarchy such as Zimbabwe had and influencing a region as big as from the Zambezi River to the Transvaal across the Limpopo River, and from Mozambique to Botswana/ Zambia.

As such, it is misleading to think of the Mhondoro cult as different from the Mwari cult (Ranger 1967:17), or as having originated from the one coherent system of belief and practice with the Mwari cult and therefore complementary parts of an integrated religious whole, developing along historically different lines (Daneel 1995:218).

The sheer size of the empire necessitated a certain amount of decentralization. Consequently, relatives or trusted servants were assigned duties to rule the provinces all over the empire. The Mwari cult acted as an important centralizing socio-religious and socio-political force first at Great Zimbabwe and later in the Matopo Hills, before the Nguni invasion broke up the Mbire-Rozvi Empire in the 19th century.

The Mhondoro cult is a decentralized Mwari cult itself to provinces and districts far from the central shrine. It is not a separate religious system as Ranger and other Euro-American scholars have deliberately conspired to suggest in fragmenting and distorting Mbire religion. This is why in the so-called Mhondoro cult, the Mhondoro are never identified with Mwari at all, but Mwari remained the creator on whom the Mhondoro depended. It should be noted that the provincial Mhondoro visit the central shrines to confer with Mwari on matters of serious importance. Regular contact between the cult centre and distant Mhondoro is maintained. All Mhondoro, whether they are in regular touch with the oracle or not, are aware of and believe in the vital importance of Mwari, the cosmic power and the ultimate authority in charge of the spirit world. The Mhondoro spirits received their power and directives from Mwari. Mwari is above the Mhondoro.

Daneel (1995:230-231) rightly observes that the conceptual framework is that Mwari presides over in the spirit world. Senior representatives are, first, national hero living-timeless like Murenga, Chaminuka and Nehanda. Mhondoro living-timeless, the senior land guardians of each district, follow. Mwari is above the hierarchies of the living-timeless and is accessible to humankind through the mediation of the priesthood of senior living-timeless.

Ransford (1968:30-31) argues that it is impossible to withhold admiration for all that had been accomplished during the Mbire reign first at Great Zimbabwe and later elsewhere. He is insistent that the Mbire had come to terms with their own environment and charted a pattern of development suitable for their needs. They had developed a complex socio-political and socio-economic system and a sense of togetherness grounded on a common socio-religious ideology.

Ransford (1968:25) is also insistent that on the spiritual side, the Mwari worship, which is based on a fundamental belief that, although a person's body may die, the person's spirit lives on in the spirit world, had been so developed that it was later able to withstand the successive impacts of both Christian and Islamic religions. He argues that the Mbire faith had developed a true religious sense. Their religious beliefs, judging from the extreme difficulty encountered by Christians of every denomination down the centuries in converting them, must have been spiritually satisfying. They believed in an all-embracing ultimate reality, a cosmic creator, whom they call Mwari. Their fortunes are guided by an elaborate hierarchy of living-timeless of fathers/mothers who are wooed and propitiated through priesthood. The Mbire people acknowledge only one ultimate reality called Mwari. The prophet (svikiro) of Chaminuka was believed to be especially powerful as a mediator and to possess the ability to interpret the squawking of the fish eagles, which carried Mwari's pronouncements.

This, then, was the religious state of the Mbire people on the eve of the advent of Euro-American people. This religious ferment, which had made the Mbire advance so far, still exists in the modern Mbire people, and only needs to be reactivated for them to take their proper place in the world today.

5.13 SUMMARY

This chapter has described and discussed the role of the living-timeless in a way, which is broader than it is traditionally viewed and portrayed. It dealt with socio-political, socio-economic, socio-religious and pharmaceutical aspects. The living-timeless are Mwari's vice-regents concerned with the survival of the community and the environment. The main concerns are about body, mind, spirit, and environment, all viewed as a "gestalt" or whole (Mugabe 1993:138). In summary, the Mbire have a religious and spiritual epistemology and ontology; a holistic view of reality; a communitarian epistemology and ontology; a ceremonial epistemology and ontology; belief in the

finitude of humanity; kinship relationship; kingship; art form or aesthetics, and socio-political reality of poverty. A theology that does not deal with these perceptions and prescriptions cannot speak to the Mbire people in a significantly creative and meaningful way.

Now I turn to my analysis of the twin assumptions of colonial and postcolonial readings as I take them further, compare, and contrast each assumption with the Mbire religion in the next two chapters. Firstly, I turn to Euro-American people acting out the artistry of the letter to the Hebrews in Africa in general and in Mbireland in particular.



CHAPTER SIX

DEMONIZATION OF MBIRE RELIGION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Having provided the background against which to mirror the twin readings of colonial and postcolonial interpretation in the previous chapter, I now return to a critical evaluation of colonial assumptions and their relevance to the Mbire people. A colonial paradigm had resulted in supersessionism. The artistry of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews' superior Jesus did not end in this community or with conflict and competition among the colonized Jewish people over two thousand year ago (Dube 1998:129).

In this Chapter, I will substantiate how this astonishing drama, like waves produced in ever-widening circles by some vast sub-oceanic convulsion, rippled and exploded over its boundaries and laid claim upon Mbireland. I will illustrate the negativity of a colonial supersessionism on the Mbire people and their religion. Jesus' superiority in the letter to the Hebrews has functioned to devalue and demonize Mbire religion with unmitigated savagery (cf. section 6.3 below).

The question of religious tension is pertinent to the Mbire and other non-Christian contexts. Questions of religion and ways of worship are familiar to the Mbire people. The advent of the Christian religion at the close of the 19th century was characterized by an absolute denial of the validity of Mbire religion (see Smith 1950:128; Dewick 1953:39). Mbire religion was derogated and demonized. Moreover, the Mbire people had witnessed the advent of the Christian religion hand-in-hand with colonialism (see section 6.3.2).

Dube (2001:45) argues that, according to this approach, the religious contest could be understood as a competition for economic power. She contends that people's spirituality is inseparably tied to their economic interests. Thus, the struggle to convert other people to one's religion often entails an effort to expand one's economic market base. Who is converted to whose religion is related to who has economic power in the world. Thus, the demonization of Mbire religion suggests the concomitant economic investment that accompanies religious competition, tensions and conversion.

Dube (2001:43) contends that the question of racial discrimination based on fear and suppression of differences is a common painful experience of all non-Euro-American peoples, particularly Africans then and now, both locally and internationally.

Locally, Zimbabwe and South Africa are some of the best instances. In Zimbabwe, colonial land policies dispossessed the Mbire masses for the benefit of minority European settlers (see section 6.3.3). Apartheid plagued South Africa for many years. Although apartheid has ended, years of

structural marginalization and deprivation are wounds that will remain with South African black people for a long period. The effects of these many years of systematic deprivation of South African black people of education and access to professional training are manifest in crime, which is currently also plaguing the entire continent. Dube (2001:43) argues that apartheid, in both South Africa and Zimbabwe, was an economic system of exploitation designed to appropriate the resources and labour of African people for the benefit of a minority European people.

Internationally, African people are still discriminated against on the ground of their skin colour (Ntoedibe-Kuswani 2001:98). Dube (2001:43) contends that the construction of Africa as a dark continent and of its people as primitive and childish served to justify colonial oppression, since the colonizing people could claim to bring light to Africa and to rule African people because they were like children who needed guidance.

African people are living with this overt international discrimination even now. Those African people who have travelled overseas or are living overseas can tell of their struggle with racial marginalization and discrimination. Even as the world is largely becoming globalized, this racial discrimination still sustains African economic marginalization. Dube (2001:43) argues that the absence of African faces among the United Nation's Security Council, G8 and other important financial institutions reflects the fact that African people continue to be ignored by structures that affect their lives.

However, as Dube (2001:44) argues, although African people are not represented at such institution as the G8, Euro-American leaders are constantly designing economic policies and projects that make African people the market of their goods and providers of a cheap workforce to feed the labour demands of their multi-national corporations. Thus, racial discrimination always carries an economic face and it is one evil African people suffer, irrespective of gender, class or religion.

The chapter is composed of four sections. The first one offers some introductory remarks. This will be followed by an examination of the background to the missionary era. The third section describes the excessive claim of the Christian religion that it is the only true religion, while the Mbire religion was/is erroneously regarded as an offshoot of the "devil." This will be followed by a re-evaluation of the demonization of the Mbire religion, including an evaluation of the *praeparatio evangelica* paradigm and its implication for the Mbire people and their religion. The Chapter concludes with a synoptic summary of the argument.

6.2 BACKGROUND TO COLONIAL MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

The colonial missionary enterprise was part of a wider phenomenon of Africa-Euro-America contact. Some of the missionaries shared same understanding of Africa with other Euro-American

people of their time. Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:98) argues that Euro-America had already a fixed image of Africa by the early 19th century, where race difference plays an important part in history:

Some people, perhaps most people, have been conscious of their own racial type. Some have assumed that they were a “chosen people”, especially favoured by God. Some have assumed that they and they alone were human. Most have preferred their own type as the aesthetic standard of human beauty. Most have assumed that people of their own type were physically, or mentally, or culturally superior to other races.

She contends that race was assumed to determine the course of history even in 19th century Euro-American science. Skin colour was used against African people. The colour of their skin was assumed low and inferior. Skin colour was then used as a ground for assessing African people, their cultures and their belief systems.

As a justification for the enslavement of African people and the destruction of their identity, Edward Long (as quoted by Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2001:98) claims that Euro-American and African peoples were not of the same species. Euro-American people were believed to have been created by the ultimate reality, but African people, if created by the same ultimate reality at all, were created as “animal-like creatures”, separated from animals only by being able to speak.

A number of anthropologists also contributed to the shaping of the missionary image of Africa. Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:99) describes how E. B. Tylor refers to the religions of the so-called primal societies as animism and places them at the bottom of the dustbin in relation to Euro-America. African religions were dismissed as pagan and animistic because of the status of their societies compared to those of Euro-America.

Consequently, African religions were excluded, marginalized and condemned for destruction by a number of Euro-American missionaries (cf. Hegel 1956: 91). When some of these Euro-American missionaries came to Africa, they were filled with this colonial spirit and wanted to destroy what they regarded as paganism and animism (see Dewick 1953:39; Richter 1913:540).

A number of these Euro-American missionaries were negative about anything African (cf. Moffat 1885:349; Hegel.1956:91; Dewick 1953:39). Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:98) describes how Robert Moffat believed that African people had no consciousness of their own until some missionaries formed it and had no knowledge of the ultimate reality and of future life. Kodjo (1992:2) argues that some of these Euro-American missionaries “came not only with their various cultural values...but also with the identifiable ideology of their age – colonialism.” Kwame Bediako (1992:227) also argues that their overriding image of African people was that they “were not only savages and uncivilized, they were also in the very depths of ignorant superstition.” Bediako (1992:225) describes Dr Adrian Hastings’ observations:

In fact, neither in the nineteenth nor in the early twentieth centuries did the missionaries give much thought in advance to what they would find in Africa. What struck them undoubtedly was the darkness of the continent; “its lack of religion and sound morals”, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of slave trade...It is not surprising that, as a result of this perception of Africa, the European missionary approach tended to “treat everything pre-Christian in Africa as either harmful or at best valueless, and to consider the African once converted from paganism as a sort of tabula rasa on which a wholly new religious psychology was somehow to be imprinted”.

The consequent result of such endeavours was that some Euro-American missionaries did not take the religio-cultures of Africa seriously (Dewick 1953:39). To them Africa could not contribute to the enrichment of the Christian religion. A number of African ideas were believed to be irreligious and superstitious (cf. Hegel 1956:91; Smith 1950:128). Thus, it was believed that these ideas had to be destroyed if the Christian religion was to flourish (cf. Richter 1913:540; Dewick 1953:39). Even where some missionaries accepted African people as human beings and fought to end slavery (Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:100), they still found it difficult to accept most African ideas as given of the ultimate reality.

The aggressive encounter between some missionaries to Mbireland and the Mbire religion, which is discussed below is, in my view, the best instance of this attitude. In the colonial missionary enterprise as well as now, a number of Euro-American people present the Christian religion as the only true religion. It is presented as the only given tool by the ultimate reality to be used to conquer and rid Africa of its religions (Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2001:100).

Consequently, the process of becoming a Christian by African people entails destroying what was/is African and replacing this with what was/is believed to be ‘superior’ (Richter 1913:540). Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:100) concludes that African belief systems were believed to be “perfect specimens of absolute error, masterpieces of hell’s invention” and that the Christian belief system was called upon to oppose, uproot and destroy them. Euro-America was unsparing in its efforts – through the Christian missions, educational systems and language policies – to monopolize the production of meaning and thus the construction of culture (Thomas 1995). This brings me to the tragic encounter of the Mbire religion with the Christian religion.

6.3 MBIRE PEOPLE ON RELIGIOUS TRIAL: THE INITIAL PHASE

6.3.1 Socio-Religious Colonization

As Chapter Four has demonstrated, colonial ideology uses the promotion of its own cultural values to devalue and suppress diversity. Colonial ideology expounds the notion of the inferior knowledge and invalid religious faith of the colonized people (cf. Dewick 1953:39; Hegel 1956:91). It depends heavily upon constructions of colonized people as ignorant. There is a divide between the superior

colonizing people and the inferior colonized people. In a re-enactment of the artistry of the letter to the Hebrews, some Euro-American Christian people to Zimbabwe generally find the Mbire religion lacking and inadequate (cf. Dewick 1953:39; Smith 1950:128).

However, although the Mbire people were deeply religious, to some missionaries people who were not Christians were heathens, agents of dark goings-on, headed for hell fire (Zeke 1979:10). This was a result of the subtle ethnocentric binary opposition between paganism and the Christian religion that we saw in the previous section. The latter was set in an atmosphere of Anglo-Saxon racism. A number of Anglo-Saxons typically recognized no pattern of life other than their own. Mrs Kroeber in Danmole (1974; 224) notes that:

Anglo-Saxons tended to racism then and now. A person with a skin colour different from their own was thought to be intellectually and morally inferior; marriage with him [*sic*] was an anti-social act, sometimes legally forbidden; whatever the source of wonder and sacredness, if *non-Christian*, it was considered to be superstition and to be reprehensible.

Anglo-Saxons, though by no means all of them, have come to represent colonialism since the Hanoverian succession of 1714. As new masters of the world, they wrote and interpreted world history in the limited human manner they were capable of. Everything was to reflect on Anglo-Saxon nuances. As Danmole (1974:223) argues, their selfish interests, their greediness and their aim of subjugation distorted their perspectives. They created a civilization that was to limit itself to an understanding of humankind as defined in Anglo-Saxon terms.

Anglo-Saxon ideology was suffused with the notion of the superiority of the Christian religion over non-Christian forms of religious beliefs. Consequently, as Segovia (2000a:128) observes, the socio-politically and socio-economically colonized Mbire were to be socio-religiously colonized as well. Their socio-religious beliefs were to be corrected and uplifted. The Mbire Mwari was to be devalued and demonized. Their practices were to be ridiculed and replaced.

This was not an event unique to Mbireland, but occurred in any part of Africa that was subjected to the Euro-American missionary enterprise of the colonial era. As Wijngaards (1985:59) argues, it was the consequence of a threefold objective of most Euro-American missionaries, namely to christianize, to commercialize and to civilize. All were products of the Victorian concept of the African as being void of civilisation, culture or religion

Some Euro-American missionaries believed that their Christian religion was the only true manifestation of the ultimate reality. Dewick (1953:39) sums up this belief thus:

We have seen that the source of the *non-Christian* religions ... are today putting forward claims to absolute supremacy and universality ... and others, while admitting that they can offer alternatives to Christianity which are more satisfying to the moral and spiritual needs of mankind. To all such

claims, the Christian answer is (and is indeed bound to be) a rejection, no less decisive than its rejection of political totalitarianism. For in this case, too, it would be impossible at one and at the same time to admit that outside Christianity, there exists a higher form of religion, and yet cling to the title of “Christian”. We need not therefore cite examples of the refusal by Christians to admit the superiority of any other type of religion; for this is universal and unanimous (italics mine).

This belief had as its corollary that the Mbire religion was to be considered false and demonic. The Christian religion was generally believed to be morally superior to Mbire religion. Mbire religion was believed to be suffering from certain disabilities. The absence of written records and the assumption of totems, witchcraft and service to the living-timeless were considered as the essence of a primitive faith (cf. Hegel 1956:91). Charles Bullock (as quoted by Ocallaghan 1977:134) writes:

Not in one or two generations do the forces of a long-established culture cease to operate, even when that culture is barbaric ... The question that is of practical interest to all who are directly or indirectly concerned with the subnascent *Weltanschauung* of the Bantu - that is, to everyone living in Bantu Africa - is whether the native religion can be sublimated to a higher religion - Christianity, or whether it will sink into a gross materialism enlivened by a few superstitions; or whether, perhaps, communism will take its place.

The Mbire and the whole of African society represented a primitive stage in the development of humankind in some of the Euro-American people's minds. Hegel (1956:91) sums up this attitude when he called Africa the “land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night.”

Some Euro-American people were attracted by Mbire culture's simplicity of a society, which they had since left behind (Ocallaghan 1977:134). Though some social anthropologists attempted to understand the complex relationship between beliefs, ritual, cultural pattern and the social system of Mbire religion, unfortunately until recently they studied the Christian religion and colonial rule in the Mbire society with anything like the analytical depth they applied to the structure of simple societies. Moreover, as Peter Worsley (1968:xii) notes, social anthropologists, though concerned with beliefs as social interaction, are not by nature concerned with ultimate truth.

A number of Euro-American missionaries, scholars and anthropologists often saw Mbire religion as witchcraft (cf. Ocallaghan 1977:134). For instance, Mbire priests and practitioners of medicine were not considered as part of a religious hierarchy, but rather as witch doctors (Chavunduka 1977). Spirit possession and prophecy (divination) were seen as an elaborate fraud (Smith 1950:128). F. Posselt (as quoted by Smith 1950:128) argues, “The priests...imposed on the credulity of the uninitiated by their assumption of mystery, and also resorted to ventriloquism and sleight of hand”.

H. A. Stayt (as quoted by Smith 1950:128) also asserts, “These men [the Mwari priests] play upon the credulity of the people who come to consult the oracle, and extort wealth from them”.

Consequently, the kingdom of Satan, paganism and Mbire religion were seen as corresponding terms (Chavunduka 1977). Mwari, the ultimate reality of the Mbire people, was like the Baal of the Canaanites. To defeat the kingdom of Satan would entail the eradication of the Mbire religion. The missionizing enterprise as civilisation and the civilizing work carried out with missionary fervour were all aimed at breaking down Mbire religion and replacing it with the Christian religion (cf. Richter 1913:540). According to Ocallaghan (1977:134), even where some idea of a Supreme Being was/is granted, it could well be seen as the degenerate relic of an ancient religion, which was brought into Mbireland from the Near East and into which indigenous Mbire elements were incorporated.

Consequently, to enable the primitive Mbire people to live like Christians, it did not matter whether one was really converted or not, as long as they were civilized through instructions, which made them, adopt the customs of the colonizing country and be incorporated as one nation (Wijngaards (1985:59). The most important changes for a Mbire convert were the introduction of a Euro-American language, table manners, dress fashions and the adoption of a Euro-American name. As For a Mbire convert to be recognized as a Christian s/he had to accept Euro-American Christian religion with all its cultural baggage, because Mbire culture in all its aspects was regarded as inimical to true godly life (cf. Wijngaards 1985:59).

According to Stanley (1990), these missionaries commonly assumed that Euro-American civilization and the Christian religion were two aspects of the same gift, which they were commissioned by the ultimate reality to offer to the rest of the world. Wijngaards (1985:59) argues that, in holding this conviction, they forgot that the people they were seeking to evangelize and hoped to convert cherished and held in high esteem their own customs, cultural values and religious beliefs. Indeed, as Chinyowa (2001:127) argues, it became impossible to completely uproot Mbire cultural values and religious concepts. Mbire religion became a force to be reckoned with.

Wijngaards (1985:59) argues that what some of these Euro-American Christian people forgot in their zeal was that the ultimate reality created people of all races and cultures in its own image and endowed them with distinctive human faculties – rational, moral, social, creative and spiritual – all of which contribute to the culture of a people. As such, there is no one religio-cultural heritage, which is superior to another. Any religio-cultural heritage is tainted with sin and some aspects of it are demonic. Dietrich Westermann (as quoted by Wijngaards 1985:233) notes that:

We have treated the Africans as having no religion, no language, no traditions, no institutions, and no racial character of their own, as empty vessels to be filled with European or American foods.

Some of these missionaries felt that Euro-American civilization was far superior to anything they found in Mbireland. Mbire people were poor, illiterate and naive by their standards. They found their religious practices crude, their beliefs primitive and riddled with superstition (cf. Bediako 1992:227). As they felt called upon to import Euro-American education, medicine and technology to improve Mbire people's condition, so they tended to introduce Euro-American forms of worship and religious practices wholesale (Wijngaards 1985:59). Fanon (as quoted by Bell 2002:55) notes this situation:

Having judged, condemned, abandoned his [sic] cultural forms, his language, his food habits, his sexual behaviour, his way of sitting down, of resting, of laughing, of enjoying himself, the oppressed flings himself upon the imposed culture with the desperation of a drowning man.

According to Wijngaards (1985:59), most Euro-American ways of praying, of thinking about the ultimate reality, of solving marriage problem and others were held out as the only valid Christian models. This rejection of the religio-culture also included a complete withdrawal or separation from one's parents, relatives, and a transfer of political allegiances to Euro-American authorities. This socio-cultural separation meant that many families and many socio-cultural units were destroyed as well (Mugabe 1993).

In addition, a number of Euro-American writings and media converged on the point of the supposed lowly and barbaric status of the Mbire and other African people. Basil Davidson (as quoted by Danmole 1974:222-223) observes that,

Whenever anything remarkable or inexplicable has turned up in Africa, a whole galaxy of non-African...peoples is dragged in to explain it. The Phoenicians are brought in to explain Zimbabwe in Rhodesia. The Egyptians are produced as the painters of the 'white lady' of the Brandberg in Southwest Africa. Greeks or Portuguese are paraded as the inspirers and teachers of those who worked in terracotta and in bronze in medieval West Africa. Even the Hittites have had their day. Yet every one of these achievements and phenomena is now generally agreed to have had a purely African origin.

As stated in the previous section, these demonizing attitudes were facilitated by the fervour of 19th century Christian religion. In 1860, Mary Moffat wrote to her son and was quoted by John S. Moffat (1885:349):

Little did I think that you, my dear son, would many years afterwards have your name lispied by those rude barbarians as their missionary? But so it is, and may you and dear E. have grace to persevere with your colleagues till you see the influences of the Holy Spirit descending upon those poor ignorant men and women, till of such stones God does raise up children unto Abraham. Wonders and miracles of grace are being wrought in all parts of the world where the light of the word has reached, and why not among the Matabele?

The London missionary society (1879:41-42) reports thus:

The mission commenced in 1859, in Matabeleland, the scene of the raids and iron despotism of Moselakatse, is still being patiently carried on under difficult circumstances. There are four missionary brethren in the field two at Inyati and two at Hope Fountain. Rightly to understand the position of the brethren in the high place of heathenism requires a measure of knowledge of what barbarian tribes are, and of the depth to which they have sunk; and a breadth of observation and keenness of insight into the daily life of such wild children of the jungle of humanity which very few who have not seen people of this low level possess.

Most truly do the directors sympathize with the devoted missionaries who are thus perseveringly and hopefully carrying on the siege of this fortress of ignorance, cruelty, despotism and superstition?

A similar description is also found in the Methodist Church's report of Mbire people (Vol. 111:384):

The Shona people were a race peculiarly ignorant and degraded, and it was difficult to find the best way of bringing their minds to grasp the ideas of Christianity, or to impart any instruction to an illiterate people with centuries of barbarism in the past.

Though religious fervour need not necessarily mean racial exclusion, it implies conversion and was accompanied by apocalyptic belief in the establishment of the kingdom of the ultimate reality. The spread of Euro-American influences all over the world was easily confused with Christian eschatology. Within this framework, Ocallaghan (1977) argues that Euro-American colonialism, settlement and economic expansion were seen not as political acts of domination, but as flowing from the will of the ultimate reality and the desirability of Christian conversion.

Bhebhe (1978) contends that Euro-American colonial ideology was based on a belief that the Ndebele rulers were cruel despots. Thus, there was a duty to free Mbire subjects from their rule. This was a relic of an idealized version of the British role in ending the slave trade. To free the Mbire from the Ndebele meant extending to them the protection of British rule. That the Mbire might not need to be protected only emerged in the revolts of 1896-97.

A number of missionaries shared this idea of peace and civilisation as well. According to Cairns (1965:chap vi), the fact that Euro-America was more technologically advanced than the Mbire society allowed an easy assumption that "paganism was but one facet of uncivilized life."

Subsequently, the Berlin Missionary Society and the Dutch Reformed Church independently sent missions in Mbire country from 1883 to 1894. D. N. Beck (1973:334) reports:

The outstanding point about the Shona rulers' reaction to the missions was that they were overwhelmingly keen to secure them for their territories ...[and] one of the true motives for the welcome of the missionaries was undoubtedly the local demand for the imported goods.

Mbire rulers might have wanted to use the missionaries as potential allies against the Ndebele as well. However, despite the spirit of Mbire friendship, there were few conversions during this period. Like Mzilikazi and later Lobengula, neither was interested in conversion but was concerned about the political problems posed by the proximity of the Boers and the British. These missionaries made very few converts. The London missionary society (1899:250-251) reported:

There is not much to be told of the Matabele mission. The main features have been the stolidity of the people, and the fortitude and devotion of the workers. Mr. Sykes continued to work there, year in and year out for twenty-seven years. In all that time, he could scarcely count one convert. At first there was only one station--that at Inyati which Moffat founded. Now there is a second at Hope Fountain and here Mr. Carnegie ...has laboured for twelve years. The Rev. W. A. Elliott saw seventeen years of service at Inyati and Rev. C. D. Helm has already been nineteen years at Hope Fountain. Lastly the Rev. Brown Rees, after some service in Central Africa, has been at work for the last eight years at Inyati. These things deserve statement. The men who can work on year after year, in an apparently barren spot, in faith that the hour of awakening will come, are not few. Matabeleland has had many such ...Even now, when the power of Mosilikatse's son, Lobengula, is broken, and the cruel and arbitrary autocracy at an end, it seems probable that a better day is dawning for the Matabele, and that truth and freedom will go hand in hand.

The London Missionary Society (1885:137) records the same hope that the "tyranny" would be broken from without or within in order for conversion to progress or proceed.

The Jesuits were the first Euro-American missionaries to make contact with the Mbire Empire during the 16th century (Ocallaghan 1977). In 1561, the Jesuit priest Father Gonzalo da Silvia visited the Mbire rulers. Some follow-up efforts were made but these failed. In 1879, eleven Jesuits arrived at Matabeleland and attempted to win Lobengula's favour. They withdrew in 1885 having made few converts and left none (Bhebhe 1978). In fact, as Ocallaghan (1977) argues, the Ndebele and the Mbire have been more interested in the material advantages to be obtained from Christian missions than in conversion to the Christian religion.

6.3.2 Missionaries: Collaborators in Mbire Colonization

In Mbireland, a number of missionaries worked hand-in-hand with the Pioneer Column (Ocallaghan 1977). The difficulty of making converts and the dependence on Lobengula's good will persuaded some missionaries that what was needed was the colonization of Mbire country. It was for this reason that they accepted the Chartered Company as the political means through which freedom would come. The London Missionary Society (1895:164) reports:

Much criticism has been passed on the Chartered Company for their seizure of Matabeleland, but apparently their treatment of the people now that they are under their rule is not open to complaint. For the first time in their experience the natives are having a taste of real freedom in many ways.

They are free to wear European clothing instead of skins, free to work and hold as their own the proceeds of their labour, free to attend Christian worship and to send their children to school.

Consequently, a number of missionaries of the London Missionary Society were drawn into de facto support of company rule. In the first place, Rev. C. D. Helm took part in the 1888 Rudd Concession as an interpreter. Terrence Ranger (1968:140) says that there is reason to support the view that the missionary Helm was a knowing party to the deception of Lobengula on behalf of Rhodes.

In the second place, John Moffat was attached to the Inyati mission before he resigned to become a native commissioner in 1879. He became the British representative at Bulawayo in 1887 and in 1888, persuaded Lobengula to sign the Moffat Treaty (Ocallaghan 1977:140), in which Lobengula agreed that,

In and over the Amandebele country with its dependencies aforesaid, on behalf of himself and people...he will refrain from entering any correspondence or treaty with any foreign State or Power to sell, alienate or cede or permit...any sale, alienation or cession of the whole or any part of the said Amandebele Country under his Chieftainship, or upon any other subject, without the previous knowledge and sanction of Her Majesty's High Commissioner for South Africa.

The Rudd Concession and the Moffat Treaty became the two legal bases for the occupation of the Mbire country. According to Encyclopaedia Rhodesia, Bishop George Hamilton Knight Bruce became the first bishop of Mbireland in 1891. Bishop Thomas Gaul was not only Bishop of Mbireland but also Chaplain General of the Rhodesian forces until 1907.

The Jesuits returned in 1890 with an expeditionary force sent into Mbireland by the British South African Company. The Dominican sisters were requested to accompany the expedition to nurse the wounded soldiers. Michael Gelfand (1964:3-4) gives us the reasons for this request in notes written on 8 June 1891:

In November 1889, I went to Kimberly with the late Reverend A. Weld to see Mr. Rhodes and Col. Carrington in command of troops in B. Betchuanaland. We had in view to obtain leave from these gentlemen to establish an ambulance, which would accompany the troops to Mbireland. We hope, in this way, to be enabled to re-enter our mission proper, which, by the closing of our station at Empandeni, had been completely abandoned. We hoped also to secure our being in the field with the first Protestant missionaries and on an equal footing. Finally, we hoped to provide for the establishment of a good centre from which later on other stations would branch off.

The goodwill and assistance of the authorities of the CC. Co. seemed to be necessary to the attainment of our desires and we thought no better means would be found to secure it than by getting sisters to take charge of the sick wounded in the service of the co.

Father A. M. Daignault (as quoted by Gelfand 1964:4-5) also recorded what he and the sisters received from Rhodes and the Company:

I began getting necessary things and at the suggestion of Dr. Harris Mr. Rhodes gave me £250 to help me. I also got £25 to pay part of travelling expenses. The company paid also over £400 for hospital stores which I got from imperial government and carriage of same. The company paid also for the journey of the sisters from Mafeking to Macloutsie. Meanwhile father Murphy had arrived; we talked the matter over, he saw Mr. Rhodes and according to his advice I made a formal proposal of agreement asking, first, that all expenses should be made good, second, provision to be made for maintenance of sisters, granting each £60 yearly or £300 for all ... Since then Mr. Rhodes has given us a farm in Mbireland and I received £1, 000 from the company. Father Murphy had asked £500 and the provision of a certain income for the sisters. I must not forget to mention that father Hartman was provided for the journey, and got rights to a farm and some claims besides £71 given by the police.

The leader of the Dominican sisters, Mother Patrick Mary Ann Cosgrave, subsequently founded the first Dominican convent in Mbireland in 1892 and in 1899 became prioress of all Dominican houses in the country. The Jesuits first provided secondary education for European boys at St George's College in Bulawayo in 1896. The founder, Father Barthelemy (Dachs 1973:93), asserts that the aim was "To establish at this extremity of the Empire the traditions which form an English gentleman and were so dear to Mr. Rhodes." According to Ocallaghan (1977:141), Father Barthelemy also served the British patrols as "padre" during the Mbire uprising and was a great admirer of Rhodes and Powell.

According to Ocallaghan (1977:141), the Jesuits established schools also at Chishawasha near Harare and Empandani outside Bulawayo. Sister Patrick-Mary and the Dominican sisters first established a hospital, then schools, one for Europeans in Harare in 1892 and Bulawayo in 1895, and one for Africans in Chishawasha. The dates of mission establishment in the country are also instructive. Ocallaghan (1977:141) listed them:

The Dutch Reformed Church and the Wesleyan Methodist Church from England in 1891; the Salvation Army in 1892, the Seventh-Day Adventist in 1894, the South African General Mission in 1897, the Methodist Episcopal Church from the United States in 1898, the Church of Sweden in 1903.

These missionary societies were beneficiaries of land grants made to them by the Chartered Company as part of the distribution to most Euro-American settlers of tracts of farming land. Roy Briggs and J. Wing (1970:195) state that the London Missionary Society received 8,000 acres at Inyati; 6,000 acres at Hope Fountain and 24,000 acres around Dombodema.

G.G. Findlay and W.W. Holdsworth (1922) state that the Methodist Church received 3,000-acre farms near Epworth, Harare and in the Lomagondi district to the north and a promise was made that, if the work of the mission prospered, "any further application should receive every favourable consideration".

A.K.H. Weinrich (1966:3) states the land that the Dutch Reformed Church received:

The first Dutch Reformed missionary reached Chief Mugabe in ...1891, and was soon accepted by the Chief as his friend. The Chief gave him a piece of land on which to build his first simple dwelling. In 1892, Dr Jameson, acting on behalf of Cecil Rhodes, donated a large area of some 12,600 acres to the missionary whose land, therefore, equalled that of Chief Mugabe in size.

Accordinging to Ocallaghan (1977:141-42), most missionaries accepted the alienation and division of land so that they could build schools and missionary centres, set up convents and religious establishment, run farms to obtain an income and to establish what they considered to be the social and economic framework within which the Christian religion will be developed.

The farming-out of large missionary land holdings coupled with competition between Christian denominations for Mbire and Ndebele membership resulted in certain areas coming under the influence of particular denominational churches (Ocallaghan 1977:142). Church membership was therefore to become mainly determined by the area in which a particular denomination had gained control. Under this control were churches, schools, welfare centres, hospitals and mission farms. N.D Atkinson (1973:95) sums this up:

The impact of missionary endeavour on life in Southern Rhodesia was probably proportionately greater than in the case of any other African colony. Missionaries opened up contacts with the local African peoples more than half a century before European settlers arrived to exploit the economic and strategic potential of the land. Missionaries played a vital part in the negotiation, which leads to the victory of Rhodes in the competition for a concession. Missionaries took the first steps towards establishing a working relationship between settler and African, based on the acceptance of common moral and religious principles. Moreover, even before there was any framework of central government in the territory, much less systems of educational administration, missionaries were busily engaged in the provision of schools for both Europeans and Africans.

In this way, the Christian religion was part of the colonial system (see section 6.3.4). It made the system work by providing the ideological justification for Euro-American rule. Ocallaghan (1977:142) is insistent that the Christian religion confirmed the legitimacy of Euro-American political power; it furnished rudimentary social services such as some literacy necessary, if Mbire and Ndebele people were to enter certain levels of the Rhodesian labour market and supplement government administration in Mbire and Ndebele areas. He expressed no surprise at all that prior to settlement Mbire and Ndebele people may have made a distinction between a trader and a missionary, but the revolts of 1896-97 were directed against both.

I also concur with Ocallaghan (1977:142) that if there was an incipient conflict between some of the missionaries and the Rhodesian government after settlement and conquest, this conflict at no time implied that the whole Euro-American Christian community shared the protest or that there was

even total agreement among the clergy. For some Euro-American missionaries the “glorious” heritage of the pioneer and the “historic” mission to spread Euro-American Christian civilization was an important element of their political ideology (Ocallaghan 1977:143). The conflicts between church and state could coexist with the religious rationale of Euro-American supremacy or, of a separation between the religious belief and political behaviour, a separation by no means restricted to Rhodesia.

6.3.3 Colonial Impact on Mbire People

The colonization of the Mbire country was a tragedy in Mbire history. Mbireland, like other African countries, was to bear the severe brunt of the needs for the growth and sustenance of capitalism in Euro-America. The colonial forces of capitalism went wild, unrestricted either by law or by the political consciousness of the Mbire population (cf. Danmole 1974). Land alienation proceeded with hardly any regard for the well-being of the Mbire population (Dube 2001:43). The genesis of Rhodesia involved a large number of Euro-American people in a ruthless pillage of vast settled land (Kiewet 1966:59). It was already an area of settlement by a great Mbire population.

Frankel (1938:34) argues that, driven by enormous deficiencies in the domestic supply of primary materials to Euro-America, the seizure of Mbire and other African land was thus to represent to the colonizers a clear opportunity “for colonial policies based on the deliberate economic exploitation of natural resources, an opportunity to drain the country of its natural resources and exploit its human power.”

In the plantations and mines that such land expropriation opened up, Mbire people had no incentive to work for a money wage (Bhebhe 1978). To land alienation were added strategic tax levies as a form of compulsion to drive the Mbire people off their land into the dark exploitation of the mines and slavery in the plantations. Burdened with arbitrary tax levies and severed from their land, the basis of their economy, the compulsory transformation of the Mbire masses into landless peasant, into serfs and shiftless proletariat was complete (see Danmole 1974). Of this tragic process, Karl Polanyi (1968:57) was to say:

Forms of land tenure occupy the centre of interest, because it is on them that social organization most directly depends. What appears as economic conflicts - high tax and rents, low wages - are almost exclusively relied forms of pressure to induce the natives to give up their traditional culture and thus compel them to adjust to the market economy, i.e., to work for wages and procure their goods on the market. It was in this process that some of the...tribes, like the kaffirs and those who had migrated to town, lost their ancestral virtues and became shiftless crowd ‘semi-domesticated animals’ amongst them loafers, thieves, and prostitutes-an institution unknown amongst them before-resembling nothing more than the mass pauperized population of England about 1795-1834.

The Mbire people found themselves in a confused and oppressive situation. The encounter with Euro-America should have been met with nothing less than an upsurge of defensive and compensatory cultural mentality. However, some missionaries paved the way for the seizure and subjugation of Mbireland (see section 6.3.2). Danmole (1974:223) contends that in the process, they lost their cultural perspective and their *volksgeist* became a theme of Euro-American contempt. Isolated from the rest of the world by the colonial and bombarded with the contempt of their colonizers, they attributed all their misfortunes to their own sins.

This process produced an ideology of effective contempt against the Mbire and other African people (Bell 2002:55). The impact of this effective contempt on the Mbire people impaired their sense of self-worth, disrupted their medium of relationship with others and alienated them from their Mbire *Weltanschauung* (cf. Danmole 1974). The seizure and subjugation of their country made the Mbire people ubiquitous victims of a perverted ethnology created by the process of colonization. In the process, the Mbire people lost their cultural perspective (Wijngaards 1985:233).

Throughout the entire colonized African world, the doctrine of Euro-American supremacy provided the basis on which economic and socio-religious organizations were grounded (Dube 2001:43). This colonial mentality forced the mainstream of African mentality into a confluence with some Euro-American colonial concepts and ethnology that rationalized the position of the subjugated African population as hewers of wood and carriers of water (Danmole (1974:224) The Mbire people were to accommodate their being to the perverted ethnology of their conqueror. Their being was to vindicate the precepts of Anglo-Saxon nuances. They were to acknowledge a cultural dynasty in which their category as inferiors made them practically insignificant. Not only were they supposed to acquiesce to the dominance of their conqueror, but they were to be educated to foster and support that dominance as well (Danmole 1974:224-5).

This is the pattern, which is generally characteristic of colonial relations. The subjugated Mbire people were to provide Euro-America with an exonerating attitude towards the colonialist conquest of their land (Mudimbe 1988). Yet, the enchantment and glorification of a new Euro-American civilization produced hardly any mitigated effect on the impoverished situation of the colonized Mbire peasants (cf. Sullivan 2002:99). Thus, any consideration of the role played by the Christian religion in justifying the all-too-human manipulation of the divinely ordered instrument invites a variety of strategies for mapping both writing and religious relations.

6.3.4 Christian Religion: An Institution of Ideology

Meanwhile, the Mbire country was being reconstructed by some European ideologies purely in various European terms. The European war against the Mbire and other African people has always been waged on both military and ideological levels (Moomo 2003:1-3).

The exploitation of Mbireland through military plunder, unequal trade and forced labour requires also the conquest of the mind in order to foster an attitude of compliance and obsequiousness. To conquer a people effectively the mere use of naked, savage and brutal force is not the most effective tool. Effective subjugation is most thoroughly done through the force of ideas. Ideas rule the world (Moomo 2003:2). The institution of ideology is part of the macrostructure whose intimate affinity to the prevailing structure of political power cannot be mistaken (cf. Danmole 1974).

In every age and in every community ideology have its peculiar forms and an institution through which it is expressed. In the colonial era and in the neo-colonial era the Christian religion with its bible has been the foremost handmaiden of oppression in the mental domain (Danmole (1974:84). The manipulation of social attitudes has always been an essential consideration for sustaining the power of the Christian religion (Mazrui 1990).

Consequently, the Christian religion employed a system of gentle but insidious coercion over human conscience to terrorize the colonized Mbire peasants with the dangers of losing their souls, while they struggle in vain to gain their lost lands (see sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 above). Danmole (1974:85) argues that the Christian religion's responsibility was the colonized peasants' souls, which the unctuous Christian theology was to mould and render compatible with the needs and interests of some European colonizing peoples.

However, to the colonized Mbire peasants it glorified poverty and submission through the esoteric catechism and Christian ritual incantations (Mazrui 1990). As Danmole (1974:85) argues, such panegyrics of the "good Lord" and enjoining abstinence are inspired by a divine revelation that talks of a world of perfect love, a world that has learnt to turn the other cheek and survive on bread alone. It was from such a world that would occur a mystical extrapolation to another world of eternal peace and princely treasure. Mazrui (1990) contends that some Euro-American missionaries had made the pacification of Mbire and other African people easier by stressing the Christian virtues of humility and forgiveness.

Consequently, expressions of faith would constitute the best test of being a law-abiding colonized Mbire peasant. The Christian religion and the state would see to it that the colonized Mbire peasants dared not lose their souls to gain the lost lands. Nor would the colonized Mbire peasants indulge in such categories as poverty or riches. From then on, it was to be guilt or innocence. No one could have expressed this spirit better than Sir Francis Drake could. Danmole (1974:85) states that in commending colonial expansion to the people of England, Sir Francis Drake remarked: "their gain shall be the knowledge of our faith and ours such riches as the country hath".

Though other reasons have been proposed for Euro-American demonization of Mbire and other African religions (Zeke 1979:10), I would like to contend that it was a direct act of commission to

exclude the Mbire people from scientific, technological and economic development. As Stewart (1992:481) notes, the effects of a negative social definition of a people are enormous. If one's intellectual link with one's world is cut off, one will not be able to make the desired progress in the development of one's material culture, which Mbon (1991:106) considers being essentially what science and technology are all about. There are economic and political undertones in the subtle but most effective use of religion to generate feelings of self-negation and self-alienation in the Mbire people (cf. Dube 2001:45). The Christian religion and its bible have been used by some Euro-Americans for their own advantages and to the disadvantages of the colonized Mbire people (Mazrui 1990; Moomo 2003).

The Christian religion had always been conceived as a force unto itself, unrelated to the politico-economic realities and the existing mode of production. It was hardly realized that the Christian religion was an ideological apparatus of colonial economic domination that was devised to facilitate the pursuit of particular economic interests (Danmole 1974). The Christian religion was used and continues to be used to satisfy the industrial needs of colonial Euro-America (Mazrui 1990). As Bell (1964:4) observes, from religious to military institutions, the colonial powers were well aware that the "security of their investments" requires the correct alignment of religion and the economy.

There is no doubt that some missionaries to Mbireland welcomed the colonization of the Mbire country (see section 6.3.2 above). The Christian religion became the ideological rhetoric for African slaves fastened forcibly to the productive process that made possible much of the primitive accumulation of wealth that gave capitalism its earlier momentum. It also became the ideological rhetoric that helped the forcible usurpation of the land of the Mbire and other African peasants, thus occasion their enservment and proletarianization (Danmole 1974). Today, it is still the main vehicle through which the theistic ideology of capitalism finds its most systematic and relentless expression. Colonial Christianity still reigns supreme. It maintains its power primacy through the academic discipline of biblical scholarship that continues to inform and legitimize the subjugation of women whether in the church, the academy, or society, justifying colonialism and neo-colonialism, rationalizing homophobia, or otherwise legitimizing the power of hegemonic classes of people (Dube 2001).

There is a quite serious split in our critical consciousness today, which allows us to spend a great deal of time elaborating historical theories without giving attention to the authority that these theories bestowed on attempts to subject the Mbire and other African peoples. Said (1993) contends that, unless we can comprehend how the biblical guild achieved one of its principal purposes, almost unnoticeably sustaining society's consent in overseas expansion – a consent that promoted the selfish forces which directed colonialism to utilize the protective colours of disinterested

movements such as philanthropy, religion, science and art – we will misread both the culture's importance and its resonance in the empire, then and now. He argues that how one formulates the past shapes one's understandings and views of the present.

Postcolonial readings arose from the historical encounter of Christian biblical writings functioning compatibly with slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and of the bible functioning as the 'talisman' in colonial possession of foreign spaces and peoples (Dube 1996:127). A postcolonial theory is concerned primarily with a new view of the nature of the interpretive process. It seeks to challenge the dominant Christian tradition and epistemology. It embodies demands for freedom, which are revolutionary vis-à-vis the established system (Fuery and Mansfield 2000:118). Colonial scholarship continues to be complicit in consecrating the new global capitalist domination and cultural hegemony (Mazrui 1990). I consider colonialism as a crime against humankind. Unfortunately, the Christian religion continues to be complicit in human rights violation.

6.4. RE-EVALUATION OF THE DEMONIZATION OF MBIRE RELIGION: THE SECOND PHASE

6.4.1 The Twin Mission Approaches

The above is the historical background, which makes a postcolonial theory of reading, with its focus on liberation and identity, imperative. In an effort to use memory positively, a critical analysis of the present in relation to the past is essential. Thus, this section tries to understand how our memory is shaped by our social context and how the accountable use of memories can carry people forward and create a new identity. Remembrance helps us to take collective and moral responsibility for what has happened, so that it will not happen again. It helps us to learn from the past for the future.

Consequently, it is important that all stories of people are told and heard in order to forge an identity for the future. This will help people maintain their religious practices and cultural identities. This could also be a healing process to undo the social and economic losses caused by colonialism and achieve transformation of both the victims and the perpetrators of colonialism, bearing in mind that the wounds of colonialism are not easy to heal.

In this section, I will first re-examine the two approaches of the missionary strategy toward Mbire religion, namely a Protestant approach represented by the Dutch Reformed Church and a Roman Catholic approach. Secondly, I will re-examine Father Kumbirai's response of *praeparatio evangelica*. Thirdly, I will examine the implication of the *praeparatio evangelica* argument for the Mbire people. The Chapter concludes with a synoptic summary of the argument.

6.4.1.1 The Protestant Approach

Assuming that colonialism was/is a crime against humankind, one would have thought that, after the initial phase of colonialism, some protestant missionaries would repent and change their approach towards the Mbire people and their religion. Unfortunately, Protestantism, represented here by the Dutch Reformed Church, was unwilling to change and further promoted a policy that discouraged dialogue between the Christian religion and the Mbire religio-cultural heritage (Daneel 1989). This resulted in the continued negation of Mbire practices by various early mission church policy-makers (Vambe 2001:102).

Despite the Dutch Reformed policy of not robbing the Africans of their languages and cultures (Van der Merwe 1967:52), some of the pioneer missionaries to the Mbire country lacked a strong ethnological interest (Gann 1965:206). Rev. A. A. Louw and friends preached a radical break with Mbire culture. Gann (1965:206) describes the pietistic zeal of these pioneer missionaries:

Early evangelists...took their lives in their hands by going out to the far north; they did not go to analyze, synthesize or apologize, they went to fight Satan and all his works; they took risks because they believed they were fighting evil, and evil brooked no compromise.

Rev. A. A. Louw represented the uncompromising frontier spirit of most Protestant mission policies. He could not allow Mbire dances, dream messages of the spirits, services to the living-timeless, consultations with Mbire doctor-prophets (n'anga) and Mbire marriages to be assimilated into or purified within the church. Most, if not all, Mbire customs were to be renounced (Daneel 1989). Consequently, as Vambe (2001:102) observes, this resulted in a double foreign context of Protestant churches in Zimbabwe, namely the so-called biblical Christian position and Euro-American pattern of worship.

Rev. A. A. Louw's views of Mbire customs found expression in the catechism of various Protestant churches, as they did in the Dutch Reformed Church's "Rules and Regulations." The Mwari worship and its oracular manifestations at Matopo Hills (Matonjeni) as well as the local rain rituals associated with mhondoro (mukwerere) were renounced as evil customs of the living-timeless (Daneel 1989). Katekisma (1966:8) condemns most forms of service to the living-timeless and Mbire doctor-prophetic activities as transgressions against the first commandment. Service to the living-timeless and most Mbire customs were lumped together as direct evils from Satan to deceive the faithful. The "Rules and Regulations" (1967:35) condemned Mbire burial rites and substituted manyaradzo (condolences) rites for them. According to Daneel (1989), the manyaradzo rites were subsequently stopped when they appeared to be degenerating into actual Mbire kurova guva rites.

Although some Protestant missionaries took an interest in the Mbire culture, the general tendency was towards elimination and negation of the Mbire belief system instead of dialogue. Daneel (1989)

is insistent that some Protestant missionaries' attitudes towards service to the living-timeless concentrated on imagined features of worship, idolatry and satanic turning away from the ultimate reality so excessively that no space was left for remoulding and assimilation, or for a substitution of parallel Christian rites within Protestant churches.

6.4.1.2 Implication of the Protestant Approach

The implication of this Protestant mission policy was the failure of most Protestant missionaries to address the whole range of existential issues in the Mbire world (Vambe 2001:102). The Mbire converts apparently lived in two religious worlds and they continue to live in two religious worlds even today (Kurehwa 2000:10-11). They would attend church services by day and, because the Christian religion had not penetrated their world fully, they continued to propitiate their living-timeless in an effort to secure their own well-being (cf. Daneel 1970). The two-world paradox of the DRC members in the Gutu area, often quoted by Daneel (1971; 1989) is a good instance of this failure.

Furthermore, there was/is no possible interaction between mission stations and the Mwari worship of the Mbire people. Having renounced the Mbire ancient worship of the ultimate reality, some missionaries negated it (Daneel 1989). Unaware of its resilience, they could not confront the Mbire ancient worship of Mwari in their church sermons. As has been argued previously, what was in their minds were conversion and spiritual growth in a pietistic sense as well as the upliftment of the heathen Mbire through education and medical services (Gann 1965:206).

Consequently, the vanyai (messengers) of Mwari worship continued to collect the annual zvipo (gifts) in every district from both non-Christian and Christian Mbire people, both Protestants and Catholics alike, for presentation at the central cultic shrine at Matopo Hills with a plea for rain and other requests (Daneel 1971, 1989).

It appears that Mbire people viewed prayers to the Christian ultimate reality to be insufficient, especially in times of crises (Kurehwa 2000:10). On the contrary, those prayers seemed to benefit missionaries only, since they were the ones living an affluent life, while the Mbire people were living in abject poverty. Somehow, the Christian ultimate reality did not cut a strong figure among the Mbire people (Vambe 2001:102).

Thus, Mbire living-timeless continued to hold sway, determining the destinies of their living descendants. For Mbire people service to the living-timeless was/is the age-old religious pivot on which life revolved. It is important to note that neither modern progress nor modern accumulation has changed this view of the Mbire people (Daneel 1989). It is a misconception that only those who

are unchristian and uneducated solicit the services of the Mbire living-timeless. Facts from field experience and other researches conducted depict the contrary (Chavunduka 1977).

Daneel (1989:43) critiqued the DRC and other Protestant churches for their radical policy of discontinuity without adequate substitution, which he thought created a vacuum that many Protestant Mbire converts filled by leading a double religious existence – worshipping the ultimate reality of the bible and worshipping their Mwari through the mediation of the living-timeless for protection and well-being.

Thus, the basic Mbire cosmology had remained unaltered (Vambe 2001:102). Daneel (1989:43) contends that the cultural foreignness and strict disciplinary measures experienced by Protestant Mbire converts as a repudiation of their own cultural identity led to alienation and the defection of large numbers of Mbire adherents to the Independent Churches, where Mwari seemed to be visibly entering their own Mbire world. This brings me to the Catholic approach.

6.4.1.3 Catholic Approach

After the initial phase in which both Protestant and Catholic missionary approaches resembled each other (see section 6.3), the Catholic Church shifted its position to accommodate the Mbire religio-cultural heritage (Daneel 1970, 1989). This was in line with Catholic missiological strategy, which entails building bridges between the Christian religion and local cultures it encounters. Despite Prestage (as quoted by Gann 1965:206), a priest who studied Mbire customs and believed that the all-pervasive dread of the living-timeless and the power of the Mbire prophets (masvikiro) made it impossible to build on the old religious foundation, Mbire Christian priests were tasked to re-evaluate the old usages. The first Mbire Christian priest who set the trend in accommodating Mbire rituals and belief system was Father Kumbirai (Daneel 1971:268-270). He proclaimed that Mbire religion was a given *praeparatio evangelica* which was to reach fulfilment in the ambit of the Christian religion analogous to the Levitical priestly mediation. I shall presently return to the *praeparatio evangelica* paradigm to evaluate it and discuss its implications for the Mbire people and their religion later in this chapter.

After examining kupira vadzimu (service to the living-timeless), Father Kumbirai concluded that the ritual was an extension to the realm of the living-timeless of the same respect that is shown to the living people (Daneel 1989). This paved the way for adopting forms of communicating with the living-timeless.

The Mbire rain-making ritual (mukwerere) was the first sacrificial rite to be accommodated. This ritual was replaced by the tinonamatira mvura (we pray for rain) church ceremony. In this liturgy, there was a reading of scripture and prescribed prayers in which the living-timeless were not

addressed, but the ultimate reality was asked to bless the fields, the seeds and the cattle of the worshippers with sufficient rain (Daneel 1989).

The assumption here was that a recurrent seasonal need of the Mbire subsistence peasants was catered for without the Mbire address to national senior living-timeless, which in the Mbire system were supposed to transmit the request to Mwari, the ultimate reality. However, as Daneel (1971:268-270) argues, this new ritual was theologically conservative and transformative and never accommodating. The Christian priest also blessed the lands, the seeds and the cattle with holy water. Mbire mediatory practices of the living-timeless were replaced by a symbolic action, which was intelligible within the framework of Christian traditional thinking (Daneel 1971).

The second Mbire ritual to be accommodated was the burial ceremony. This ceremony included the address of the living-timeless of the deceased person by both the priest and congregation before lowering the coffin into the grave (Daneel 1989). In this liturgy, the prescribed address begins with an appeal to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and then the deceased person's patron saints and proceeds as follows:

Priest: You of his father's house, there is your child.

People: Go with him to Mwari!

Priest: You, his ancestors and forefathers and all of his father's tribe who have died, here is your child.

People: Go with him to Mwari!

Priest: You, the departed of his mother's house, here is your child.

People: Go with him to Mwari!

Priest: You, his uncles and grandmothers of his mother's lineage and all who have died of his mother's tribe, here your child.

People: Go with him to Mwari!

In conclusion, Mwari is asked to receive the departed, who is then addressed personally as follows:

Intercede for this family of yours, N. so that it may be free from problems in this world and also from the things that harm the body and soul. On the day when they die you must meet them and escort them to Mwari in heaven where there is eternal joy (Kumbirai 1967:6-15).

The third Mbire ritual to be accommodated was the kurova guva ritual, the key ritual of all Mbire service to the living-timeless. Kurova guva ritual symbolizes the official induction of the deceased person's spirit into the world of the living-timeless as a condition for and sanction of all future interaction between the living and the living-timeless. Daneel (1971:269) is insistent that here the characteristic features of the Mbire kurova guva ritual were preserved. Incorporation of the deceased person's spirit by the living continues but not into the Mbire hierarchy of the living-timeless, but into the heavenly communion of the saints. Communication with the departed and related living-timeless continues and the protective function of the newly installed living-timeless is

given a new content. In place of symbolically protecting the deceased person's living descendants, the living-timeless is made an intercessor on behalf of the living so that Mwari will protect them.

According to Daneel (1971:270), it was believed that the family mediatory function of the living-timeless between Mwari and their living kin is more direct than in the Mbire religion. This Catholic ritual seeks to overcome the supposed remoteness of Mwari in Mbire religion by making Mwari responsible for the daily protection of the deceased person's relatives as well as making Mwari more readily accessible through a re-interpreted form of mediation. The assumption is that ritually Mwari is drawn nearer.

6.4.1.4 Implication of the Catholic Approach

The impact of these adapted rites on the Catholic Church was great. The Catholic Church lost some of its foreign Euro-American characteristics and seemed to be closer to the Mbire people. The Catholic Church was less judgmental about the Mbire religio-cultural heritage than the Protestant churches were and consequently gained more support than at first (Daneel 1989).

Nevertheless, some of the Catholics expressed concern about Father Kumbirai's proposals. According to (Daneel 1989:40), their fear was that such proposals would be interpreted as the Church's sanction of Mbire kupira vadzimu rituals and that the Mbire people's dependence on the Christian ultimate reality would be obscured. The Mbire people's preoccupation with the involvement of the living-timeless in every aspect of life has been attacked as well. For instance, the emphasis on the mediatory function of the living-timeless in the adapted burial rite was attacked (Daneel 1989:40).

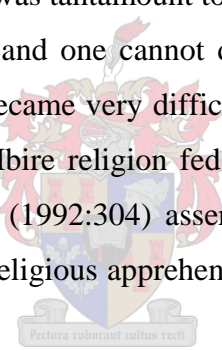
However, Catholic theology has no problem with this, since it propounds that those living-timeless who obeyed natural law are with the ultimate reality and thus can act as mediators. Father Kumbirai's proposals also came under fire from his critics for what they considered to be a failure to make a distinction between the mediatory office of mudzimu in respect of non-Christian dead and that of mudzimu who intercedes with the ultimate reality through Jesus for the faithful (non-Christian and Christian living-timeless).

Daneel (1989:40) critiqued Father Kumbirai's proposals on three main grounds. The first one entails what he thinks is the failure of the liturgy to mention Jesus at all. Daneel thinks there is no contrast between Jesus' unique mediation with that of the mediation of the living-timeless in the liturgy. The second one concerns what he thinks is the failure of the participants in the ritual to address Mwari directly in their plea to the living-timeless to accompany the deceased person to Mwari, though Mwari's presence is presupposed. This ceremony is critiqued for its passive portrayal of Mwari. The third one entails what he thinks is an active portrayal of the mediation of

the living-timeless on behalf of the living. He argues that such a projected configuration of roles in the world beyond equates Jesus' mediation with the mediation of the living-timeless, which to him leaves Mwari remote, yet surrounded by a legion of active and humanly more comprehensible living-timeless.

Contrary to Daneel and those who share his views, I see the Catholic's justification of such absorption and equating Jesus' mediation with the mediation of the living-timeless as suggesting a better understanding of the economy of salvation and grace of the ultimate reality, which may well be the result of profound thinking. Daneel's criticism (1989:43) of the Catholic's accommodation of Mbire mediation of the living-timeless is, in my view, colonial and could obstruct further theologization in this direction. Mbire people, particularly in times of crisis, live with and rely on their living-timeless for protection, irrespective of the doctrines of the churches they belong to (cf. Kurehwa 2000:10-11).

6.4.2 Evaluation of *Praeparatio Evangelica* Paradigm

The act of destroying the Mbire religion was tantamount to destroying the Mbire people themselves. Mbire people are very religious beings and one cannot destroy their religion without destroying them (Vambe 2001). In the process, it became very difficult to destroy the Mbire religion (Daneel 1995). Missionaries' demonization of Mbire religion fed the root from which people like Father Kumbirai and others emerged. Bediako (1992:304) asserts that such people tried "to affirm the integrity of an African point of view in religious apprehension where it has been underestimated or despised in Africa's missionary history." 

Father Kumbirai was one of the early Mbire scholars to celebrate the Mbire religious past as a *praeparatio evangelica* for the Christian gospel (cf. Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2001). He saw the Christian gospel as a fulfilment of Mbire religion. Since that time, efforts have been made to give expression to the Christian religion in Mbire religio-cultural terms, to relate the Christian religion meaningfully to the Mbire's view of reality and integrate it into the Mbire worldview (see Mugabe 1993; Kurehwa 2000). The aim was to help Mbire converts live out the Christian religion authentically within their cultural milieu and to integrate their religious personalities. According to Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001), this was part of a wider effort by African scholars such as Mbiti and others. These scholars also celebrated the African religious past as a *praeparatio evangelica* for the Christian gospel.

This effort produced two schools of thought. The first school is considered moderate because the business of translating the Christian religion into African contexts continues to use the Euro-American methodological framework. Indigenous cultural elements used in the contextualization process remain subject to Euro-American revelation theology and gain validity in the Church only

through transformation (Daneel 1989). Mulago, Nyamiti and Pobee are some of the representatives of this approach.

The second school is considered radical, because it adopts a non-Euro-American theological methodology. Here the bible and the Christian religion are evaluated with greater openness towards African religio-cultures. African religio-cultures are allowed to direct the course of theologizing largely. Grassroots encounters between the Christian religion and African people in their total religio-cultural contexts are the main concern here (Daneel 1989). Tshibangu, Bemwenyi-Kweshi, Idowu and Mbiti are some of the representatives of this school of thought.

Daneel (1989) argues that these two approaches are a response to Euro-American theology and its practical expression in the colonial missionary enterprise, exemplified by the Mbire example described in 6.3 above. These scholars tried to unmask some of Euro-American weaknesses and pretensions and establish their own identities. They renounced Euro-American theology's implicit claim to universality and normativeness as well as most Euro-American theologians' tendency to view African theology as an adapted version of universal theology (Ntoedibe-Kuswani 2001). According to Bemwenyi-Kweshi (as quoted by Bosch 1984:113), these scholars advocated the pluriformity of all theological effort. African scholars argue that their theology "proceeds from its own basis to grapple with the total complexity of questions put by the Church in Africa and to respond to these questions in the light of the 'African faith'".

Witvliet (1984:111) contends that African theology is a religio-cultural liberation movement. It tries to present a new approach in the face of a history of Euro-American colonial subjugation. Enforced acculturation has resulted in a religious schizophrenia in the African soul as well as identity crisis. African theology tries to resolve this religio-cultural alienation. He argues that African theology presents the necessary first phase of the exodus from Euro-American religio-cultural enslavement. The hallmark of this first phase of liberation is the discovery and appreciation of those African religio-cultural tenets, which had been rejected or ignored under Euro-American colonial domination.

However, this exercise is, in my view, rather limited because African scholars appear to be passionate apologists. They are concerned with establishing continuity with the Christian religion rather than discontinuity, which the missionaries tended to emphasize. Their aim is to establish the ultimate reality of Africa and the ultimate reality of the bible as essentially the same. Kibicho (1968:235) sums up this attempt:

I think it would be right to conclude that the Kikuyu conception of God compares well with the Hebrew conception of the Old Testament, perhaps even at the latter's highest level of development.

This attempt is a rejection of the idea of a *deus otiosus* or *deus remotus* contrived by most Euro-American colonialists as a misleading generalization. The elevation of the African conception of the ultimate reality is grounded on a prefiguration paradigm, which presents African religions as a *praeparatio evangelica* in its own right comparable to the Levitical priestly mediation. This is an escape from the judgment of discontinuity as preached by most Euro-American missionaries.

This trend is best reflected in Mbiti's theology. Mbiti (1980:817-818) argues that the ultimate reality of the bible is the same as the ultimate reality already known in pre-Christian framework of African religions. Missionaries are accredited with creatively introducing Jesus as an innovation, but rightly used the names of the ultimate reality already present in Africa, since this ultimate reality is the creator and father of Jesus.

Mbiti went further and renounced as unbiblical the Euro-American theological distinction between 'general' and 'special' revelation. He questioned the restriction of the revelation of the ultimate reality to the biblical account only:

One important task, then, is to see the nature, the method and the implication of God's revelation among African peoples, in the light of the biblical record of the same revelation.

Thus, the involvement of the ultimate reality with African peoples is assumed to be at par with that of Israel. Mbiti advocated for the broadening of salvation history to encompass other peoples along with the Israelites. Though Mbiti did not draw this argument to its logical conclusion in his article, his equating of the Levitical priestly mediation (Old Testament history) with pre-Christian African history is implied here, hence the prefiguration paradigm.

Postcolonial thinking moves beyond the prefiguration paradigm. Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:111) contends that the idea of *praeparatio evangelica* suggests the incompleteness of non-Christian religions and their need of the Christian religion. The Christian religion is viewed as the only religion created by the ultimate reality. Thus, the argument strongly emphasizes non-Christian religions as only a *praeparatio evangelica* unable to achieve fulfilment in themselves. That is, without the Christian religion non-Christian religions could not have been redeemed. Non-Christian religions are taken as inadequate in themselves.

She further argues that, if non-Christian religions are also given by the ultimate reality, then this is a paradox. What sort of ultimate reality is this that decides to give non-Euro-American peoples partial knowledge and make them suffer until they accept foreign civilization and religion? Accepting fulfilment from foreign sources confused and destroyed whatever partial knowledge non-Euro-American peoples had before. Non-Euro-American peoples lost their identity, their independence, their power and their humanity in this process.

I concur with her that the idea of *praeparatio evangelica* only allows us to see how colonized non-Euro-American peoples are. They try to defend their religio-cultural heritage, but they could not overcome the colonial framework (Mosala 1989:13), which puts the Christian religion on top of the ladder and non-Christian religions at the bottom of the dustbin. Even non-Euro-American scholars like Father Kumbirai, John Mbiti and others failed to grant that non-Christian religions are complete on their own and that they have a right of their own to exist.

Bediako (1992:35) is insistent that what was presented as the Christian gospel to the non-Euro-American world was a colonial package, “which has shown itself...in many forms: ecclesiastical, social, theological, cultural and administrative.” This colonial package is thought to not have been all that unworthy. Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:112-3) concludes that, despite renouncing it, efforts are made also to snatch something from it – the so-called the “gospel.” Because of the so-called “gospel,” some non-Euro-American scholars prefer not to harp on the ills and mistakes caused by most missionaries. She challenges those non-Euro-American scholars who continue to subscribe to the colonizing approach by defining non-Christian religions as *praeparatio evangelica*, which implies the incompleteness of these religions on their own. Many African scholars continue to see Euro-American churches as their major theological pillars.

Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:112-3) further contends that this dilemma substantiates the ambivalence in claiming non-Euro-American identities but at the same time classifying non-Christian religions as *praeparatio evangelica* – secondary to the Christian religion. It also shows the difficult and impossibility of plucking the Christian gospel from the colonial package without at the same time pulling on the strings to which it is attached (Mosala 1989:13). The marketing of biblical tradition to universal standards by some Euro-American Christian people undermined the fact that it was bound to its own context and culture. The above efforts have been unable to resolve this non-Euro-American dilemma.

6.4.3 Implication of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* Paradigm for Mbire People

Does the presentation of Mbire religion as a *praeparatio evangelica* help the status of Mbire people and their religion? According to this argument, Mbire religion is a *praeparatio evangelica* just because it does not have the concept of Jesus as is seen in the Christian religion. This argument sees Mbire religio-cultural figures as *praeparatio evangelica* for the Christian Jesus. Some Mbire scholars continue to operate within these colonial frameworks. They claim that their Christian theological frame of “no other name” makes them obliged to name Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ above all Mbire religious figures (Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2001:115).

This is, in my view, a manifestation of oppression to Mbire people (Kibicho 1972:319). As much as Mbire people have to struggle for equal political recognition, they also have to struggle for the same

equal recognition of their religion with others, especially with the Christian religion. The demonization of Mbire religion and the imposition of most Euro-American Christian patterns on Mbire thoughts should be resisted by all means, because this demonization shattered the focal symbols of Mbire people's self-esteem.

Fortunately, despite the putting up of new structures to disempowering them, Mbire people continue to struggle for their own empowerment (Chinyowa 2001:127). When their religion was condemned as demonic, false, incomplete, their religious practices went underground, and some of them were taken over and utilized in the Independent Churches (Daneel 1971, 1989).

Though other spheres such as political and economic structures were dislocated, Mbire religious presence continues to be felt by developing various strategies of resistance (Chinyowa 2001:127). Mbire religious practitioners have not defaulted in passing their knowledge systems through oral history, proverbs, rituals, myths and legends drawn from Mbire philosophy (Chinyowa 2001:127). Consequently, Mbire people continue to consult Mbire religious personnel, namely their priests, prophets (masvikiro), doctor-prophets (n'anga) and many others (Kurehwa 2000:10). After all, these people understand the Mbire worldview better than most missionaries and everyone else. As Ntloedibe-Kuswani (2001:112-3) argues, Mbire people refused to accept that their own religious system was in error and that their living-timeless were idols.

The time has come for Mbire people to go beyond the colonial paradigm of *praeparatio evangelica*, which continues to present Mbire religion as incomplete and powerless. The entire religious system imposed on the Mbire people should be reworked on Mbire terms. Mbire religion should set itself free from the Christian religion and define its context, patterns, dimensions and theology. In doing so, the Mbire religion will be in a position to present its unique identity and compete with other religions. Mbire images of faith will empower the Mbire people against a new kind of colonialism/globalization. With this freedom, Mbire people can move beyond the *praeparatio evangelica* framework for Mbire identity, autonomy and survival.

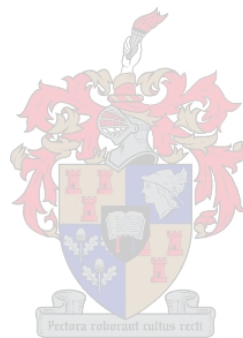
The *praeparatio evangelica* framework was a good starting point to subscribe to different theological frameworks, which might take Mbire theology beyond just *praeparatio evangelica*. The idea of Mbire religion as only a *praeparatio evangelica* with the Christian religion as its fulfilment reflects a trend that is taken by mission and colonial Christian religion, which influences most Mbire and other African scholars (Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2001:112-3). Most Mbire scholars adopted this *praeparatio evangelica* standpoint. However, a postcolonial paradigm questions the definite normativity of the popular Christian religion. It asserts that there are other religious ways of leading an authentic human life other than the Christian one (cf. Knitter 1985). Consequently, I will argue

that Mbire religion is salvific in its own right. I shall return to this in Chapters Seven and Eight below.

6.8 SUMMARY

This chapter began by examining the background to the missionary enterprise. This was followed by a detailed analysis of the excessive claim of the Christian religion to being the only true religion, while the Mbire religion was/is erroneously regarded as an offshoot of the devil. The last section re-evaluates the Christian demonization of Mbire religion, including an evaluation of the *praeparatio evangelica* paradigm and its implications for the Mbire people and their religion. This was found to be a possible and subtle form of Christian colonialism, which does not allow any manifestation of the ultimate reality, which is not under the control of its claims.

However, could the Christian absolute claim to epistemological and ontological superiority stand and survive the postmodern and postcolonial test (Best and Kellner 1991:1)? The next chapter re-evaluates this Christian absolutist claim from a postcolonial perspective in order to determine its truthfulness.



CHAPTER SEVEN

POSTCOLONIAL RE-EVALUATION OF CHRISTIAN AND *MBIRE* RELIGIONS

Why have Christians so often thought it permissible and even morally imperative to carry their message across all boundaries, invading the homelands of other communities (Swanson 1995:241-63)?

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Having examined some Euro-American colonizing people acting out the artistry of the letter to the Hebrews in Africa in general and in Mbireland in particular, I wish to re-examine and re-evaluate this artistry from a postcolonial perspective. As previously argued, it is the interpretation of Jesus by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews that is contentious here and not Jesus himself.

Why did the author of the letter to the Hebrews feel that Jesus' priestly mediation possesses a pre-eminent salvific value? Is it the Jesus event (his birth, death and resurrection) that makes the writer feel that Jesus' priestly mediation possesses such a pre-eminent salvific value, thereby making the Christian religion superior? Could this Christian absolutist claim to supersessionism stand the postcolonial test? Could the understanding that Jesus' priestly mediation possesses pre-eminent salvific values over the Levitical mediation have meaning external to the self-understanding and faith experience of the community, which believes it? These are controversial and problematic questions, which this chapter will address.

The chapter consists of eight sections. The first section consists of introductory remarks. Examining a postcolonial quest for new ways of theological reflection will follow this. The third section provides a postcolonial re-evaluation of the assumption of Jesus' priestly mediation as possessing such a pre-eminent salvific value by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews. This section will re-evaluate the Jesus event (birth, death and resurrection) from a postcolonial perspective and contends that incarnation, atonement and resurrection are "constructed edifices of belief" (Baker 1970:137). This will be followed by a postcolonial re-evaluation of the Mbire religion, particularly its concepts of Mwari (the ultimate reality) and service to the living-timeless to ascertain whether the Mbire "constructed edifices of belief" are qualitatively inferior to the Christian constructed edifices of belief. The fifth section examines the mythological aspects of religion. This will be followed by a postcolonial re-evaluation of the Christian bible. The seventh section provides a postcolonial acknowledgement of an independent validity of Mbire religion. The Chapter concludes with a synoptic summary of the argument.

7.2 A POSTCOLONIAL QUEST FOR RELEVANCE

Postcolonial critics have worked out new paradigms and approaches that are vastly different from those of the dominant biblical scholarship of the past (see *The Postcolonial Bible* 1998). Postcolonial theorists move beyond the prefiguration paradigm to an independent validation of non-Christian religions. According to Dube (1998:38), they seek to challenge biblical writing, its reading, its readers and its institutions. The main purpose is to seek ways of reading for liberating interdependence.

Dube (1998:133) argues that a postcolonial reading performance has a five-fold purpose. Firstly, it propounds biblical readings that challenge colonial tendencies and any other oppressive writing designs. Secondly, it propounds readings that take biblical writings and Jesus as important phenomena, which are nevertheless not “superior to” or “better than” or “above all”, but among the many important manifestations of religion. Thirdly, it challenges the overtly divine characterization of Jesus and his place of origin in such writings as the letter to the Hebrews and other biblical writings. Fourthly, it challenges Christian absolutist claims to epistemological and ontological authority over all other places and religious cultures of the world. Lastly, it calls for a reading for liberating interdependence of cultural differences and economic systems.

This quest for new ways of theological reflection is imperative. In the first place, there is the need to avoid dependence on sources of authority outside one’s own context. For instance, dependence on sources of authority outside of Zimbabwe has hampered Mbire people from sharing with others what they should have been sharing. Dependence on rules of theological reflection developed in countries alien to Mbire life is a hindrance to Mbire people’s growth in maturity. It reduces Mbire people’s credibility, diminishes their spirit and negates the universality of the ultimate reality.

This desire to build approaches of theological reflection from within the cultural context of Zimbabwe is not a manifestation of misplaced nationalistic zeal. Two thousand years of Euro-American Christian heritage and the enormous contribution of a number of Euro-American scholars to theological reflection cannot and should not be dismissed as of any consequence. To do so is to repudiate Mbire people’s citizenship responsibilities in the household of the ultimate reality. This postcolonial quest is not in the spirit of unwillingness to learn from insights gained by others living in different areas of the *oikoumene* but merely a sign of growth in maturity.

In the second place, the shifting sand of theological reflection in Euro-America has proved to be an undependable basis for theology. Some Euro-American scholars feel that colonial theological reflection on the bible has now come to an end of its usefulness to theology. According to Samantha

(1987:2), each time a Euro-American scholar sneezes, Mbire scholars “should not catch a cold and manifest the symptoms all over the footnotes”.

In the third place, there is a deeper reason why Mbire people need to develop their own distinctive character and direction. The basic question here is not so much about the rules of theological reflection as the perception of truth/reality. The question as to how reality is to be perceived is the first concern. What are the rules of theological reflection, which point to, explain or communicate the experience of that reality? Felder (1989:185-186) is insistent that of all the mandates confronting the present world community predicated on a renewed commitment to pluralism and the attendant acknowledgment of the integrity of all cultural groups constitute an urgent agenda for biblical scholars. It is an agenda far too long neglected in the vast array of Euro-centric theological and ecclesiastical traditions that continue to marginalize Mbire and other African people throughout the world today.

A postcolonial reading performance enables a shift in method from Euro-centrism and its attendant text-centrism to a people-centred and context-centred theological reflection (Hinga 1996:279). Mbire scholarship should be answerable not to some Euro-American guild, but to the hopes, dreams and fears of the society in which it is practised (Mosala 1989:13). Those critical scholars seeking hermeneutical strategies suitable for the Mbire situation would have to address the religio-cultural and socio-political contexts of Zimbabwe and Africa.

Now I turn to a postcolonial re-evaluation of the assumption of Jesus’ priestly mediation as possessing a pre-eminent salvific value. The purpose is to ascertain whether Christian supersessionism can be substantiated.

7.3 POSTCOLONIAL RE-EVALUATION OF CHRISTIAN SUPERIORITY

Jesus of Nazareth, the first-century Jewish prophet whose teachings form the basis of the Christian religion, has left an indelible mark on the course of Euro-American human history (Sullivan 2002:1). His vision of the ultimate reality and humanity has changed almost every aspect of Euro-American human life. Probably no other person throughout the ages has had such a profound and positive influence on the course of Euro-American human history. So strong was the image he created that he affected Euro-American culture, politics and religion in a very dramatic and decisive way (Richter 1913). As a result, many Christian people the world over have come to view him as ‘Lord’, ‘Saviour’ and ‘incarnate Son of the ultimate reality.’

However, a postcolonial re-evaluation is insistent that some Christians are ignorant of some of the conclusions reached by scholarly study of Jesus’ earthly life. According to Sullivan (2002:1), the reason for this ignorance emerges from the Christian religion’s view of Jesus as “a mysterious,

other-worldly person to be encountered only in hymns and anthems, in creeds and doctrines, in icons and stained-glass windows, and in porcelain Christo-statues displayed in ecclesiastical art stores.”

Christian people have expended mental-speculative energy hammering such doctrines as the incarnation, atonement, eschatology, trinity and others. Sullivan (2002:2) argues that this process resulted in Jesus becoming ensconced in a creedal castle. Moreover, for centuries the assumption of the letter to the Hebrews of Jesus’ priestly mediation as possessing such a pre-eminent salvific value was not questioned.

However, with the advent of the Enlightenment and the post-age epoch, this supersessionism has become less plausible and in fact obsolete, so that it no longer makes sense to many people. Thus, the Christian religion’s absolute claim of superiority because of the concept of Jesus is no longer credible and plausible (Ariarajah 1985:13-18; Sullivan 2002:118).

In this section, I will re-evaluate the Jesus event from a postcolonial perspective. The three aspects of the Jesus event – the incarnation (Jesus’ birth), atonement (Jesus’ death on the cross) and resurrection – are three Christian beliefs claimed for Jesus’ superiority over other Christs and by extension, the Christian religion over non-Christian religions, such as the Mbire religion.

7.3.1 The Incarnation

Some Christian people’s claim that their religion is decisively superior to non-Christian religions is, in the first instance, based on the incarnation (the nature of Jesus’ birth). They believe that the ultimate reality became human in Jesus of Nazareth and that Jesus is the Son of the ultimate reality. However, a postcolonial re-evaluation would inquire whether Jesus was really the incarnation of the ultimate reality.

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find the birth of Jesus riddled with controversy. It would find the two writings (Matthew and Luke) that give circumstances that surrounded Jesus’ birth contradictory. For instance, Joseph seems to dominate in Matthew’s writing, while Mary seems to dominate in Luke’s writing. In Matthew, divine messages are conveyed through dreams, while in Luke divine messages are conveyed through angels. In Matthew’s writing, Jesus’ parents lived in Bethlehem, while in Luke’s writing they lived in Nazareth. In Matthew Jesus’ birth is celebrated by wise men with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, while in Luke shepherds and a host of heavenly angels celebrate it. Moreover, Matthew’s writing lacks the extensive attention given by Luke’s writing to the birth of John the Baptist. On the other hand, Luke’s writing lacks the detail of the mysterious, guiding star and the account of the flight into Egypt to escape Herod’s threat of

infanticide. Though Matthew and Luke share patrilineal genealogies and the idea of a virgin mother, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find these writings contradictory.

Furthermore, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find that the genealogies reflect Joseph as Jesus' biological father, though Christian people have never emphasized this idea. They have always emphasized Jesus as a virgin's son. Yet embedded in these writings are the opposite tradition that Joseph was Jesus' biological father. For instance, in Matthew 13:55 Jesus is called a carpenter's son; in Luke 2:48 Mary called Joseph Jesus' father; and in John 1:45 Jesus is called Joseph's son.

Although Matthew and Luke contain patrilineal genealogies of Jesus' ancestry through Joseph, the genealogies in Matthew (1:1-16) and Luke (3:23-38) also disagree. Matthew lists twenty-seven names from David to Joseph, while Luke lists forty-two names from David to Joseph. Moreover, only four names, namely David, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel and Joseph in the David to Joseph list are identical. Matthew and Luke's lists also give different names for Jesus' grandfather. Matthew has Jacob, while Luke has Heli.

Another issue of much interest to a postcolonial re-evaluation is Matthew's mentioning of four flawed women besides Mary in Jesus' ancestry, namely Tamar (1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5) and Bathsheba (1:6). Matthew's insertion of these flawed women in Jesus' ancestry broaches possibilities that Christian theologians do not belabour. As Sullivan (2002: 36) suggests, one may think that maybe Jesus' mother was somehow a flawed woman; that Jesus' birth may have been irregular; that Jesus may have been born out of wedlock; and that Jesus' mother may have been a commercial sex worker.

Whatever the case may be, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find both genealogies to be possible pious fabrications by the apostolic Church, which provided Jesus with proper Davidic credentials. The genealogies embody a view that Joseph was Jesus' biological father, a view held by an early conservative Jewish Christian sect called the Ebionites. According to Sullivan (2002:37), though they accepted Jesus as a Messiah, they rejected both the belief that Jesus' birth was a virgin birth and that Jesus' death was a sacrifice for sin. They interpreted the Lord's Supper as a memorial meal. Unfortunately, Ebionite Christianity withered and was supplanted by Gentile Christianity. The Jewish understanding of Jesus as Joseph's son went into eclipse and was superseded by the Gentile virgin birth belief.

Furthermore, a postcolonial re-evaluation would argue that the idea of a divine parenthood of human heroes was not a Jewish idea, nor was virginal conception uniquely a Christian belief. According to Sullivan (2002:38), virginal conception was a widely held belief in the non-Jewish world. For instance, the virginal conception motif was commonplace in Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism and mystery religions. Hercules, Asclepius, Alexander the Great and many Roman

emperors such as Julius Caesar, were believed to be of divine parentage. Plato's mother was also believed to have been impregnated by Apollo, the Greco-Roman god of sunlight, prophecy, music and poetry. Ariston, Plato's father is said to have never slept with Plato's mother until after Plato's birth. Thus, virginal conception was a non-Jewish idea.

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find that the apostolic Church, in an effort to enhance Jesus' reputation and to make him appear greater than the evidence allows, might have applied this non-Jewish belief to him. The writer of Matthew asserts this virginal conception as a fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14. The writer, in my view, has been one of the early Christian writers who scanned the Old Testament for "proof texts" that could be viewed as prophecies of Jesus. A Jewish interpretive technique called *peshet*, which involves taking an Old Testament statement out of its original context and giving it a new reading or application, was employed (Sullivan 2002).

Thus, Matthew 1:22-23 works a *peshet* on Isaiah 7:14. Unfortunately, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find that the Christian thinkers who worked a *peshet* on Jesus' virginal conception were not aware of the fact that it involves a mistranslation of the Hebrew term *almah* in Isaiah 7:14. This verse, taken out of context, mistranslated and subjected to *peshet* exegesis has been used to establish and maintain the virgin birth belief in the Christian religion.

Moreover, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find that a virgin birth belief is peripheral in other New Testament writings. For instance, neither Mark's writing nor John's writing mentions this virgin birth belief. Furthermore, neither the Petrine corpus, the Pauline corpus, the apostolic preaching as recorded in Acts, the Epistle to the Hebrews, nor the Revelation of John mention it. A postcolonial re-evaluation would agree with Sullivan (2002:40) that, despite being one of the fundamental beliefs of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, Jesus might have been not a virgin's son. The apostolic Church in its de-Judaizing of and Hellenizing of the Christian religion as it spread into the Greco-Roman world may have taken on this non-Jewish virgin birth belief. Moreover, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find that a virgin birth is not more miraculous than a natural birth. This brings me to a postcolonial re-evaluation of a second Christian absolutist claim to epistemological and ontological superiority.

7.3.2 The Atonement

A second instance of trying to enhance Jesus' reputation and claim his epistemological and ontological superiority and by extension that of the Christian religion is based on the letter to the Hebrews' view of Jesus' death by crucifixion as a sacrifice for sin offered to the ultimate reality on behalf of sinful humanity. The letter to the Hebrews most prominently emphasizes this notion. For instance, Hebrews 9:11-14 and 9:26-28 consider this notion and eventually correlate blood sacrifice and forgiveness. One is not possible without the other (cf. Chapter Three). Hebrews is supported by

other New Testament references such as 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 1:7; and Revelation 5:9 in this emphasis.

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find that the apostolic Church might have been trying to make sense out of Jesus' violent death. Moreover, sacrificing animals to appease and please the realities (gods) was a commonplace in Near Eastern religions. One can observe an instance of this practice in Acts 14:13. Animal sacrifice was a commonplace in both Judaism and mystery religions (Ferguson 1980). A postcolonial re-evaluation would find the letter to the Hebrews and the apostolic Church wrongly putting such emphasis upon Jesus' execution as a sacrifice for sin that makes possible divine forgiveness. Consequently, the Christian religion became centred on the cross to the extent that many Christians now view Jesus' sacrificial death as the Christian gospel. Jaroslav Pelikan (1997:103) observes about this notion:

The followers of Jesus concluded very early that he had lived in order to die, that his death was not the interruption of his life, but its ultimate purpose. The creeds recognized this by moving directly from his birth, "from the virgin Mary" to his crucifixion "under Pontius Pilate." What was said of the thane of Cawdor in Macbeth was true pre-eminently of Jesus: "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it." "Far be it from me," St. Paul said, "to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal.6:14).

Leslie D. Weatherhead (1965:116-117) also observes about this notion earlier:

It is obvious that, in every generation, men [*sic*] are at liberty to try to make sense of important events by reference to the thought-forms of their own time. The Jewish were familiar with the age-long idea of obtaining a sense of forgiveness by sacrificing an animal on an altar. When, therefore, the early Christians, steeped in Judaism, were confronted with the execution of Jesus, it is no wonder that, to make sense of it, to explain an omnipotent God's non-interference and Christ's willingness to die...their minds hit on the idea of sacrifice, and Jesus, whom John the Baptist had called the Lamb of God, was thought to be the climax of the age-long sacrifices in the temple, and it is probable that Paul thought in this way also. Paul was a great theologian as well as a great saint and a heroic missionary, but we are not bound to imprison our minds in his theories. Newton was a great scientist, but it is no disparagement of Newton to realize that even school *children* today know more than he did about atoms. Thought moves on in every field of inquiry (*italics mine*).

Paula Fredriksen (1999:51-52) observes that animal sacrifice was a very prominent feature of worship in antiquity and describes it as

the single biggest difference between the religious sensibility of people in the modern world and our cultural ancestors of twenty centuries ago...Universally, the worship of a deity-virtually any deity-involved the slaughter of animals...Purificatory rites helped prepare the worshipper for his (*sic*) encounter, through sacrifice, with the sacred.

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find the Christian emphasis upon Jesus' shed blood also embedded in hymns. It argues that once a belief has been embedded in hymns, it becomes

unquestionable and sacrosanct. It also finds this emphasis embedded in the observance of the Holy Communion, where sacrificial blood and forgiveness of sins are correlated. It argues that Christian theologians have emphasised atonement theories to explain why and how Jesus' death was sacrificial (Sullivan 2002:91).

However, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find questions abounding concerning this absolute claim by some Christian people. Postcolonial re-evaluations of Jesus' sayings make clear that one is hard pressed to cite a single statement from the pre-Easter Jesus' lips suggesting that he himself viewed his death as a sacrifice for sin. Sullivan (2002:92) contends that the only statement suggestive of this reading is a problematic statement in Matthew 26:28. He consequently suggests that it is unwise to construct atonement theories on a single problematic statement.

Moreover, Jesus himself never correlates forgiveness and his crucifixion. Instances abound here (Matt. 6:14-15; 9:2-8; Mark 2: 3-12; Luke 5:18-26; 6:37; 23:34). In all these instances, Jesus did not correlate forgiveness and his crucifixion. In Matthew 19:13-22 Jesus was asked what one must do to inherit eternal life. His answer was "keep the commandments" (v.17). He did not say, "Believe that my crucifixion is a sacrifice for your sins." As Sullivan (2002:92) argues, Jesus taught that a blessed future was dependent upon right moral behaviour and not on personal acceptance of a blood sacrifice.

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find that the letter to the Hebrews and the apostolic Church might have fabricated Jesus' death as a sin sacrifice without paying attention to what Jesus thought and taught. It would find a gulf between what Jesus believed and what the Christian religion believes. It would find the Christian religion's gospel concerning Jesus different from the gospel preached by Jesus himself. Paul Tillich (1967:518-519) argues that "the gospel or message preached by Jesus contains nothing of the later message preached concerning Jesus."

It is Sullivan's contention (2002:93) that the Christian religion did not pay attention to what was experienced by Jesus in the closing hours of his life. He argues that Jesus' crucifixion was an instance of bureaucratic brutality. The Romans viewed Jesus as a rebel and executed him. A postcolonial re-evaluation would find that Jesus' execution has no religious significance at all and does not harmonize with later efforts by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews to give it a religious significance.

The assumption of the letter to the Hebrews that Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for sin and making forgiveness possible has been taken as making the Christian religion superior to non-Christian religions. Nevertheless, efforts by the letter to the Hebrews and the Christian religion to explain Jesus' execution as accomplishing forgiveness for all humankind are no longer plausible and convincing. In my view, the idea that the ultimate reality required a human sacrifice – Jesus'

death by crucifixion – in exchange for divine forgiveness is grotesque and repulsive. As Sullivan (2002:94) argues, curiously most Christian people condemn animal sacrifice in non-Christian religions, while placing the human sacrifice of Jesus at the heart of the Christian religion. This brings me to a postcolonial re-evaluation of a third Christian absolutist claim to epistemological and ontological superiority.

7.3.3 The Resurrection

The third instance on which the author of the letter to the Hebrews and Christian people base the superiority of their religion over non-Christian religions is the notion of the resurrection (Heb. 1:3, 9:11; 1 Cor.15). The Christian belief is that Jesus' story did not end with his crucifixion and burial. A day and a half later Jesus is said to have appeared to some women and later to his disciples. These post-burial appearances of Jesus are what Christian people call the resurrection.

But a postcolonial re-evaluation would find that Jesus' resurrection is plagued with controversy and problems. For instance, the gospels do not explain explicitly the nature of Jesus' resurrection. Furthermore, no person who can describe and explain what exactly took place witnessed the resurrection. The gospels simply reported the post-burial appearances, but not the resurrection itself. The letter to the Hebrews likewise simply reported Jesus' appearance in heaven. This opens the resurrection to any sort of reading.

Moreover, these post-burial appearances were exclusively made to Jesus' disciples and not to the Jewish priestly leadership and Pilate, who are said to have been responsible for his death. Surely, it could have made a difference if Jesus had appeared to these people in addition to his disciples. Notwithstanding this, some of his disciples also doubted Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 28:17; Luke 24:11). A postcolonial re-evaluation would find the limitation of these post-burial appearances to his disciples raising a question of possible fabrication. Could it be that the post-burial encounters were his disciples' inner, subjective experiences or hallucinations? Why did Jesus not appear to the Jewish and Roman officials for vindication? Why is the post-burial accounts characterized by a weave of secrecy?

A postcolonial re-evaluation finds it no disparagement of Jesus to concede that his so-called resurrection is abounds with embellishments. Consequently, the sceptics who doubt the resurrection have been asked to posit a reason other than the resurrection for the disciples' post-crucifixion behaviour and the Christian religion's emergence and dynamic growth (Sullivan 2002:77-78). In my view, this is a very weak answer to a postcolonial question. One could as well ask whether Christian people are under any obligation to posit a reason other than the resurrection for Islam's emergence and dynamic growth. It is clear that religious fanaticism and not the resurrection could be one of the explanations for religious emergence and growth. The Mbire religion survived the

colonial onslaught and continues to manifest a resolute vitality without any claim to resurrection. It has not faded away and no prospect exists of it fading away (see IRIN 2005). While Christian people may find no alternative explanation that is plausible, postcolonial critics may find numerous alternative explanations.

However, even if one assumes Jesus' resurrection, a postcolonial re-evaluation would still find nothing to substantiate him as the only Saviour of the world. Assuming Jesus' resurrection, how does that make him a Saviour of the Mbire and non-Christian people as well? I argue, like Jones (1973), that a postcolonial re-evaluation would find no historical ground to substantiate that the liberative ultimate reality depicted in the Exodus, who is believed to have become incarnate in the person of Jesus, is actually carrying out any project of liberating African people from Euro-American socio-economic oppression (cf. Ngungi 1993:12-13).

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find the reality actually contrary to what the letter to the Hebrews and some Christian people claim concerning Jesus and human life (Sullivan (2002:99)). The sugary Jesus of the Christian religion has little relevance to the problems of evil and human suffering in this unfriendly world (Jonsson 1991:4). The tendency of the author of the letter to the Hebrews to enhance Jesus' reputation and make him appear greater than what evidence allows has made Jesus a figure remote from ordinary human experiences. Christian people have etherealized Jesus to the extent that for many he becomes irrelevant to everyday human life (cf. Jonsson 1991:4). The sinless cosmic reality in human flesh could hardly understand what it is to be a peasant, a farm labourer, a mineworker or a factory worker in Zimbabwe or Africa.

Sullivan (2002:100) observes that the Christian religion has been transformed into a self-serving Jesus cult. What he called Jesusolatry, the worship of Jesus, has supplanted the worship of the ultimate reality, the creator and sustainer of life. Jesus cultists have oversold him by preaching Jesus as a genie who exists to do the will of those who call upon him as his disciples. This is an excessive affirmation, which only makes Jesus reside in speculative doctrines and in stained-glass windows.

7.3.4. Constructed Edifices of Belief

From the genesis of the Christian religion up to modern times, a number of Christian readers have constructed "systematic edifices of belief." These edifices range from some writings of the New Testament to Augustine's *City of God* to Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* to John Calvin's *Institute of the Christian Religion* to Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and others. John Austin Baker (1970:137) expresses this perspective:

If it could ever be proved that the Gospels consisted throughout of completely accurate material for a biography of Jesus, the traditional Christian faith would collapse in ruins. This can hardly be stressed too strongly, especially to those Christians who are convinced that an orthodox faith rests

on factual reliability of the Bible in general and on the status of the Gospels in particular as precise records of the words and acts of Jesus, and of the incidents of his life. Such a conviction is very nearly the reverse of the truth. Every one of the systematic edifices of belief, both orthodox and heretical, which have marked the history of Christianity, has depended in the last analysis on an edited, expanded, or artificially interpreted version of the Gospel text.

Postcolonial critics argue that the Christian religion has been reshaped or re-read many times. Reading and re-reading the Christian religion is an unending job. They argue that although Jesus is thought of as the foundation of the Christian religion, his significance to others is not self-evident (e.g. Mbire and other Africans). The multiple and different understandings of Jesus' significance to the first generation of Christian readers is the best instance of this. They point out that the writer of John gives one understanding of Jesus' significance, while the writer of Hebrews gives another. Moreover, Paul's letter to the Romans gives a different understanding as well (Sullivan 2002:100). And so are the other writers of the New Testament. They contend that this diversity probably points to more than one original Christian gospel. It should be admitted that this problematic identity of the Christian religion is still an issue in our time.

The above readings have happened within changing cultural contexts. For instance, the cultural context within which Paul read the Christian religion was not identical to the cultural context within which Augustine read the same Christian religion. Nor was the cultural context within which Thomas Aquinas expounded the Christian religion for the 13th century identical to the cultural context within which Martin Luther or John Calvin read the Christian religion for the 16th century. Sullivan (2002: 117-118) argues that in our time Christian people find themselves living in an unprecedented communicational, democratic and pluralistic cultural context where they rub shoulders with devotees of non-Christian religions. He also stressed that for Christian people to be receptive to non-Christian religions does not entail abandoning or betraying the Christian religion. It simply entails appropriating insights previously unavailable to them.

I strongly contend that Christian absolutist biblical claims to epistemological and ontological superiority go strongly against any sense of social justice (Danmole 1974). What is needed is an honest engagement with issues and not clichés. I contend that neither the Christian religion nor the Mbire religion nor any one religion or human reason can provide all the answers to humankind's questions, what Sullivan (2002:121) calls an "interrogative dilemma," that is, the capacity of the mind to ask questions that it does not have the capacity to answer. Immanuel Kant (1956:7) expresses this interrogative dilemma as follows:

Human reason has this peculiar fate, that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions, which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is not able to answer.

The philosopher Blaise Pascal (as quoted by Sullivan 2002:123) also expresses this interrogative dilemma as follows:

I know not who put me into the world, nor what the world is, nor what I myself am. I am in terrible ignorance of everything. I know not what my body is, nor my senses, nor my soul, not even that part of me which thinks what I say, which reflects on all and on itself, and knows itself no more than the rest. I see those frightful spaces of the universe which surround me, and I find myself tied to one corner of this vast expanse, without knowing why I am put in this place rather than in another, nor why the short time which is given me to live is assigned to me at this point rather than at another of the whole eternity which was before me or which shall come after me. I see nothing but infinities on all sides, which surround me as an atom, and as a shadow, which endures only for an instant and returns no more. All I know is that I must soon die, but what I know least is this very death, which I cannot escape.

Fannie Flagg (1998) expresses it dramatically:

Poor little old human beings - they're jerked into this world without having any idea where they came from or what it is they are supposed to do, or how long they have to do it. Or where they are gonna wind up after that. But bless their hearts, most of them wake up every morning and keep on trying to make sense out of it. Why, you can't help but love them, can you? I just wonder why more of them aren't as crazy as Betsy Bugs.

As Sullivan (2002:123) contends, notwithstanding this infinite and interrogative dilemma, people still get up each day to face the challenges of the day. For instance, they go to work, take care of children, look after elderly parents, relate to spouses, meet household responsibilities, pay bills, experience physical suffering and endure life, which is a serious burden, which no thinking human person would wantonly inflict on someone else. He recalls Albert Schweitzer who is said to have remarked that he could scarcely remember a day he was glad to be alive.

Consequently, the ultimate reality, in my view, has created humankind on this earth for a journey, but has not provided them with a map. This could also mean that the Christian religion does not have all the answers. It needs to create space for other religions to work in partnership with it. Collective and collaborative efforts are needed to negotiate the future and possibly alleviate some of humankind's sufferings. A pluralistic form of religious environment where there is no one religion with preferential privileges is an ideal thing. We need a different conceptualization of the role of religion. Now I turn to a postcolonial re-evaluation of Mbire religion.

7.4 POSTCOLONIAL RE-EVALUATION OF MBIRE RELIGION

A postcolonial paradigm views religion as a cultural system, which embodies a people's history and ideas of self. Religion gives a nation the unity and intimate cohesion, which assure its life. From Moses right up to our day the religious component of any particular people has remained the focal point from which ancillary social institutions emanate. It influences in considerable measure the

growth of a family of interconnected social institutions. It is the basic catalyst of human culture (cf. Danmole 1974).

Though historical, archaeological, sociological and other disciplines are essential for understanding the essential contextual consideration for studying communities, postcolonial critics believe that it is the religious stories of a people, which communicate the essence of a people's identity (Opoku 1989). Destroy their religion and you will have destroyed the people themselves. Thus, a postcolonial understanding of a people entails listening to their religious stories.

Postcolonial critics find it not a matter of coincidence that those peoples who have made a positive identification with their socio-religion happen to be making advances in science and technology. However, those who are confused about their socio-religious heritage seem to be lagging behind in this regard. Moomo (2003:2) identifies instances of peoples whose socio-religious heritage is preserved and who are making giant strides in science and technology. These include the Chinese, Indians, Israelis, Koreans and Japanese. Mbire and other African peoples are confused socio-religiously and are therefore trailing behind in scientific and technological advancement, particularly from the time of their first tragic encounter with Euro-America around the 13th century.

In this section, I intend to undertake a postcolonial inquiry into whether there is anything uniquely demonic about Mbire religion. The concern here is to attend to a critical reading of Mbire religion in order to yield insights into the Mbire theological conceptualization of the ultimate reality, particularly as seen in their concepts of Mwari and service to the living-timeless. For centuries the Mbire people have been practising their religion and recognizing its beauty and significance (see Daneel 1970).

Unfortunately, innumerable Mbire religious concepts from the pre-colonial era have been irretrievably lost (Vambe 2001). The lack of appreciation for this truly Mbire religious form contributed to the demise of these religious concepts (Chavunduka 1977). Thus, it is impossible to utilize the full repertoire of Mbire religious concepts. Moreover, this section will not investigate a comprehensive collection of the remnant religious concepts. Rather, it will select religious concepts, which are representative, and which speak to Mbire concerns regarding making the ultimate reality increasingly relevant to them.

Mbiti (1989:7) laments that earlier descriptions and studies of African religions by some Euro-American anthropologists, sociologists and missionaries have “left us with terms which are inadequate, derogatory, and prejudicial.” For Mbiti (1989:7-10) some of the contemptuous and flawed terms, which were used to describe African religions, include animism, fetishism, totemism, ancestor worship (idolatry) and polytheism.

Unfortunately, Ndhlovu (1997:24) contends that even today African Christian theologians continue to simplify, misrepresent and belittle African religions. This postcolonial re-evaluation will inquire whether Mbire concepts of Mwari and service to the living-timeless are polytheistic and idolatry and hence demonic, false and qualitatively inferior to the Christian religion. This brings me to a postcolonial reading of Mbire concept of Mwari.

7.4.1 Mbire Concept of Mwari: Polytheism or Monotheism?

As we have seen in the previous chapter, one way through which Mbire people have been most cruelly dealt with is by drumming in their heads that they do not believe in one true ultimate reality (see Dewick 1953:39; Gann 1965:206; Katekisma 1966:8; Rules and Regulations 1967:35; Daneel 1970, 1989, 1991, 1995 and many more). Mbire people have been accused and judged guilty of polytheism and idolatry (Turaki 2001:24-25). Their ultimate reality (Mwari) is described as remote and not intimately involved or concerned with them. Instead, they are accused of seeking out the living-timeless to meet their needs. Mwari's oracular pronouncements are characterized as being monitored by a few cultic officials and of being demonic (Smith 1950:128; Daneel 1989:37).

Steyne (1990:164) argues, "Morality, goodness and virtue have no bearing on a worthy practitioner of the belief system of Africa." Steyne just seems to be demonizing African belief system, for as far as some Euro-American colonialists are concerned there is nothing of value in Mbire and other African belief systems. As Moomo (2003:3) remarks, on moral issues one only needs to look into the pages of the history of slavery to find out that Steyne is a case of 'the kettle calling the pot black.' Postcolonial critics would surely question the morality and virtue of slavery, racial segregation and savagery that were/are perpetuated against African people in the name of Christianizing, commercializing and civilizing them.

Turaki (2001:25) claims without substantiation that African people do not actively worship the ultimate reality, though he does not define his notion of 'worship.' However, if one looks into the practices of the Christian religion, Judaism and Islam, one knows that they pray to the ultimate reality. They bind themselves to do what they know the ultimate reality has commanded. They make sacrifices to the ultimate reality. They invoke the name of the ultimate reality on their enemies and use its name to bless or pray for friends (Moomo 2003:3). If these constitute the visible forms of worship, a postcolonial re-evaluation would argue that Mbire people knew the ultimate reality and worshipped it.

To substantiate this claim, I cite examples from the Mbire people themselves. Hodza and Fortune (1979:11-12) present a prayer (poem) that was prayed by Mbire people to their Mwari (the ultimate reality). This prayer (poem) implies a relation to a common deity and not the prerogative of any one clan. It is one transcending clan and tribal divides.

Detembo raMwari

Mwari wedu weGuruuswa,
Mupumburu uzere homo nendarira;
Mvumiramatondo;
Merino usina rugande.

Nzirakavambe, Mwari wavanhu,
Ndiwe baba wedu, ndiwe amaas vedu,
Vane zamu rinoyamwisa pasi rose richiguta.

Dandenakutanda, ziendauchisiya;
Bambiranyika, mucheka usina magumo kana mavambo
Zinakiramatondo, mvura isina mupande,
Mhepo yemuninga isina murumo.

Ndiwe Mutangakugara naMuwanikwa naChidzivachepo.

Une tsvimbo isina maungira.
N'angaruचेचे inorapa nemuti usina gwenzi.
Nzirakavambe, mambo usitandavare.
Shuramatongo usoreva chinopokanwa.
Chirambakutseketuka, mushonga unofura sora.

Munhamo nemungozi nemudambudziko zvose nemukusuwa,
Tinokufunga siku nesikati.

Nhamo dzedu dzose mutoro wako.
Munyevenuri wezviriwado zvedu ndiwe.
Mupakuriri wezvose ndiwe.
Mucheti wedu tose ndiwe.

Mwari wedu weGuruuswa,
Kuipa kwezvinhu zvose tinochemba newe.
Ndiwe wakatitsvitsa dzino.
Ndiwezve uchatichengeta mushangwa dzose.

English Translation

The Praises of Mwari

Mwari, ours even since Guruuswa,
A bundle full of beads and bracelets;
Whose word stills the forests;

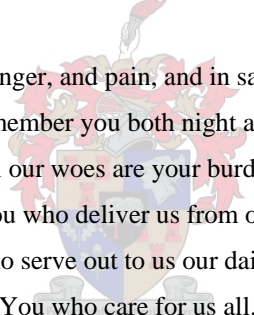
Healing medicine without its smell.

Leader in the way, Mwari of all the people,
You are our father, you are our mother,
Whose breast feeds the whole land unto satiety.

Like a plant that creeps everywhere, where you go we cannot follow;
You encompass the land, a girdle without beginning or end.
Whose blessing fills the forests, gentle rain that falls on all,
Wind through a cave that makes no noise in passing.

You are the one who began to be, found already there, the original pool,
Your rod has a noiseless sway.
Seer fresh as a child, healing with herbs that never grew.

Leader in the way, lord never stretching his leg in annoyance.
Beauty that would elsewhere be omen, never provoking a quarrel.
Immovable and wondrous as medicine that feeds upon grass.



In trouble, danger, and pain, and in sadness as well
We remember you both night and day.
All our woes are your burden.
It is you who deliver us from our ills.
You who serve out to us our daily food.
You who care for us all.

Mwari, ours since Guruswa,
We weep on your account in these evil times.
You have brought us into them.
You then will guard us in all adversities.

Three more prayers sum up the reverence for Mwari and indicate some of Mwari's qualities.

(1)

Great Spirit

Piler of the rocks into towering mountains
When thou stampest on the Stone,
The dust rises and fills the land,
Hardness of the precipice;
Waters of the pool that turn
Into misty rain when stirred
Vessel overflowing with oil!
Father of Runji,

Who serveth the heavens like cloth:
Let him knit together that which is below
Caller forth of the branching trees...

(2)

Show mercy when we beseech thee, Lord.
Thou art on high with the spirits of the great.
Thou raisest the grass-covered hills
Above the earth, and createst the rivers,
Gracious One (Posselt in Ocallaghan 1977:125)

A third Mwari prayer, quoted from T. O. Ranger (in Ocallaghan 1977:25-26), says:

(3)

Praise,
Lion of praise!
Lion who laughs at
My little spear, though I throw it far,
But he sees everything, even in Tsawa country;
He gathers fruit afar,
And comes back when his children are longing for him
Lion of praise
Mwari with the single breast
Sucked by all the tribes;
His needle is not for sewing blankets
But sews up rocks with ease
Mwari is a great one...

It will be illuminating to compare the Mbire prayers and praises to Mwari with some Jewish prayers to Yahweh as found in Psalms 123 and 117 respectively.

Lord I look up to you,
Up to heaven, where you rule,
As a servant depends on his master,
As a maid depends on her mistress
So we will keep looking to you, O Lord.
Be merciful; we have been treated with so much contempt
We have been mocked too long by the rich and scorned by proud oppressors.

And in Psalm 117:

Praise the Lord, all the nations
Praise him, all peoples
His love for us is strong

And his faithfulness is eternal.

In the light of the above examples, could it be argued that the Mbire people did not know and did not pray to the ultimate reality? Are Mbire people, indeed, polytheists? Steyne (1990:35) and Turaki (2001:25) claim that African people do not worship the ultimate reality. A postcolonial re-evaluation would find the above examples of prayers by Mbire people of Zimbabwe as substantiation of African people's worship (praying to and praising) of the ultimate reality. If Mbire and other African people are, why are they isolated and treated differently from those with whom they are partners in crime?

What is polytheism? According to Moomo (2003:5), polytheism is,

The multiplicity of pagan gods stems from the manifold powers and seeds of primordial realm, each of which is conceived as a self-contained divine entity. Water, sky, light, darkness, life, death and the like, all derive from the primordial realm. This sets the natural and eternal bounds to the dominion of each pagan deity. It is not the plurality of gods per se then, that expresses the essence of polytheism, but rather the notion of many independent power-entities, all on a par with one another, and all rooted in the primordial realm.

Moomo (2003:6) nevertheless observes that a type of monotheism exists among some peoples of the world, including African people. He gives three critical features of any belief system that could be regarded as monotheism. The first one entails belief in one ultimate reality that is above all and above nature. The second one concerns belief in one ultimate reality that has supreme will. The third and last one entails belief in one ultimate reality that is free from the bounds of myth and magic.

Mbiti (1970) has exhaustively described concepts of the ultimate reality in Africa. He argues that African people believe in the ultimate reality, which created the universe. This ultimate reality is all knowing (1970:8), transcendent (1970:12), immanent (1970:16) and self-existing (1970:19).

According to Mbiti, African people do not believe that the ultimate reality has a wife, nor wages war against other realities. The ultimate reality has no equal. Mbiti argues that African people believe that the ultimate reality brings everything into being and, thus, the ultimate reality will judge all things. The ultimate reality is not bound to the laws of nature. The ultimate reality does not eat food nor practice magic. From Mbiti's study, it is clear that the Mbire people are more monotheistic than has been presupposed.

Consequently, a Mbire person believes in one ultimate reality (Mwari), the creator, the giver of rain and all good things in life and is the highest of all spirits. Mwari's protection is available to all Mwari's children, particularly in times of crisis. Mwari is both immanent and transcendent, both male and female. Mwari is usually approached through the mediation of the living-timeless. At the

apex of the living-timeless hierarchy is Chaminuka, the son of Mwari, emanating directly from Mwari (Daneel 1970: 15-18).

A number of Euro-American researchers refuse to accept this reading of Chaminuka. There is reluctance on the part of some Euro-American researchers to accept the similarity with the Christian religion (see Daneel 1995). Nevertheless, below Chaminuka are the royal living-timeless (mhondoro), then the tribal living-timeless, and lastly, the family living-timeless. The mediation of the living-timeless is a continuing relationship both with the living and with Mwari (Kumbirai 1967).

As has been argued in Chapter Five, there are no two ways of approaching Mwari, as suggested by Ranger and Daneel. The so-called mhondoro cult is a variation of the Mwari cult itself. All living-timeless communicate with Mwari. Central to an understanding of the Mwari priesthood is the understanding of the mediation of the living-timeless (Mugabe 1993). Mwari speaks to people through the living-timeless who possess mediums and then interpret Mwari's voice (Daneel 1970). As we have seen in Chapter Five, the living-timeless also speak through mediums in their own right. This ensures that important aspects of Mbire society are regulated by Mbire religion and that an explicit relationship exists between political power and Mbire priesthood. Thus, the secular hierarchy is intertwined with the religious hierarchy (Chavunduka 1977).

Some Euro-American researchers on Mwari worship at Matopo Hills misrepresent it largely (see sections 5.11 and 5.12 above). Matopo Hills has been considered as a shrine where the principal rainmaking rituals are held for Mbire people. Rainmaking rituals are depicted as the main attributes of the Mbire Mwari. Mwari has been characterized as an ecological deity, that is, the provider of rain, fertility and healing power only (Daneel 1995).

Moomo (2003:2), in his unpublished article on *Translating YHWH into African Languages*, points out that humankind experiences the ultimate reality in terms they know about it, such as its intrinsic attributes. People's historical experience of the ultimate reality in relation to the economic, social, political and material life shape the names they use to refer to the ultimate reality. The things that the ultimate reality does and its attributes may be seen across cultures.

Every culture has a limited and provisional knowledge of the ultimate reality (cf. Rom.1: 20). What is most prominent to particular cultures in terms of their survival and relation to the cosmos largely influences the ways they know the ultimate reality and describe it. For example, Mbiti (1970:9) points out that among the warlike nations, as the *Zulu* in South Africa, the omnipotence of the ultimate reality is conceived in military terms. For these people, where warfare is the order of the day, the power to deliver from an enemy and to give victory is understandably, what is most

prominent to them. A being that can provide such deliverance and victory will be described with expressions that refer to such activities.

It is of interest to note that the name used to refer to the ultimate reality by Jews is 'elohim', which is translated as 'the mighty ones'. The Jews have a history as a nation born out of war and that has fought for existence for centuries to this day. Thus, the names used to refer to the ultimate reality are not personal names, but a description of its attributes (Moomo 2003:3). Mbiti (1970), using the notions from African religious worldview and philosophy, provides a detailed account of the names with which African people refer to the ultimate reality.

In Mbire society, names and naming are important aspects of life. Many Mbire names are like one-sentence stories. In Mbire society, a name is usually one sentence that summarizes the history of the family into which the child is born. It may also express the wishes and prayers of the parents for the new baby. For instance, one could hear a name such as 'Muchineripi,' meaning 'what do you still have to say?' or 'Ndidudzirei,' meaning 'Tell me what wrong I have done to you.'

Deities are also referred to according to the particular functions it is believed they perform for the community or to the world of the community. Because no one knows any pre-history of the ultimate reality, the Mbire do not name the ultimate reality as they name their children. They believe that nothing pre-exists Mwari. Mwari is and always will be (Mbiti 1970). Mwari lives everywhere but nowhere in particular. When they refer to Mwari, they describe Mwari with any of Mwari's perceived attributes. For instance, the ultimate reality is called Musikavanhu (Creator of humankind), Nyadenga (The One Above) to name just a few.

In using names to refer to the ultimate reality, Mbiti's discussion (1970) of the concept of the ultimate reality in Africa reveals a very fundamental truth. The names used for the ultimate reality are never used for any other deities. This is in contradistinction from the peoples of the Middle East and the Greek or other Caucasian races. Moomo (2003:6) argues that the word 'theos' in Greek may refer to any kind of deity, including the cosmic creator. This also applies to the word 'god' in English, which could be any deity, though English uses a capital letter for the first letter to distinguish the divine reality from other realities. Moomo contends that this difference is not heard in sounding the word. Even the Hebrew word 'elohim' for the ultimate reality, the cosmic creator, is also used for all types of deities. This contradicts Turaki (2001:12), who concurs with Steyne (1990:25), that African people use the same attributes to refer to both the ultimate reality and other nature deities. A postcolonial re-evaluation would leave readers to judge who is more monotheistic, the Mbire people or the Caucasian people or people of the Middle Eastern region.

In choosing concepts that refer to the ultimate reality, the Mbire people simply describe the ultimate reality in terms of its perceived attributes or activities (Mugabe 1993). Because no one knows the

history of the pre-existence of the ultimate reality, the ways it is referred to excludes such history. The Mbire people believe that the ultimate reality has no beginning and no end. The ultimate reality is (Mbiti 1970). This brings me to a postcolonial re-evaluation of Mbire service to the living-timeless.

7.4.2 Mbire Service to the Living-timeless: Is it Idolatry?

Mbire people have been accused of idolatry. Momo (2003:7) defines idolatry as “the manufacture of other *realities* and their worship.” Momo quotes the Hebrew prophet Isaiah (ca. 8th Century BCE), who describes idolatry in the 44th chapter of the book bearing his name, especially verses 12-20. Isaiah’s description of idolatry includes three things. The first one entails the metal/wood worker forging an image in fire or carving it with a chisel. The second one concerns that the wood might be cut from the forest, or specially planted for the purpose. The third one entails that part of the wood could be used for fuel. Isaiah concludes, “Such people are too stupid to know what they are doing” (Isa. 44:18).

A postcolonial re-evaluation would inquire whether Mbire religion is indeed idolatrous. Momo (2003:7) admits that Israel practised idolatry. The Greeks, the Germans, the Anglo-Saxons and the Americans, who are today referred to as ‘civilized societies’, are all guilty of idolatry. It is clear that the Mbire people are not practising anything uniquely Mbire or African

A postcolonial re-evaluation would advocate that whatever judgement is handed down to the Mbire people should also be handed down to others. The religious beliefs and practices found in Mbireland are also found in Euro-America (e.g. new age and occultism). A postcolonial re-evaluation would view Mbire religious beliefs and practices as a part of a world phenomenon. Let me describe the significance of the service to the living-timeless.

7.4.2.1 Significance of Service to the living-timeless

The Mbire service to their living-timeless is usually viewed as an instance of idolatry. Mbire people serve their living-timeless in various ways. The most popular forms are beer-drinks and the slaughtering of an ox or a goat. As Pato (1988:22) argues, in each of the rituals there is an element of communion, not only with the living-timeless, but with the living as well. These rituals enhance and express the value of the corporateness and solidarity, which exists between the living and the living-timeless.

Pato (1988:22) is insistent that communication in these rituals occurs not only through symbols such as beer and meat, but also through prayers. Prayers made at these rituals often point to the attitudes, emotions and values of the participants. For a postcolonial re-evaluation, the most important thing is not so much the nature of these rituals but their significance.

Maimela (1981:66-71) has noted that service to the living-timeless expresses a particular people's attempt to respond to and to cope with daily concrete social and political problems. The problems Mbire people encounter include, among other things, loss of humanness, illness, barrenness, unemployment, witchcraft, injustice and oppression.

Pato (1988:22) contends that experience of suffering from any of the above problems is often attributed to a loss of contact with one's communal interrelationships, a loss of power, which is normally sustained by the maintenance of these mutual relationships. In this regard, it is also believed that the living-timeless who had taken an interest in their descendants in this life continue to maintain this interest even beyond the grave. Thus, the living-timeless are believed to keep surveillance over the living and their continued surveillance is retained through regular service.

One important aspect of this regular service to the living-timeless has to do with 'health' which goes beyond simply the absence of illness. It entails the absence of all that militates against a fulfilled life. Consequently, the significance of service to the living-timeless has to do with the life and survival of both the individual and the society.

Tempels (1967:44-47) coined the term "vital force", which views all misfortunes that befall a person as instances of the diminution of power. Put somewhat differently, an individual possesses an innate power, which is achieved and sustained by living a corporate life within the community including the living-timeless. So a Mbire person feels threatened by the possibility of the loss of this vital power. A Mbire person struggles to find the appropriate means to maintain it. Thus, the maintenance of a living relationship with one's own people, living or living-timeless, is deemed appropriate. This brings me to the presuppositions, which underlie direct service to the living-timeless.

7.4.2.2 Belief in After-Life

McVeigh (1974:153) perceptively observes the concept of death among the Mbire people:

Although the African has many problems, uncertainty regarding the after-life is not one of them.

African belief in the survival of the personality after death is his [sic] a priori.

The concern with the living-timeless among Mbire people is primarily because in their perspective there is no impenetrable boundary between life and death. As Pato (1988:24) argues, for the Mbire death is not the end of life and certainly not the enemy that threatens to annihilate the individual's personality. It is a means whereby the present earthly existence is substituted for another.

There are also indications that this other world is in various ways thought to be similar to this earthly world. It is common to hear people saying of the deceased "waenda kumusha (s/he has gone home). Similarly, the use of libations for a deceased person indicates the physical resemblance

between the human earthly world and the world of the living-timeless. Therefore, death makes no break in the continuity of family community. Everyone is considered a member even if s/he is not physically there. Cullen Young (1950:39) captures this concept correctly:

The African community is a single, continuing unit, conscious of no distinction in quality between its members still here on earth and its members now there, wherever it may be that the ancestors live.

According to Pato (1988:24), service to the living-timeless rests upon the invincible conviction that those who have departed from this world have only passed into another life. Equally based on this same conviction is the belief that, though parents have departed, the authority and jurisdiction which they wielded during their lifetime goes on. Consequently, ethical conduct is sustained by honouring them as parents or guardians, which they were during their lifetimes. Thus, though separated by death, they are not torn away from the social bonds of their families. Service to them preserves the solidarity of the group and the stability of the individual.

Thus, Pato (1988:24) is insistent that service to the living-timeless implies, among other things, an extension into infinite distance of the family activities on earth and a continuation of the social duties towards the living-timeless. This service to the living-timeless manifests an unbroken family relationship between those who have departed from this world and their children who are still here. It expresses a dynamic relationship of existence as opposed to isolation.

A postcolonial re-evaluation would argue that other peoples around the world serve their living-timeless in their own ways. Some do so by using different symbols. For instance, most Euro-American people put flowers on the tombs of their dead relatives. Israelites put stones whenever people visit the tomb of their dead relatives. Others keep the ashes of cremated relatives in boxes and keep them in their homes. These are, in my view, different ways of paying tribute to the living-timeless.

Thus, the terms “polytheistic” and ‘idolatry’ could function as disclaimers of religious practices performed by Mbire and other African people. Postcolonial critics would regard the terms as convenient propagandist labels constructed to discredit the other. They would see the terms as misnomers and misleading. Difference should never be equated with the demoniac and inferiority.

The conceptual framework of Mbire worship is that Mwari is above the hierarchy of the living-timeless, but is accessible to humankind through the mediation of the living-timeless. It is, therefore, misleading to think of Mwari as only an ecological deity, i.e. the provider of rain, fertility and healing power (see Daneel 1995:217-218). A number of Euro-American scholars believe that this notion is firmly embedded as a permanent feature of the Mbire Mwari. As a result, the Mbire

Mwari represents an incomplete and misleading understanding of Elohim to them (cf. Daneel 1995).

7.4.3 Pluralistic of Revelation

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find that among the Mbire people the separation between general and special revelation ought to be discarded as it negates their conception, which acknowledges the full revelation and knowledge of what is manifested in various people's actions and thoughts clearly. As Kibicho (1983:170) argues, this is not correct and is a negation of the Mbire mindset to describe revelation in Mbire religion as being general.

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find the separation between general and special revelation as employed in Euro-American theology to convey the assumption of its superiority (Kibicho 1972:319). A number of Euro-American Christian people, including their Mbire adherents, deny any salvific significance in Mbire religion, but find it only in the Christian religion (cf. Smith 1950; Dewick 1953:39).

As postcolonial critics reflect on the scope and source of theology, they find the Christian belief system to be so closed and limiting (Garrett 1990:18-20). They would find special revelation contrary to the Mbire perception of revelation in which everything is thought to be special and specific (Kibicho (1983:170). Postcolonial critics would find a need to liberate this kind of doing theology. Since the Christian religion came into the world as a religion of revelation, postcolonial critics would find a revelation that is only centred in the person and nature of Jesus as limiting and exclusivist (Kelly 1960:29). Postcolonial critics believe that there are other witnesses to the ultimate reality different from the one that emerges from the Christian religion.

For postcolonial critics theology is an on-going quest for defining, clarifying and articulating the meaning and purpose of human existence in the ordering of history, whose life-giving force is the ultimate reality (Philip 2003:2). All creation is its creation. It follows then that all human history is the history of the ultimate reality. They see the Christian ever-dominant sectarian understanding of the economy of the ultimate reality in the universe as rendering the Christian religion so impoverished as never before, because that part of the other activity of the ultimate reality outside the church should be recognized and cherished as also its business. According to Philip (2003:2), the Christian religion can be immensely enrichment as it realizes the relevance and complementary aspect of non-Christian religious faiths in the on-going redemptive and creative work of the ultimate reality in the universe.

A postcolonial re-evaluation would advocate for a pluralistic revelation or a multiplicity of revelations in contrast to the so-called 'special revelation' in Jesus. Though the Jesus event is

historical and biblical and has been believed to have an unquestionable efficacy in changing millions of lives throughout its historical development and propagation, one may note with interest that the Christian faith in its infancy had Judaism as its birth bed. Wilkinson (1996:127-128) argues that some scholars view the New Testament as a Christian creation from an old one, the Torah. This in itself reflects a serious game play of power in reading as the formulation of the canon became the exercise of those with power (Jonsson 1991:7).

A postcolonial critic may question whether there were no other events beside the Jesus event, which can claim authentic revelation and authority for human salvation? Despite being subjected to this non-negotiable salvific event in Jesus, a postcolonial critic may want to believe that the ultimate reality was also speaking in other sectors of human existence besides the Judeo-Christian community (cf. Knitter 1985).

Kibicho (1972:319) argues that this is an acknowledgment “that there may be other ways” and that “this faith in the One has had its occasional manifestations elsewhere”. Postcolonial critics would find it imperative for the Christian religion to seek friendship in a world of plurality of faiths, cultures and ideological frameworks rather than promote gulfs of differences competing to obliterate, annihilate or dominate non-Christian religious expressions.

Richard Niebuhr (1941:16) proposed a theology, which begins from the acceptance of historical relativity.

Such a theology of revelation is objectively relativistic, proceeding with confidence in the independent reality of what is seen, though recognizing that its assertions about reality are meaningful only to those who look upon it from the same standpoint.

Postcolonial critics find this to be a helpful approach as it looks at each religion in the context in which it is practised. Each religion has the potential of its authenticity. Leonardo Boff (1991:72) claims that other faiths are not realities external to the Christian religion, but “they are steeped in something that we find everywhere active: the word that acts within them and within Christianity”.

Maimela (1985:63-77) also argues for the futility of discussing salvation in African religions without acknowledging that salvific issues in these religions can only be detected and appreciated within the African context itself. From a postcolonial perspective, signs of salvific activity in Mbire religion are there. Such an assertion is possible only if Euro-Americans understand that salvation means different things to different people, who have another morphological understanding of social cultures and religious situations. This brings me to a postcolonial re-evaluation of religion as mythology.

7.5 MYTHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION

In an article on world religion, John Jonsson (1991:1), an American theologian, argues that 'myth' and 'mythology' are not synonymous. He defines 'myth' as human attempts to give expression to what is inexplicable, indescribable and impossible to verbalise. That life is an ineffable mystery, human life and experience baffling contradictions, human reason to account for the most sacred utter futility, myth is the human effort to express in religious language what is inexpressible in human language.

Jonsson defines 'mythology' as the systematization of popular myths into systems used by socio-religious hierarchies for particular religious, political and social purposes. The ethos of such collectivities is born from socio-religious communities through epoch-making events and the recitation of their epic poetry.

Jonsson (1991:2) identifies two significant factors concerning hegemony. Firstly, one of the states became dominant. Secondly, the patron reality (god) of the dominant state became the presiding and all-powerful ultimate reality of the hegemony. In this way religion and the state function together. The systematization of popular myths gave a common identity and provided solidarity and security for the hegemony.

Mythologies also gave licence to the political hierarchies to rule over the people at each level of society. The endorsement of religion on politics became the genesis of tyranny in societies across the world. Consequently, usurpation, tyranny, dictatorship and colonialism became the hallmarks of totalitarian power. This, Jonsson (1991:2) contends, was made possible by hierarchical religion. He is insistent that the Christian religion should hang its head in shame, for it has taught secular society how to be totalitarian in every respect.

Mythologies of the religious hierarchy provided the tradition of the dominant hierarchy in society of which the mainstream of religion had become an integral part. Mythologies were systematized theologies of the religious hierarchies who claimed to account for everything in society. These structured mythologies conditioned and created a mass mindset through the media, which they controlled. These mythologies had morphological consequences on the mass thinking of hegemonies. According to Jonsson (1991:3), the common people were duped into submission and dependence on theological constructs encapsulated within the canons of these mythologies. Religion became a dominant overlord of the common people within these institutional structures. Consequently, the ultimate reality is portrayed as a tyrant, a demagogue and a colonial monster.

Jonsson (1991:3) further contends that the apocalyptic writings both in the Old and New Testaments were oppressed people's responses in their societies with visions of the overthrow of the

‘principalities and powers of spiritual wickedness in high places’, who were representing divinity as oppressive, domineering and demonic. He argues that the religious hierarchy had canonized their mythologies to be the word of the ultimate reality when in fact they were a demonstration of the iniquity of ungodliness, the depravity of religious overlords.

Consequently, he contends that Jesus’ teaching concerning the kingdom of the ultimate reality must be understood in the context of colonial oppression, which the common people were experiencing in colonial Roman Judea. Even his opposition to the religious leaders should also be understood as opposition to the socio-religious and politico-economic leaders who had taken control of the law of the ultimate reality as a device in the socio-political system to give support to their own socio-economic vested interests.

As Jonsson (1991:4) insists, now the mythology of the Christian theology is beginning to crumble. Postcolonial peoples all over the world are discussing the relevance of the Christian religion for them today as they voice their own striving for liberation from oppressive theology. Mythologies of divinations in people’s mindsets are due to hegemonic devices of religious hierarchies of oppressive theology. The morphological structuring of these hegemonic mythologies is intended to bring common people into subjugation and submission to these overlords.

As Jonsson (1991:4) points out, within this mythological framework Jesus’ teachings becomes

a plastic Christology inept and unable to address the socio-ethical injustices in society with prophetic voice. Jesus becomes inactive, unaffected by the issues of injustice and human suffering in society, an insipid figure of spirituality, dehydrated of flesh and blood theology, a detached deity in a mythological play act

Unfortunately, most Christian people in Zimbabwe continue to present Jesus’ ethics in such detached abstractions without addressing the injustices that the Mbire people are experiencing. Jesus continues to be depicted as a quietist, plastic personality, unaffected by human suffering and oppression in Mbire societies.

Postcolonial critics would define the Christian religion, which acts unilaterally from a position of vested interests and power, as mythological. From this assumed position of authority, some missionaries and Church leaders regard themselves as plenipotentiaries of the ultimate reality, possessing unquestionable right and power. Assuming hierarchical shaman positions, they canonize their scriptures to undergird their mythological constructs of reality-centredness among members of their socio-religious constituency. As Jonsson (1991:5) further argues, the canonization of their scriptures became the body of divinity to usurp the role of the incarnation of the transcendent deity in human life and experience.

The common people groan under these theological oppressors. Jonsson (1991:5) argues that the hierarchical religious institutions treat what does not belong to their prescribed body of divinity as paganism, animism, heresy, demonic and as fairy tales. However, the common people within the oppressed system in which political dictatorship is endorsed by religious institutions continue to express their dignity and human values, their hope for liberation and their existential ethos in suffering within the rhythms of their so-called paganism and fairy tales. In fact, these are the legitimate expressions of their hopes, anger and frustration within the privations of human existence.

Jonsson (1991:5) recalls the familiar fairy tale of “Jack and the Beanstalk.” This fairy tale is a sort of an apocalyptic story. The rich king with the goose that lays the golden egg does so at the expense of the common people who were subjugated and deprived of their basic human rights and privileges. The growing beanstalk represents the undying hope of the common people. This hope is a poignant potency in the underprivileged minds for a big opportunity to get control of the goose that lays the golden egg. Their hopes were fulfilled when Jack, representing the messianic hope burning within the oppressed people’s hearts, climbed the beanstalk. Justice belongs to the rights of the people. Jack and the beanstalk is a proclamation of liberation, which identified the ultimate reality with suffering humankind.

Unfortunately, the rights of the common people are short-lived. Jonsson (1991:6) illustrated this by a Promethean myth in the context of the pantheon of Olympus in Greek religion, where Zeus is the presiding reality. Prometheus is the guardian of the common people’s rights and acts on their behalf because the religious hierarchy under Zeus has robbed them of their fire, which is their basic fuel for their livelihood and existence. Zeus treated Prometheus’ action of retrieving the fire and giving this basic right back to the common people as rebellion, usurpation and undermining the religious authority. Zeus acts unilaterally, reclaims the fire, and brings it under his dictatorial control. Being tied to a rock where vultures ate out his liver punishes Prometheus. Fortunately, Prometheus did not die. The next day he has a new liver.

This process of his liver being clawed out and growing again the next day is the point of the myth. According to Jonsson (1991:6), a particular people may be deprived of their basic human rights, and their messianic leaders seeking to bring them relief and the return of their basic amenities may be imprisoned and killed, but the hierarchy of totalitarianism and religious sovereignty cannot destroy the “liver” of hope, which remains a part of the anatomy of their salvific hopes of liberation. This imagery is not theological, but belongs to the incarnate hope of people in the traumas of their collective sufferings and deprivations.

Postcolonial critics would find Jesus' death on the cross as one about a person having been robbed of its transformative power. They would inquire into the meaning of his death for African people, bearing in mind their experience of enslavement, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Megan McKenna (1994:223-224), an American theologian, argues that the theological statement: "Jesus died on the cross for our sins" can rob the story of Jesus' life and death of any transforming power.

When Jesus spoke of the cross, the images he evoked had nothing whatsoever to do with the theological notion of dying for sin. They were images of execution: long, tortuous, painful, public, and humiliating. Crucifixion was a form of capital punishment, legal-though unjust-that the Roman, the oppressor, the powerful used on the helpless, the poor and the oppressed, slaves, revolutionaries, anyone who spoke out against injustice.

To say Jesus died on the cross for our sins is often to ignore or forget that he died because he was dangerous to a society that wanted to hold unto power. Jesus died on the cross for his beliefs, his ideas of God, his preaching, and his siding with the poor and outcast. He died on the cross because he told the true to power, putting himself in jeopardy for others, so that they might know life and the hope of freedom. His command to be ready to experience crucifixion as part of discipleship says that this is not just an historical account of one innocent man dying or a theological statement about why he died; it is a present-day reality that his disciples-all of us-must accept and deal with consistently.

Postcolonial critics would find that African people have lived with the theological statement of Jesus dying on the cross for their sins without serious scrutiny. As Njoroge (2001) argues, African people have failed to articulate the theological meaning of Jesus' life and death on the cross through the eyes of the suffering African people. She contends that African people have experienced various crosses that included enslavement, colonialism, neo-colonialism, wars and genocide. Yet they have to come to terms with the meaning of the cross and what carrying their own crosses means. They have to learn to resist the evil forces in their midst and to struggle for the transformation of their lives.

In a postcolonial paradigm, as Njoroge (2001) argues, there are women and men who are not afraid to say no to these evil forces. Postcolonial critics are struggling for justice, peace and reconciliation, even if it means death in the hands of the authorities. This should help Mbire people to break out of the catacombs of doctrine and trust the presence of the ultimate reality in their lives. If plain talk about the ultimate reality constitutes a serious reflection on what people believe, that talk must take into account the rough and tumble of ordinary experience. According to Godsey (1996), the terrains of people's journeys of belief that take place downtown and in the suburbs, in the city and in the countryside become the best context for beginning their conversation.

Mbire people should not be content to serve as pawns in other people's belief systems. The conversations of faith should enable Mbire people to exchange ideas and test what they say against the reality of another's experience. When it comes to honest talk about the ultimate reality, there are no right or wrong answers. We live in a context where glib answers to deep questions are not very satisfying. The neat categories of Christian religious doctrines often seem unrelated to the world that Mbire people reside. Godsey (1996) argues that no one people's confession should ever have a binding force on another people. We do not know enough to do that. Our affirmations of faith are rarely a place to stand forever unchanging. He contends that today's confession is a place from which to move and to grow. It is a place to be open to hear the continuing voice of the ultimate reality.

The truth and error of a community of faith's theological statements are never the concern of a postcolonial religious understanding. It is concerned in ascertaining why such theological statements were made and why they were made in any particular way. Godsey (1996) warns us not to depend upon the stability of our own limited and fragile theological statements, which admit or reject people because of agreement and consent. He argues that 'doctrinal soundness' is arrogant theological nonsense, because all our theologies and statements of faith were/are crafted by fragile people and should never be trusted for their finality. Such a postcolonial inquiry into religion will review such belief systems within the "gestalt" of the entire ethos of the socio-human, politico-religious and religio-economic context in which the religious dynamic functions. Cognizance will be taken of the infrastructures in any particular hegemonic empire of religions.

Within this socio-context, the theological statements will be treated as part of the larger whole. In this postcolonial perspective, theological terms such as 'monotheism,' 'monism,' 'dualism,' 'pantheism,' polytheism,' assume somewhat different meanings. The question is not their being right or wrong, but why it was necessary for such beliefs to have persisted. Moreover, postcolonial critics would want to know who decides what is right or what is wrong? Just whom would we trust to decide what is right and what is not right? What justifies promoting those particular people to their position of authority? According to Jonsson (1991:6), an entirely new world of theological meaning comes into focus within the framework of our own mindsets, thought-patterns and conceptualizations, if these theological terms are investigated within the infrastructures and superstructures of their own distinctive socio-human and religio-political contexts.

Postcolonial critics would find the threefold classification of religions (Jonsson 1991:7) as theological options seen from an ontological distance. It is an ivory tower involvement. It is a

metaphysical interest, which belongs to the ‘orthodoxy’ of hierarchical religion in society. In the context of the deprived and dispossessed, the ‘godlike’ concerns relate specifically to the ‘orthopraxy’ of transcendence within the collective suffering of the common people. Here theological concerns of ultimacy are incarnational flesh and blood concerns. As Jonsson (1991:7) further points out, ‘monotheism’ becomes ‘theopraxy,’ ‘pantheism’ becomes ‘panpsychism’ and ‘somapsychism,’ ‘polytheism’ becomes ‘anthropomorphism,’ and ‘metaphysics’ becomes ‘metamorphosis.’ Postcolonial critics would see hierarchical religion as having a spiritualized bird’s eye view of the world, but the deprived and dispossessed people as having an incarnated worm’s eye view of the world of religion. They advocate for a theological viewpoint, which necessitates a reconfiguration of socio-political structures in which theology is formulated. This necessitates a better understanding of the ultimate reality, the world, human nature and human destiny.

Postcolonial critics would observe a paradigm shift in viewpoint, which is traceable to the development of the Christian religion following the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, when Christendom became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Jonsson (1991:7) argues that before this Edict there was no priority in the canonization of the New Testament. After the Edict of Milan, caesaro-papism took control of the Christian religion and Church. In the creedal controversies between the councils of Nicaea in 325 CE, Constantinople in 381 CE and Chalcedon in 451 CE, Caesar became the pope of the Christian Church. Justinian’s reign (527-565) was a watershed, when Christendom was incorporated into Roman ideology and cultural hierarchical concerns.

He further observes that the birth of “*corpus christianum*” within the Roman Empire enabled Justinian’s pontifications to give expression to a “*corpus juris civilis*” that stripped the common people of their religious freedom. There followed a millennium of caesaro-papism in which the religious pope became the political Caesar of the Roman Empire.

Jonsson (1991:7) concludes that the reformers’ efforts to reverse this situation only resulted in replacing the church-state of the Vatican with state churches. The Anabaptists or radical reformers insisted on the separation of church and state to restore the religious freedom of the common people. He contends that, unfortunately, there were centuries before time and the price were a vision trampled into the dust of blood. It was only in the 18th century following the Copernican revolution in cosmic understanding and the American revolution that real reformation took place in Euro-America.

Danmole (1974) argues that, unfortunately, Euro-American liberalism pervaded the entire globe with the justification of its values. Despite the colonial subjugation, slavery and quasi-slavery to

which it had subjected Africa and other continents, it insisted that its concept of liberalism is universal. He contends that it became intoxicated with the obsession that it fostered religious toleration while its missionaries conscripted the souls of African peoples for slavery in the mines and plantations, which it had added to its domain. It insisted that Euro-America civilization is not illegitimate in the face of massive Indian extermination, slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and inveterate racism. Danmole argues that Euro-American liberalism overthrew the feudal mercantilist state to create its own courts, its own laws, its own police, its own army and its own religion. It created its appropriate social institutions to facilitate the operation of its ideals and values. This brings me to a postcolonial re-evaluation of the Christian bible.

7.6 POSTCOLONIAL RE-EVALUATION OF THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE

A postcolonial re-evaluation would find colonial scholarship's belief that the bible is normative and can thus be used as a source of theology to be a misconception. In the dispute regarding the use and misuse of the Christian religion in the furtherance of sectarian socio-economic and political interests, a number of colonial scholars assume that it is appropriate to appeal to biblical writings to authorize their proposals, hoping thereby to convince their opponents about their "biblicalness" and hence the legitimacy of their theological claims (Kelsey 1975:97).

Moreover, postcolonial critics are amazed to find that even a great number of non-Euro-American scholars continue to cling to the view that the bible could function as a source of theological reflection. Postcolonial critics believe that the bible does not contain neutral and objective records of actual events, but the partisan perspectives of dominant groups that won the ideological battle (Jonsson 1991:7).

Postcolonial critics argue that theologies are socially conditioned modes of human speech about the ultimate reality that tell us "far more about the hopes and dreams of certain talkers of the ultimate reality" (Cone 1975:41). If this is the case, then it is surely naive for Mbire people to continue to believe that the bible can be used as the final court of appeal in theological disputes, as if theological claims expressed there had a status different from their own. Ideas and claims to truth both in the bible and in Mbire religion are human constructions without ontological privilege or certainty held by humankind to serve human needs.

Postcolonial critics argue that the bible has not provided and could not serve as a source of theological proposals for all humankind, because theological positions are a result of an irreducible and radically different imaginative construal of the mode of the presence of the ultimate reality in the world and, furthermore, they are influenced by the time and space in which they are written. People's concepts, images, language, knowledge, beliefs and thought processes are all profoundly shaped by their culture (Kelsey 1975:97-216). The culture of a people provides a world in which its

followers live. Its stories and practices, its teachings and its rituals become the lenses through which its members see reality and their own lives. It becomes the primary basis of identity and vision (Borg 2001:29).

Prof. E. S. Gerstenberg (2004:1) of Marburg University, views the bible as a wonderful treasure of human testimonies of faith along the ages. However, each individual affirmation about the ultimate reality and people, world and history is necessarily bound to its cultural and religious context. Everything is conditioned by transitory views and customs. Nothing in itself is eternal and unchangeable. He warns us to know that we do live in a transitory world and that even our theology is contextually limited.

Secondly, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find the naive understanding of the use of scripture in theology, which, in my view, indicates that in direct contradiction to the paradigm shift that has occurred in theological discourse, to be a misconception. Consequently, some colonial scholars continue to work with the traditional understanding of the duty of biblical scholars, namely interpreting or mediating the word of the ultimate reality to humankind as that word is found revealed in the bible (Kelsey 1975:97-216). Postcolonial critics contend that when theology is understood as a translation or an exposition of the biblical message to a particular community, the duty of theology is seen as peeling off the cultural wrappings in which “the revealed truth” is enshrined. After discovering the truth, biblical scholars try to apply it to people’s social practice.

Postcolonial critics would find that, whether they are aware of it or not, many colonial scholars continue to assume that biblical truths are relatively fixed and stable, readily ascertainable to those freed from ideological captivity and simply to be accepted as the basis of theological reflection. According to Kelsey (1975:97-216), attempts by most colonial scholars to give the so-called biblical truths privileged status, as if such truths were not themselves socially conditioned human constructs created to serve human needs, are a repudiation of the very historical consciousness that grounded many of modern insights.

Postcolonial critics argue that since theologies are imaginative human constructs, to continue to view different theologies as having the bible as their source portrays a lack of theological sophistication. As Borg (2001:22-23) contends, the bible is a response of two ancient communities to their experiences of the ultimate reality. As such, it contains their stories of the ultimate reality, their perceptions of its character and will, their prayers to and praises to the ultimate reality, their perception of the human condition and their paths of deliverance, their religious and ethical practices and their understanding of what faithfulness to the ultimate reality involves. As a product of these two communities, the bible tells us about how those two communities saw things, not about how the ultimate reality sees things.

Postcolonial critics become subjects of their liberation and take full responsibility for a kind of theology they have opted to construct without craving for some “sure” biblical foundation with which to authorize their theological proposals. Welch (1985:25) is insistent that to continue using scripture as a criterion “for faith and theological reflection...is still to avoid the cost and risk of history.”

Postcolonial critics would view the efforts to ground the Mbire people in the bible as abdicating Mbire theology’s uniqueness, namely its conceptualizations of theology in the light of a particular experience of the relation between theory and practice (Welch 1985:25). They see the bible as hardly establishing the truth of Mbire theological claims. Postcolonial critics would find that it is high time that Christian people accept the full consequences of modern historical consciousness, which has made clear that divine absolute or ‘revealed truth’ is not directly accessible to historical humankind, even as they appeal to scripture to help authorize their theological proposals. There is no neutral, uninvolved or pure divine truth in itself on which Mbire people could lay their hands in the bible or anywhere else (Kruger 1998:48). There are many sociological bibles to which all people could appeal to adjudicate disputes among themselves (Kelsey 1975:102-8). Put somewhat differently, people have many bibles, which are historical embodiments of authentic theology. Some of them are deformed, others reformed, and still others revolutionary (Maimela 1991:157).

Postcolonial critics would argue that, instead of wasting energy in searching for biblical norms with which to ascertain the “biblicalness” of their theological truth-claims, Mbire people must underpin their theological quest for a liberating ultimate reality with pragmatic or moral arguments. Mbire people need an alternative theology that can be employed as an instrument in the struggle for their historical liberation and survival. Kaufman (1985:187) argues that an alternative theology is needed, because colonial theology has proposed different sorts of ultimate realities in the past, many of which have not been conducive to the furtherance of the Mbire people.

Postcolonial critics would point out that over the centuries colonial scholarship has shied away from addressing the needs of the Mbire people. As Borg (2001:22-23) argues, very rarely has it focuses on the Mbire people’s experience of the ultimate reality: their stories of the ultimate reality, their perception of its character and will, their perception of the human condition and the paths of deliverance, their prayers and praises to the ultimate reality, their religious and ethical practices, and their understanding of what faithfulness to the ultimate reality involves.

Instead, the bible, its readers and institutions formed a mosaic of what Mudimbe (1988:2-4) terms the “colonizing structures” that promoted the domination of space, the transformation of the Mbire people’s minds and the integration of local histories into biblical perspectives.

Postcolonial critics argue that Euro-American marketing of biblical tradition to universal standards undermined the fact that it was bound to its own context and culture. Mudimbe (1988:1-2) argues that the employment of colonial writings was an integral part of Euro-America imposing its language, its trade, its religion and its culture on colonized people. The Mbire people become the colonized people, those whose land, minds, culture, religion, economics and political institutions have been taken possession of and rearranged according to the interests and values of the colonizing people.

Postcolonial critics would argue that Mbire people should find it morally necessary to take upon themselves the responsibility of searching for new ways of talking about the presence of the ultimate reality in their world, hoping to construct a theology that will lead to Mbire liberation, self-realization and fuller humanization. As Welch (1985:26) argues, a postcolonial paradigm is grounded in the process of liberating oppressed people from biblical domination, from trying to ground their theology in some “revealed truth” supposedly deposited in the pages of the bible.

Kaufman (1985:75-76) is insistent that by opting to develop an alternative vision of the ultimate reality, postcolonial critics consciously declare that they are no longer prepared to leave the ideological terrain of religion to Euro-American biblical scholars, who had misused and continue to misuse religion to justify morally the socio-political and economic interests of Euro-American peoples and their domination of the Mbire and other African people. He contends instead that, by choosing to contest biblical monopoly over theological discourse, postcolonial scholarship has effectively opted to enter the “battle of truth” on the side of oppressed communities. That is, in the struggle for liberation the only truth that matters will be the one that shows itself effective: liberating oppressed men and women and thus leading them to realize their fuller humanity, regardless of whether that truth is also found revealed in the bible.

By insisting that the divine truth consists of nothing other than an effective action that transforms our unjust world and untruthful human relationships, postcolonial critics will consciously opt for pragmatic or moral criteria for evaluating the truth claims of all theologies. This makes it clear that the only ultimate reality oppressed people are prepared to, and can afford to, worship is an ultimate reality who will truly further oppressed people’s quest for liberation and create a just and more humane world (Kaufman 1985:75-76).

A postcolonial paradigm is an intellectual, religious and moral reaction against a colonial paradigm. It is a shifting from the philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations characteristic of a colonial paradigm. It’s a paradigm shift in the larger society as whole. It is a shifting from one mode of viewing data to another mode of viewing it. A paradigm is a social construction of reality. It is a belief system, which prevails in a community. Kuhn (1970:10-11) writes:

Paradigms are models from which springs particular coherent traditions of scientific research. These are the traditions, which the historian describes under such rubrics as ‘Ptolemaic astronomy’ (or ‘Copernican’), Aristotelian dynamics’ (or ‘Newtonian’), ‘corpuscular optics’ (or ‘wave optics’) and so on. The study of paradigms...is what mainly prepares the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will later practice...Men (sic) whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice.

Kuhn concludes that when paradigms change, the world changes with them. Thus, a major paradigm shift is consonant with a leap into a new thought pattern, into a new worldview. A colonial paradigm is shifting to a postcolonial paradigm in which change occurs in the whole configuration of beliefs, values, techniques and others shared by the members of a given community. An observable change is evident in the manner in which people generally view themselves, society, the world and the ultimate reality. This brings me to a postcolonial acknowledgment of the independent validity of the Mbire religion.

7.7 RECONFIGURING MBIRE RELIGION

A postcolonial re-evaluation would argue that Mbire religion is part of humankind’s religious heritage. Born out of Mbire forefathers’/mothers’ experience and deep reflection, it provides answers to the stirrings of the Mbire human spirit and elaborates on the profundity of the experience of the divine-human encounter based on the resources of Mbire people’s cultural heritage and insight. Postcolonial critics would view it as providing answers to the ultimate questions posed by Mbire people. As Opoku (1989:16) argues, it gives meaning and significance to Mbire human life and explains the genesis and destiny of Mbire humankind, namely how everything in the world came into being and the relationship that should exist between them and nature. Postcolonial critics would argue that it is the Mbire people’s own way of coming to terms with the ultimate reality, the cosmic power.

I would contend that Mbire people’s tolerance towards other accesses to the ultimate reality and to other people’s interpretations of the genesis and destiny of humankind is in accordance with the truth of a Mbire proverb which says, “Wisdom is like a baobab tree, and a single person’s hand cannot embrace it.” Mbire people understand their religion as a single person’s hand, which cannot embrace the totality of the wisdom and essence of the ultimate reality. I argue that since the truth of the ultimate reality is beyond the reach of a single religious tradition, the Mbire wisdom recommends openness to truth, which comes from other traditions. As Opoku (1989:16) argues, since truth has its source in the ultimate reality, it may be found wherever and everywhere the ultimate reality chooses to put it. He argues that truth may not be restricted to one religious tradition, whether that religious tradition lays claim to special revelation and supersessionism or not.

Postcolonial critics would claim that such a view of truth and reality accords more with the limitations of human personality, since humankind is not its source but its recipients. They contend that those religious traditions, which lay exclusive claim to truth and engage in fierce evangelistic campaigns and relentless proselytization tend to give the impression that the source of truth resides in them. Rather than the Christian religion's lamentable opposition to non-Christian religions, postcolonial critics believe that truth is rarely a possession in the baggage of religious personalities, which they dish generously out to the benighted ones who are without it but rather a horizon towards which humankind are all moving. Opoku (1989:16) likened truth to a river flowing towards an ocean along whose journey tributaries join to enlarge it before it finally reaches its destination. Accordingly, a postcolonial re-evaluation sees each particular people as a tributary of the truth of the ultimate reality. They believe that the ultimate reality shares the truth liberally with all peoples and as the truth known by a particular people encounters other truths from other peoples, it becomes stronger and deeper as it continues its journey in leading people to the ultimate reality, the ultimate source of all truths and humankind's ultimate destination.

As Opoku (1989:17) argues, a postcolonial re-evaluation would find it imperative that Mbire religion be reconfigured and positioned in its right and proper place among other religions. I would contend that, though Euro-American books on "world religions" hardly contain a single reference to Mbire religious heritage, it must be remembered that Mbire religion does not live in the pages of books on "world religions" but in the hearts and lives of the Mbire people who practice it. Moreover, postcolonial critics would find it imperative to approach it through the inner life of Mbire practitioners, though one cannot ignore its external manifestations completely. A temptation has been to look Mbire religion from a doctrinal perspective rather than from the practical perspective. Postcolonial critics would argue that theory is never the most significant component of any particular religion.

Consequently, Mbonu Ojike (in Opoku 1989:17) underscores the practical perspective of Mbire religion when he writes:

If religion consists in deifying one character and crusading around the world to make him acceptable to all mankind, then the Africans have no religion. But if religion means doing rather than talking, then the Africans have a religion.

Postcolonial critics would argue that Mbire religion has always been interpreted from the point of view of non-practitioners who are both outsiders and insiders. These non-practitioners have sought to explain it by standards of Euro-American external criteria. Most of the people who have written about Mbire religion have been mostly Christians and non-practitioners, who tended to view it from their Christian religious persuasion. They would also contend that the result has been the

description of it as a *praeparatio evangelica*, a preparation for the gospel of Jesus, which is the ultimate and final revelation of the ultimate reality. As I have contended previously, this interpretation represents an unwillingness to view it as an independent religion in its own right. Opoku (1989:17) contends that it has been evaluated as containing the “seeds of the gospel,” without acknowledging and appreciating the fact that it contains the “fruits of the gospel” itself.

A postcolonial reading would find it imperative for a wholesome and unprejudiced understanding of Mbire religion to know the practitioners’ view of their own religion. There is no question that all the labels applied to it have all been from an observer’s point of view. Opoku (1989:17) observes correctly that an African person pouring libation at the foot of a tree would hardly see it as practising “paganism” or “worshipping nature”, as most Euro-American observers have tended to describe such acts.

Postcolonial critics would argue that Mbire religion represents a serious effort of the culture of Mbire forefathers/mothers in which the “spirit of the ultimate reality (Mwari) was an active agent” (Opoku 1989:17). Postcolonial re-evaluation affirms clearly and unequivocally that the ultimate reality has not been absent from serious Mbire efforts to make sense of their own life and destiny from the days of their earliest forefathers/mothers up to this day. Their religion is one of the ways in which they have experienced the salvific activity of the ultimate reality in their historical development, which is an affirmation of the presence of the ultimate reality with Mbire people.

Postcolonial critics would argue that the ultimate reality is the ultimate reality of all humankind and the presence of the ultimate reality is not withheld from others. Opoku (1989:18) contends that the divine truth and salvation of the ultimate reality have not been confined to a favoured and chosen few. On the contrary, the ultimate reality is accessible to all and the manifestation or revelation of the ultimate reality does not lead to the denial of the presence of the ultimate reality in certain areas of the world, an affirmation of the presence of the ultimate reality elsewhere and everywhere.

Simon Maimela (1981:126) argues that,

...there should be an increasing awareness among Christians that there are other options to the knowledge of God and salvation outside Christianity, an awareness born of the historical consciousness that the religious phenomenon is thoroughly conditioned by the social matrix that shapes a particular people. For it is a fact of life that were we born in India, Saudi Arabia, China, or other parts of Africa, the only way for us to God and God’s self-revelation would have been not Christianity but Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and African religions, because these would have been the media through which God would have disclosed the divine mysteries to us. It is a recognition such as this, which makes us humble, acknowledging that Christianity does not yet possess the ‘heavenly’ truth and knowledge of God. Such awareness makes us genuinely willing to

learn and receive God's truth from other religions in order to broaden our perception of God's activity in the world.

Assuming that this perception of religious phenomena is always conditioned by the social matrix or context that shapes a particular people, it should be admitted that this observation does not by-pass Mbire religious experiences as well.

Postcolonial critics would argue that, since the advent of the Christian religion in Mbireland, the concerns and forms of Mbire people's service to their living-timeless were demonised and treated as polytheistic and idolatrous (see Chapter Six). Consequently, Mbire Christians were forbidden to continue these practices, which sprang from the ideas they hold concerning their living-timeless. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that a concern with the living-timeless is still a vital part of the lives of most Mbire Christians (Kurehwa 2000:10).

Postcolonial critics would argue that the *praeparatio evangelica* paradigm promotes a patronizing attitude towards Mbire religion. Mbire religion is not perceived as a viable religion through which its practitioners can gain salvation. This subordination of Mbire religion to the Christian religion amounts to a subtle form of cultural imperialism, which H. L. Ndlovu (1997:24) argues is tantamount to a violation of human rights. He contends that to belittle and defame another person's religious faith is analogous to the violation of one's human right, since freedom of religion and belief is a constitutional fundamental human right. Postcolonial critics would contend that designating Mbire religion as demonic and treating it as polytheistic and idolatrous amounts to an advocacy of hatred of those Mbire people who still cherish their religious beliefs and values.

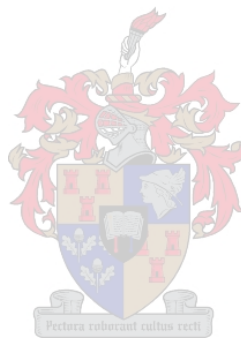
In view of the above postcolonial re-evaluation, Christian absolute claim to monopoly on religious truth is no longer credible. Instead of viewing non-Christian religions as demonic, false or inferior, the Christian religion should view them as worthy colleagues in the religious quest. A number of Christian people should be humble enough to concede that non-Christian religions are alternative and valid versions of religious faith as well. They should know that the religious laws set by religious traditions are not the boundaries within which the ultimate reality operates (Ariarajah 1985:13-18).

7.8 SUMMARY

This chapter began by describing a postcolonial quest for relevance. This was followed by a postcolonial re-evaluation of the Christian religion's most cherished beliefs. This re-evaluation revealed that Christian readers have constructed "systematic edifices of belief." This was followed by a postcolonial re-evaluation of the Mbire religion, which also revealed that the demonization of the Mwari worship carries the imprint and nuances of colonialists who seek to suffuse eternity with the belief that their way is the natural and only accepted way. It is evidence of colonialism's

insistence that the particular premise on which its ethos is based should be naively accepted as a universal category. The chapter also re-evaluated the mythological aspects of religion. This was followed by a postcolonial re-evaluation of the Christian bible and its claim to epistemological and ontological superiority. The chapter ended up by according an independent validity to the Mbire religion for its practitioners.

Having spent considerable time and space examining the letter to the Hebrews and its rhetorical strategy of comparing and contrasting Jesus' priestly mediation with the Levitical priestly mediation and its consistent emphasis on the superiority of Jesus over the Levitical high priestly mediation, the next chapter consolidates all what has been discussed in this study.



CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION – READING FOR LIBERATING INTERDEPENDENCE

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The study argues that a colonial reading is foreign to the Mbire life-conditions and the existing democratic and pluralistic context. A colonial reading paradigm is not embedded within the broad set of values and principles that give meaning to Mbire human existence. It also argues that a postcolonial reading would transform the religious landscape into a fully inclusive democracy in which human diversity could be affirmed.

Consequently, different religions have their own right of being. The idea of one uniform and true theology or religion is said to have been a Greek concept. Thus, people should not be content to serve as pawns in other people's belief systems. The conversations of faith should enable other people to exchange ideas and test what they say against the reality of another's experience. When it comes to honest talk about the ultimate reality, there are no right or wrong answers. Humankind lives in a context where glib answers to deep questions are not very satisfying. The neat categories of most Christian religious doctrines often seem unrelated to the world in which people reside (Godsey (1996)).

As such, a great deal of Euro-American religious terminologies (mono-, polytheism and others) is not very helpful in our contexts. In fact, there has not been a monotheistic believer so far on earth. Thus, openness for other religions is to be learnt on each level. Acceptance and possibly mutual checking of claims has to be practised. Consequently, people should be democratic in their theologies and look for paths for reading for liberating interdependence.

The quest for the relevance of the ultimate reality in the Mbire context is a theological problem, namely how to think and speak of the ultimate reality in the context of different social systems. Mbire people have to re-think and re-experience the ultimate reality in the framework and within the rules of their social structures.

In this concluding chapter, I would like firstly, to look at where we are and, secondly, where we could go from here. Consequently, I would like to propose a reading for liberating interdependence among religions in general and between the Christian and Mbire religions in particular. This could be a viable alternative in the Mbire context. While other proposals may work for other contexts, I believe that reading for liberating interdependence would work better in the Mbire context. Previous proposals, which attempted to discredit and supplant Mbire religion has not succeeded so far. The challenge here is to transform the universe of religion to serve a new social order, to meet pressing

national needs and to respond to new realities and opportunities. Faced with the challenge of the opening up of spaces, the Christian religion has to root and re-root its path in the emerging environment of a fully inclusive democracy. Meeting this challenge requires actively engaging in re-thinking and re-orienting Christian beliefs and practices.

8.2 RESPICE: WHERE ARE WE?

8.2.1 Re-Thinking the Christian Religion

Few people could deny that we live in a world where Christian people do not possess absolute truths. Consequently, there is a need for a new religious formation, which fits our democratic and pluralistic environment. There is a need to talk to each other to find solutions to our common problems. There is a need for conversational justice, which could establish conditions conducive for people to speak and listen to one another. Human interdependence is the language of the game, if we are to stop a chronic deficiency of democracy in the world today.

In order to achieve liberating interdependence, the existing concept of the superiority of the Christian religion should be revisited and rethought in terms of its fitness/relevance for a fully inclusive democratic and pluralistic environment. There is a need to revisit and reconfigure the relationship between the Christian and non-Christian religions. As Ariarajah (1985:3-12) argues, the concept of the superiority of the Christian religion needs to be challenged and rejected.

The development of a reflective capacity and a willingness to revisit the concept of the superiority of the Christian religion is based on a commitment to the common good. People need to use diverse religious knowledge for the common good. This is possible if a number of Christian people could be delivered from the tyranny of doctrines. I believe that one is not compelled to believe in the incarnation, atonement or resurrection in order to be a godly person. I believe that there will be no peace in the world until there is peace among religions.

It is unfortunate that some Christian people have believed that one must accept these doctrines. For instance, the crusaders and inquisition illustrate the horrific zeal with which Christian people sought to convert non-Christian people to their particular way of believing and deal with those who could not agree with what had come to be accepted as authoritative church doctrines. It had not been Jesus' purpose to fight his enemies or those who disagreed with him. In my view, most Christian people were/are applying epistemological and ontological superiority just to get an advantage.

These Christian people should admit the undeniable fact that humankind lives in a highly pluralistic society (Sullivan 2002:114). Christian people do not only engage in conversations in a world where the Christian religion is the only faith, but in a market of world religious traditions. The undeniable fact is that we live in a world in which many religions co-exist. There are many non-Christian

people whose reverence for the ultimate reality comes from intuited depths of piety (Hick 1988). These non-Christian people would not consider “converting” to the Christian religion, because their own religion is meaningful to them. Their own religious universe made as much sense to them where it matters than what the new Christian teachings purport to offer (Kurehwa 2000:10-11). They would resist any effort to be proselytized, citing the overly exclusive doctrinal conditions proposed to them by some Christian evangelizers as their objections.

Thus, in the permanent tension between Mbire tradition and Euro-American modernity within whose borderlines Mbire religious practices are often analyzed, the problem of the value of Mbire religious practices needs to be rethought and reconsidered. Insurmountable pressure from the Christian religion to discredit and supplant Mbire religious practices did not remove the prestige and status that most Mbire religious practices continue to command among Mbire people (Vambe 2001:102).

Thus, questions about Christian and Mbire religious practices complementing each other need to be rethought and reconsidered since even “educated” and “christianized” Mbire are not very detached from their cultural roots (Daneel 1995). There is no need for the Christian religion to frown upon expressions of Mbire religiosity and spirituality, and to repudiate Mbire expressions as worthless or antithetical to Christian faith and belief (see Dewick 1953:39).

Consequently, some Mbire converts to the Christian religion have tried to discard their pre-baptismal world of religious beliefs and embrace the Christian one in its entirety. However, these are very few in number and the success to which their endeavour has led them is, if scrutinized carefully, open to debate. Magesa (as quoted by Kirwen 1987: vii-viii) argues that, indeed,

Among the people who have accepted baptism in black Africa, the great majority have neither wanted to abandon nor succeeded in abandoning completely many aspects of their religious outlook. The severest Christian theological, doctrinal and pastoral strictures have not deterred them from riveting to it whenever they thought it personally or socially necessary

Consequently, most Mbire people are using their religious world-view to describe, justify and praise the actions through which they have recreated themselves and kept themselves alive (Chavunduka 1977). As a cultural system that connects and binds people to survive, what is it that generates new meanings and symbols for a people’s psychosocial order and spiritual framework? The resuscitation of various Mbire religious practices among Christians and those that are heavily influenced by some Euro-American thought patterns that had been rendered dormant by the twin forces of colonization and the Christian religion need to be viewed anew and rethought for relevance. In this context, Mbire religion will be viewed as a legitimate interlocutor of the Christian religion, where the two

can work together in liberating interdependence to fulfil each other and bring Zimbabwe to a fuller awareness of the magnitude and magnanimity of the ultimate reality.

This is problematic for some Christian people, who have been conditioned to think that their religious faith is the only valid religion that has a monopoly on religious truth and that non-Christian religions are demonic, false or inferior. This view is naive and audacious to say the least. The diversity of humankind makes this view untenable (Hick 1988:172). Many evocative religions continue to manifest a resolute vitality (e.g. Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Mbire and others).

Commenting on the resilience of non-Christian religions against attempts to destroy them by some Christian people, Wilfred Smith (1988:90) uses an Old Testament incident: “We have marched around alien Jerichos the requisite number of times. We have sounded the trumpets. The walls have not collapsed.” Despite some Christian people marching around the walls of these religions, their walls have not fallen down.

Roland Bainton (as quoted by Sullivan 2002:115) also recognizes this reality when he says:

Despite the impressiveness of the geographical spread of Christianity it cannot be said that the world has been won for Christ in our generation. No serious dent has been made on the religions of the world...In land where there has been prodigious missionary endeavour the percentage of Christians remains small. It is estimated that before the Second World War the Christians in India numbered two percent of the total population; in China it was only one percent; and in Japan a mere one-half percent. Christianity is a minority religion in the world at large, as it always has been.

In my view, this minority may well be smaller in future. This casts a shadow over the Christian assumption that it is the will of the ultimate reality that all people shall be converted to the Christian religion (Hick 1988:172). This calls for a reflective capacity and a willingness to review such an assumption in line with the reality on the ground.

Cultural conditioning often determines which religion a person believes. Whether a person is a Christian, Muslim, Jew or Mbire depends nearly always on the part of the world in which one happens to have been born. Some Christian people should be able to view anew, rethink this circumstance, and relate it to the universal sovereignty of the ultimate reality. Hick (1988:172) observes that this is conspicuously not done by a number of Christian people, who hold that the saving activity of the ultimate reality is only confined within a single narrow thread of human life, namely that recorded in their scriptures.

Consequently, some colonial Christian caricatures of non-Christian faiths are slowly being replaced by critical studies of non-Christian religions to an extent that only those who prefer to be ignorant can complacently congratulate themselves upon knowing nothing concerning other religious faiths

(Hick 1988:173). Pleading ignorance concerning the wider religious life of humankind as an excuse for parochial theological prejudices is no longer acceptable.

Smith (1980:92) also is insistent that:

We are about to enter a new situation with regard to other religious traditions of humankind. The time will soon be with us when a theologian who attempts to work out his [sic] position unaware that he does so as a member of a world and society in which other theologians equally intelligent, equally devout, equally moral, are Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims [and, one could still go on--Jews, adherents of African Religion and other primal religions, etc.], and unaware that his readers are likely perhaps to be Buddhists or to have Muslim husbands or Hindu colleagues – such a theologian is out of date as is one who attempts to construct an intellectual position unaware that Aristotle has thought about the world or that existentialists have raised new orientations, or unaware that the earth is a minor planet in a galaxy that is vast only by terrestrial standards.

A re-thinking in terms of the reality on the ground is imperative in a fully inclusive democratic and pluralistic process. When some Christian people construct theological perspectives on non-Christian religions they should honestly acknowledge that they are not the only ones to be theologically competent in matters of morality, spirituality or theological truth.

Another interesting thing is that the same kind of thing taking place in a Christian Church is also taking place in the various non-Christian places of worship (Hick 1988:173). The best instance here is the Mbire worship that I have examined in Chapters Five and Seven. Human beings are coming together to open up their minds to a higher reality, which is thought of as the personal creator and Lord of the universe and as making vital moral demands upon people's lives. What is being done in the several forms of worship is analogous.

Mbire people are “notoriously religious” to the extent that simply telling them not to consult Mbire religious practitioners is as good as treating the symptoms without addressing the root cause of the problem (Chavunduka 1977). Mbire people should be allowed to practice their religious heritage openly, knowing that all religions are but human attempts to do good to society by way of perpetuating life in the ideal way. The exclusive application of many Christian practices as if to say there were no other mechanisms to achieve the same goal and objectives is illusory (Knitter 1985). The continual repudiation of most Mbire religious practices is an eloquent testimony to the insensitivity of a number of Christian people in a pluralistic, post-modern and post-colonial context (cf. Ariarajah and Thomas 1986:5-6).

In order to appreciate a large range of interrelated physical, psychological and social factors in Mbire religion, while at the same time being able to affirm other religions, calls for a certain level of maturity in faith. It is an appreciation of the undeniable fact that religions are on a pilgrimage and

reading for liberating interdependence is an attempt to understand each other as equal partners on this pilgrimage

Because Mbire people are socialized to deal with their problems using Mbire religious methods, it becomes necessary for the Christian religion to take that world-view seriously and to re-think it in view of the new kind of religious formation. The ever-changing democratic and pluralistic landscape necessitates a continuing re-thinking and re-orienting in order to remain relevant.

Mbire religion's ability to 'accommodate' the Christian religion has been its Achilles' heel. The Christian religion over the years has been a powerful and relentless interlocutor in dialogue with a tendency to swallow up its accommodating partners. A good example is the way in which the Christian religion swallowed the primal world-view of the ancient Hebrews and made its symbols its own. Ironically, these days one becomes a laughing stock when one dares describe the Christian religion as, in fact, a sect of Judaism. Consequently, most Mbire local knowledge systems regarding the symbiotic relationship between the ultimate realities, the spirits and rituals were reduced to simplistic characterisations, if not discarded outright by the Christian religion (Chirovamavi 2004).

The advent of the Christian religion during the mid-nineteenth century with its alienating effects of Euro-American cultural imperialism negatively affected a majority of Mbire religious practices and beliefs (Chavunduka 1977). We have seen the quest to justify Euro-American hegemony when colonialism employed various strategies of containment that were aimed at silencing Mbire modes of cultural expression in Chapter Six.

Unfortunately, the Christian religion continues to explain away the reality of witchcraft, prohibit church members from consulting Mbire doctor-prophets and call into question the power and influence of the living-timeless on the living. The church in Zimbabwe has maintained a condemnatory stance on these practices, leaving most Mbire people in a dilemma (Kurehwa 2000:10-11).

Maimela (1985:71) observes it thus:

The consequence is that a large number of African Christians believe that the church is not interested in their daily misfortunes, illness, encounters with evil and witchcraft, bad luck, poverty, barrenness, in short, all their concrete social problems...As to be expected, most Africans do not know what to do with their own attractive Christian religion and yet one, which dismally fails to meet their emotional and spiritual needs.

The purpose of reading for liberating interdependence is an effort to re-think and to repackage the Christian and Mbire religions for a new kind of a religious formation for the public good of all the people. It is an attempt to create something new from both religious belief systems.

Maimela (1985: 72) further observes:

The reluctance of Africans to break ties with African...religions lies in the fact that they are wedded to an African world-view in which salvation is understood in terms of relief or help in times of trouble in this life. Salvation is thus expressed in such acts as healing, driving away evil spirits, empowerment of the individual self, the promotion of fertility, success in life's ventures....

It is imperative for Mbire and Christian people to explore ways in which their different religions would function alongside each other without unnecessarily condemning one another. The fact is that some Mbire Christians have already secretly demarcated for themselves what they consider to be the limits of acceptable Mbire religious practices (see Kurehwa 2000:10-11).

For example, while those who are steeped in the Christian religion constantly relapse to their Mbire religious past, especially in times of crisis (Chavunduka 1977), some Mbire religious practitioners imbibe Christian rites for contemporary expediency (Gelfand 1968:1). In fact, in some instances there are a number of Mbire people, particularly the Varembe in Gutu and Mberengwa, who have found some cultural practices of Islam attractive and continue to participate in them alongside Mbire religion and Christian religion (Gelfand 1968:1-2).

A situation of multiple religious allegiances readily obtains in Zimbabwe (cf. Vambe 2001:102; Kurehwa 2000:10-11). Can one be a Christian when one practices multiple religious faiths? Is the problem of multiple religious allegiances really a problem or it is a way of tackling the practical dimensions of life which most Mbire people find themselves in?

Consequently, a number of Mbire people have tended to outgrow the patterns of faith offered in their churches. Because of the complex dynamics of understanding faith, these Mbire people tend to adopt a functionalist approach in which they use aspects of different religious traditions as long as they offer relief to crises events (cf. Daneel 1970, 1989). Thus, for relevance in the Mbire context, a theological and psychodynamic understanding of reading for liberating interdependence is imperative.

Reading for liberating interdependence entails a thorough grasp of Mbire religio-cultural and Euro-American world-views and being aware that all constitute the influences that have shaped people's understanding of their environment and their relationship to it. Therefore, the extent to which reading for liberating interdependence is done is vital to personal or religious identity formation (Ntoedibe-Kuswani 2001). This is the significance for reading for liberating interdependence between the Christian and the Mbire religions.

This recognition implies an imperative to "promote mutual understanding across the boundaries of cultures and religions and treat religious diversity not as an embarrassment, but a source of enrichment with a view to solving the social and other problems facing our society" (Kruger 1998:43). It implies that in a democratic and pluralistic world people need to relate to one another in

tolerance and respect. Even though adherents of particular religions may be committed to certain truth claims which must be respected, there is need to realize their relative uniqueness in a world where other religions may be viable options (cf. Knitter 1985).

If this is so, then the colonial view of the Mbire religion as an area of spiritual darkness within which there is no salvation, no knowledge of the ultimate reality and no acceptable worship (see Moffat 1885; Dewick 1953; Wijngaards 1985) should be viewed as mistaken. This colonial view has come to seem increasingly implausible and unrealistic in the light of the growing knowledge of Mbire religion and because of better contacts with its practitioners (Opoku 1989:17). It is imperative to rethink this Christian assumption concerning Mbire religion in the context of our democratic and pluralistic environment.

The quest for a reading for liberating interdependence necessitates the vitality of enhancing the relevance of the ultimate reality in a pluralistic world. If most Christian people in Zimbabwe do not view Mbire religion as demonic, false or inferior, then Mbire religion must be viewed as a worthy colleague in the religious quest. This does not imply an abandonment or betrayal of the Christian religion. In fact, in Zimbabwe different religious practices have existed side by side for a long time as dynamic inter- and intra-cultural processes that people do not necessarily experience as separate or mutually exclusive (Vambe 2001).

8.2.2 Copernican Revolution in Religious Reflection

Hick (1988:179) is insistent that some Christian people are making efforts to escape from unacceptable implications of a colonial reading paradigm without explicitly renounce it. This is said to be in accordance with established ecclesiastical methods of developing and changing previous doctrines. Consequently, it is said that one cannot say a formerly proclaimed doctrine is wrong, but could only re-read it to mean something very different from what it was originally understood to mean.

The aforementioned author further argues that in an effort to retain the doctrine of “no salvation outside the Christian religion,” Catholic and Protestant theologians have devised such ideas as implicit faith, baptism by desire, latent Church, ordinary and extraordinary ways of salvation, general and special revelation, anonymous Christianity and others.

He is insistent that all these efforts are still operating within a colonial presupposition, namely that only Christian people can be saved. Thus these theologians have to say that the devout and godly non-Christian people are, in some metaphysical sense, really Christians or Christians-to-be without knowing it.

Unfortunately, this kind of intellectual sophistication cannot save them from seeming slightly ridiculous or dishonest. Hick views this as a charitable extension of the sphere of grace to people who had formerly been regarded as beyond the pale. Furthermore, it is meant to serve as a psychological bridge between a no longer acceptable colonial reading paradigm and a new postcolonial reading paradigm, which is slowly emerging. However, Hick laments that non-Euro-American people have stayed on the bridge for much too long. They need to get off the bridge on to the other side, namely a postcolonial side.

Hick (1988:181-2) suggests a Copernican revolution in religious reflection. He argues that the “no salvation outside the Christian religion” doctrine is analogous to a Ptolemaic astronomy, which held that the earth was the centre of the solar system and that the other heavenly bodies revolve around it. By analogy, the Christian religion was/is seen as the centre of the religious universe of faiths and non-Christian religions are regarded as revolving around it and as being graded in value according to their distance from it.

Instead, Hick argues that what humankind needs is a Copernican revolution in which it was realized that it is the sun, not the earth that is at the centre of the universe and those heavenly bodies, including planet Earth itself, revolve around it. By analogy, the universe of faith centres upon the ultimate reality, not the Christian religion. The ultimate reality is the sun, the originating source of light and life, which the various religious faiths reflect in their different ways.

Hick (1988:183) argues that the various religious faiths have each served as the ultimate reality’s means of revelation to and point of contact with a different stream of human life. He is insistent that, until recently, communication between civilizations was slow and people lived in different cultural worlds. There could not be a divine revelation through any human means to people as a whole, save only through separate revelations within the different streams of human history. It is, thus, a plausible hypothesis that the ultimate reality was revealing itself to people through a number of specially sensitive and responsive spirits. In each instance, the revelatory experiences and the religious faiths to which they gave rise were conditioned by history, culture, language, climate and, indeed, the concrete circumstances of human life at that particular time and place. Thus the cultural and philosophical form of the revelation of the divine is characteristically different in each instance, though the divine Spirit has been everywhere at work, pressing in upon the human spirit.

Thus, religion had arisen within different streams of human life and has in the past flowed down the centuries within different cultural channels. Hick (198:187-8) also argues that until very recently religions interacted with one another only spasmodically and nearly always in hostile clashes rather than in mutual interdependence and friendly reading. He observes that this scenario is somehow slowly changing. Religions are increasingly in contact with one another in conscious dialogue as a

deliberate effort to learn from one another. Each religion has gone through major historical developments, revolutions and transformations. Each religious tradition is in practice an on-going history of change and there is no limit to the further developments that may take place in future. He predicted that influences and mutual interactive system with other religious faiths as well as the influences from the secular civilisation within which each one exists would determine the future of each religious faith.

While appreciable gains have been made to advocate for reading for liberating interdependence between the Christian and Mbire religions, the practical results of such an agenda have shown that it is a theoretical possibility, but at the same time forever remaining a practical absurdity. There is a deliberate device on the part of some Christian people to ignore Mbire prophets (masvikiro), religious leaders and, where possible, to stop them from organizing and conducting their religious services (Vambe 2001). A number of Mbire Christians are blatantly discouraged from consulting Mbire religious practitioners and the church insists that participating in Mbire rituals is a sin (Katekisma 1966:8). Yet the church's alternative does not address Mbire people's deepest concerns (Daneel 1989:43). Such an attitude disqualifies most expressions of some Christian people to be fair arbitrators in a case involving its Mbire religious counterparts.

Consequently, no matter the hostility of some Euro-American Christian people to their accommodating hosts, some Mbire people who have become Christians have not resigned from Mbire religion, nor did they abandon their culture completely (cf. Kirwen 1987: vii-viii). They have maintained dual membership or what Pobee (2001:60-61) has termed the factor of "double insurance." Many Mbire Christians continue to participate in Mbire religious rituals, namely servicing the living-timeless, consulting doctor-prophets, believing in witchcraft with some even attempting to practice it or thinking that it is practiced upon them (see Kurehwa 2000:10).

The fact that Mbire religion is still a strong force in the minds and hearts of many Mbire people is indisputable. *The Herald* of July 7 (1989) noted that participation in Mbire religion has been increasing since the end of the colonial rule in 1980. At present millions of Zimbabwean people continue to resort to traditional healers for assistance. Prof. Gordon Chavunduka (*IRIN*, April 19, 2005), president of the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA), notes that over the past two years there has been an influx of patients seeking treatment from traditional healers, with each of the 55 000 members of the association seeing an average of 20 patients per day.

Despite Christian condemnation of most Mbire religious practices, at some time Mbire people may consult their religious practitioners. Religion is therefore worth the name and pursuit only when it is

powerfully efficient and delivers the goods. Pobee (2001:60-61) develops this complex idea when he says,

I am first an African and second a Christian. The African of whatever faith description was born African before being christianized and this simple truth means there are certain things which [s/he] takes with the mother's milk. There is a world-taken-for granted in [his/her] psyche which surfaces time and again, though people may attempt to camouflage them in a cloak of respectability. That explains why some Africans will in one breath consult the western trained medical doctor and in the same breath consult traditional shrines and healers.

The not infrequent habit of seeking double insurance is made possible by the nature of Mbire religion and the inherent culture of Mbire people. Mbire religion is a hospitable religion that accepts the fact that other religious systems may be equally valid (Chavunduka 1977). Mbire religion is therefore prepared to embrace other beliefs and practices as long as the necessary cultural adjustments are made to accommodate them. Mbire religion is therefore qualified to facilitate inter-religious dialogue with the Christian religion.

Indeed, Mbire religion is quite open to read for liberating interdependence with other religious systems, but does not want to be co-opted by alternative religious systems. This is because the relationship between Mbire religious practices and Christian religious system was not one of equals in terms of power and privilege (see Dewick 1953:39). Reading for liberating interdependence necessitates the implementation of a comprehensive approach where each religion is willing to learn from the other and to approach the other as an equal.

However, reading for liberating interdependence is no simple matter because;

The philosophy of equality, in practice rather than in theory, is more difficult to establish between different religious practices than it is, in terms of community participation, between health programme implementers and the community (Heggenhougen and Drapper 1990: 41)

I am surprised by the fact that most colonial readings advocate for the incorporation of Mbire religion into the Christian religion and not for co-existence. Why can't the Christian religion co-exist with the Mbire religion, considering that the former is a guest, which should not discredit and supplant its host? In my view, human interdependence is the language of the game. In spite of their religious diversity Christian and Mbire people may be certain of living under one and the same destiny. The discovery of the coherence and interdependence of life could promote the experience of co-operative diversity between Christian and Mbire people and their respective religions.

8.3 PROSPICE: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

8.3.1 Re-configuring the Christian Religion

What does all this imply concerning Jesus and his being the incarnation of the ultimate reality for the Christian people? As shown in Chapter Seven, it is no longer generally held that Jesus claimed to be the Son of the ultimate reality, with a unique consciousness of oneness with the cosmic power so that the doctrine of the incarnation could be believed to be firmly based in the consciousness and teaching of Jesus himself (cf. Pannenberg 1968:327). In my view, Christian people can no longer rest everything on the assumption that the great christological sayings – what Sullivan (2002:114) calls “egocentric claims” – were ever spoken by Jesus, who walked the hills and villages of Galilee. It is more probable that they are a reflection of the developing theology of the apostolic church at the close of the first century.

One would inquire further that, if Jesus himself did not think and claim himself as the incarnation of the ultimate reality, ought his disciples to do so? Hick (1988:185-6) contends that the Son-of-the-ultimate reality and the incarnate language could hardly be a literal factual statement, because no factual content has been discerned in it in more than 2000 years of Christian reflection. Rather, he calls it a mythological idea, a figure of speech, a piece of poetic imagery. Vernon Robbins (2004:1-2) calls this type of language Christian rhetorolects, that is, rhetorical dialects which Christian people learnt to speak about their religion. It is a way of accepting Jesus as the Christian people’s living contact with the transcendent ultimate reality. In Jesus’ presence, Christian people find that they are brought into the presence of the ultimate reality. Christian people believe that Jesus is so truly the servant of the ultimate reality that, in living as his disciples, they are living in accordance with the divine purpose. As their sufficient and saving point of contact with the ultimate reality, there is for them something concerning Jesus, which justifies these Christian rhetorolects, which they have developed. Hick (1988:186) is insistent that reality is being expressed in a mythological way when Christian people say that Jesus is the incarnate Son-of-the-ultimate reality.

However, this does not imply an abandonment or betrayal of the Christian religion. Hick (1988:186) argues that when Christian people see the incarnation, the atonement and the resurrection as rhetorolects or as mythological ideas applied to Jesus to express that he is their sufficient, effective and saving point of contact with the ultimate reality, then Christian people no longer have to draw the often-negative conclusion that Jesus is humankind’s one and only effective point of contact with the ultimate reality. Christian people could revere Jesus as the one through whom they found salvation without having to deny other points of reported saving contact, say, between the ultimate reality and Mbire people or other non-Christian people. Christian people could commend the way of the Christian faith without having to de-commend the Mbire way of religious faith or of other non-

Christian ways of religious faith. Christian people could say that there is salvation in Jesus without having to say that there is no salvation other than in Jesus for the Mbire people or other non-Christian people. After all, what if Mbire and other non-Christian people are also right in what they are doing?

Sullivan (2002:124) recognizes the need for a raft upon which to ride the rough seas of life. He is insistent that the Christian people can gratefully seize the Jesus event as their raft upon which to navigate life's seas without denying non-Christian people's rafts. They can pray to the ultimate reality as Jesus' disciples without denying non-Christian people's prayers to the ultimate reality. They can learn of Jesus' life by meditating on the Gospels and can take Jesus' Golden Rule (Matt.7:12) as their moral compass in dealing with other people without denying non-Christian people's moral compasses, which promote human life. They can take the so-called Jesus' resurrection as the basis for their hope in future without denying non-Christian people's basis for their hopes in future. Christian, Mbire and other non-Christian people can live in reverent awe of the ultimate reality, constantly bearing in mind their fragility, contingency and transitoriness.

8.3.2 Re-configuring New Forms of Religious Formation

What future developmental pattern do I envisage of the Christian and Mbire religions in Zimbabwe? I believe that the broad trend of our democratic and pluralistic time is ecumenicity and interfaith cooperation. Colonial religious divides are being transcended. Most people seem to be agreeing more on matters that unite them than on matters that divide them. My vision is that this ecumenical and cooperative spirit may increasingly affect the relation between the Christian and Mbire religions. I envisage a growing Christian-Mbire interdependence and interfluence in which the common commitment of religious faith in a higher spiritual reality demands sister/brotherhood in Zimbabwe to be more significant, while the differences would assume proportionately less significance.

I envisage the interdependence and interfluence between the Christian and Mbire religions to be somewhat analogous to that among several Christian denominations in Zimbabwe at present. Christian denominations are on increasingly friendly speaking terms. They freely visit one another's worship services and share places of worship. They have formed interdenominational organizations such as the Zimbabwe Christian Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) where several Christian denominations co-operate in all sorts of service to the community. Their clergy are accustomed to meet together for discussion in ministers' fraternities, which sometimes include even Roman Catholic priests and there is even a degree of interchange of ministries and others.

I do not envisage or desire a single religion in Zimbabwe, but a situation in which the various religious traditions (Christian, Mbire, Islam and others) no longer see themselves and each other as rival ideological communities. A variety of human types necessitate a variety of kinds of worship and a variety of theological emphases and approaches.

I also do not deem it necessary to assume – as a colonial reading does – that if the ultimate reality is being truly worshipped by Christian people that the same ultimate reality cannot also be truly worshipped by Mbire and other non-Christian people. Nor do I deem it necessary to assume that, if the ultimate reality is being validly experienced within the Christian streams of religious life as a personal presence, the same ultimate reality might not also be validly experienced within Mbire and other non-Christian streams of religious life. Hick (1988:190) sums up this assumption with a quotation from one of the great revelatory scriptures of the world, *The Bhagavad Gita* as follows: “Howsoever *humankind* may approach me; even so do I accept them; for on all sides, whatever path they may choose is mine.” Simon Peter in the context of his visit to the Gentile home of Cornelius at Caesarea also sums this assumption as follows: “Truly I perceive that the ultimate reality shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him [sic] and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts:34-35).

The Christian religion should concede that it is one among many other valid ways of salvation. It does not have a monopoly of the ultimate reality. The Christian religion should learn to deal with differences, respecting other faiths and involve them in creating a new world, which is a true reflection of the one, which people envisage when they talk about the ultimate reality.

I deem the most revolutionary postcolonial insight to be the impossibility of transcending the human reference point. This new insight comes from a realization that the structure of nature may eventually be such that people’s thought processes do not correspond to it sufficiently to permit them to think about it at all. People are now approaching a boundary beyond which they are forever stopped from pushing their inquiries, not by the construction of the world, but by the construction of themselves. The world fades out and eludes them because it becomes meaningless. People cannot even express this in a way they would like. They cannot say that there exists a world beyond any knowledge possible to them, because of the nature of knowledge. The very concept of existence becomes meaningless.

It is true that one way of reacting to this would be to shut up. People are confronted with something truly ineffable. They have reached the limit of the vision of the great pioneers of science, which believes that people live in a sympathetic world, which is comprehensible by their minds.

If that is so, then one is hard pressed to substantiate that Mbire people’s construct of religion is inferior to some Euro-American people’s construct of religion. This can be only substantiated by

suppressing them or by applying warped criteria. Moreover, the process of exclusion requires one to make a judgement about what is superior and what is not. This is where the problem lies. Who decides that Mbire religion is inferior and the Christian religion is superior? One may need to explain what justifies promoting those particular people to their position of authority? Who would we trust to decide who is human and superior and who is not?

We have seen thus far that other humans have a relatively poor track record for ascertaining what counts as humanity (Ntoedibe-kuswani 2001:98). At various points, some Euro-American people have considered African people insufficiently human (Adam 1995). When can we be confident that these people have really understood what it means to be human and superior? The Christian religion has lost its predominant role in the world and there is a need for a different conceptualization of religious formation, namely a pluralistic form where there is no one religion with preferential privileges.

This is liberating for Mbire faith, which had been demonized by a number of Christian people (Dewick 1953:39). The significance of a postcolonial reading for the philosophical presuppositions of the once-colonized Mbire people would be the overthrow of the colonial reading and its notion of Christian superiority and monopoly of salvific truth and life. A postcolonial reading could be one of the theoretical instruments to move beyond an insistence on the superiority and finality of Jesus and the Christian religion toward recognition of the independent validity of non-Christian religions (cf. Opoku 1989). The Christian religion is one of a plurality of contexts of salvation (cf. Knitter 1985).

Chao (1947:482) sums up this postcolonial insight thus:

To the African, God speaks as if he [sic] were an African; to the Chinese, God speaks as if he were a Chinese; to all men and women, the word goes over against their particular existing environment and their several cultural settings.

I would like to end this section by telling a well-known story of the three blind persons, who are said to have touched the back, the ear and the leg of an elephant. When they were asked to describe what an elephant looks like, one says it looks like a flat rock, another says it looks like a big leaf, and still another says it looks like a trunk of a tree. It is true that an elephant has a part that looks like each of these descriptions, but the elephant is not only like each of these descriptions. It is all three and more.

By analogy, each religion has a part of the truth of the ultimate reality, but not the whole truth. To believe that the manifestation of the ultimate reality in one local culture is all there is about this ultimate reality and that all other manifestations in other local cultures are demonic is to display a lack of theological sophistication. The ultimate reality is infinite and too big for people's finite and small minds to comprehend. The ultimate reality defies any explanation and understanding. No one

religion, no matter its absolute claims to superiority, can fathom the how, what, who, why of the ultimate reality fully. Religions are human constructs and efforts to understand the ultimate reality and no one construct it better than another does. Each religion's knowledge of the ultimate reality is just a drop in the ocean.

8.3.3 Re-configuring the Role of Religion in the World

The exercise of reading for liberating interdependence between the Christian and Mbire religious life is a result of a development of the reality of people's social experience and world, which is essential for the order of our functioning and, more importantly, for the vitality and quality of our religious environment. I am convinced that, without a perceived and experienced nexus with a real and shared social world, any religion is emasculated and religiously anaemic. This vision provides a model for committing religion to a broad set of values and principles that give meaning to human existence. Religion would then play a crucial role in advancing a social compact, which is essential for meeting our challenges of political, social and economic development.

Thus, instead of competing with one another, Christian and non-Christian religions could be the conscience of the nations and could pool their resources to alleviate human suffering. Dr Abdullah Hakim Quick (2004) quotes the Prophet Mohammed as saying, "If you find evil you must do something about it with your hands, but if not with your hands, you must speak about it, but if you can not speak about it, you must feel it in your heart but this is the weakest response."

Economics is, indeed, deeply a religious matter. Christian and non-Christian religions should go beyond just mere prophetic rhetoric and become participants in the story of the ultimate reality's renewal movement. I am insistent that it is possible to eradicate poverty if people are willing to stop greedy obstacles in the way. They could be able to restore a human face to religion and bring confessing hope to the poor people, who are imprisoned in the walls of poverty.

I have reflected on the past in order to understand the present and to move forward. Christian and non-Christian religions should be in the world for one another. Spirituality should be connected to every sphere of human life. It is a way of life – social, political and economic. It is a fact that the horrific effects of capitalism, colonialism and apartheid have affected us all. Gerstenberger (2004:7) argues that developments in the realms of science, technology, economy and communications are so rapid and revolutionary in our days that even the experts stand aghast and quite often loose control over what they have been initiating.

He argues that social structures over the world have changed dramatically in the wake of the revolutions and under the onslaught of unrestrained theories and practices of profit-making exploitation of human as well as natural resources. The accumulation of riches in the hands of few

individuals and in privileged industrialized zones of this world is so staggering that normal people can no longer grasp its real dimensions. Economic disparities are very much against any sense of social justice. Starvation, disease, lack of education, that is, subhuman living conditions for millions and millions of humankind around the world are dreadful consequences.

He added that waste and destruction of natural resources are tied into the ideologies of economic growth to the benefit of a few elitist segments of humankind. The abuse of socially underprivileged layers of society as well as of women in most countries because of masculine arrogance and greed for continued dominion is sickening. For instance, imagine children working and fighting wars, child-headed households, single-headed households, abusive marriage relationships because of poverty, forced prostitution and slavery, drug production, commerce and trafficking and other social diseases. These do endanger the survival of humankind and life on earth.

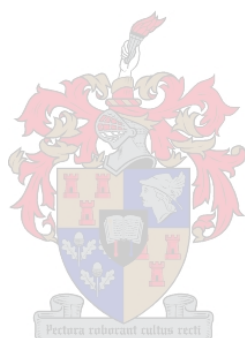
Consequently, this is the basic concern which should motivate Christian and non-Christian religions in the name of the one and universal ultimate reality, namely the survival of the creation and the well-being of human creatures. The Christian and non-Christian religions should stop fighting one another about theologies and statements of faith, which were crafted by fragile people, but should conscientize, organize and mobilize the resources that are already there in all traditions in order to change these outrageous conditions before it is too late. There is a need for repair of the economic unfairness in order to rebuild the psychology and self-esteem of the colonized people.

Unfortunately, we most often rush to be religiously right and leave a lot of people behind. It is my conviction that the creation of a simple blueprint of by-gone social systems or value paradigms is not the answer to the Mbire and other Africans' quest for relevance. For more than 150 years the Christian religion has traversed Zimbabwe and suffused it with its ethos and ideology. However, its presence either in its colonial or neo-colonial form renders it as a bizarre satire on the Mbire development process (Danmole 1974). The Christian religion should hang its head in shame for it has failed to create the kingdom of the ultimate reality on earth, despite its absolute biblical claims to epistemological and ontological superiority.

Gerstenberger (2004:7) is insistent that it is not helpful to ignore the realities of present-day life. Even the Jewish prophet Jeremiah once wrote a letter to the captives in Babylon, waking them up to their real situation and urging them to tackle life within those conditions they found themselves in (Jeremiah 29). In much the same fashion we should be aware of our own times and surroundings and do our job of theology within the (always questionable and tortuous) network of our own world.

The ever-changing democratic and pluralistic landscape necessitates a continuing re-thinking and re-orienting in order to remain relevant. The challenge for Christian and Mbire people is to enable this liberating interdependence and to seek out new forms of co-operation. Joint action, mutual

adjustment and networking are the new skills required of theologians, if they want to remain relevant in a post-modern and post-colonial context. Our context calls for a rainbow religion or a rainbow religious landscape where religions could work together to build a better world for all peoples.



EXPLANATION OF TERMS

The following terms used in this thesis need some clarification.

Colonial reading refers to reading theories, which are concerned with the innate superiority of Euro-American culture, the Euro-American male as the subject, and the non-Euro-Americans as the other needing to be controlled and subjugated. It carries with it the imprint and nuances of colonialists who seek to suffuse eternity with the belief that their way is the natural and only accepted way. It is evidence of colonial reading's insistence that the particular premise on which its ethos is grounded should be naively accepted as a universal category.

Colonizing writings refer to writings, which propound the values and representations, which authorize expansionist tendencies based on unequal relationships.

Epistemology is the study of, or inquiry about, human knowledge. This involves questions concerning how the mind acquires and uses knowledge as well as what is truth and certainty. The position adopted in epistemology determines the way in which theology is understood and practiced.

Euro-American refers to Western or white people.

Exigency refers to the reasons or causes for the composition of writing, in this case, the letter to the Hebrews.

Ideology is a system of interdependent ideas (convictions, traditions, principles) present in social groups and/or communities (e.g. political parties and governments) and which justify, rationalize, and reflect their specific political, social, moral, religious, and economic interests. It serves as a justification of the patterns of conduct, attitudes and objectives of a group or a community.

Liberating interdependence refers to the awareness of colonial exploitative forces and various strategies of such colonization as well as the conscious adoption of strategies for resisting and searching for alternative ways of reading between nations, races, genders, economics and cultures.

Living-timeless refers to Mbire ancestors.

Master-writings (or meta-writings) are writings that claim to be scientific and objective that functions to legitimize colonial projects and assume justice and truth.

Mbire is the term I will be using in this study to refer to the multiplicity of the so-called Shona dialects in Zimbabwe. Mbire people are the indigenous peoples living in central, northern and southern Zimbabwe and parts of Mozambique. Mbire is composed of six main clusters of dialects: Karanga in the south, Zezuru in the north and centre, Ndau in the southeast, Manyika in the

northeast, Kalanga in the west, and Korekore in the north-with numerous minority groups (Kahari 1990:70). Almost eighty percent of Zimbabweans speak the Mbire language, that is, Chimbire.

Mbire religion refers to the religion of the Mbire people. It is one of the many religions of Africa. Mbire religion refers to the religion, which was practised by Mbire people before and after the advent of the Christian religion and is still being practised today.

Morphology is the study of forms of things, especially of animals and plants and of words and their structure.

Mwari is the Mbire name for their ultimate reality or the Supreme Being.

Ontology is the science of being. In traditional scholastic philosophy it is much the same as metaphysics, the study of being in general. In existentialist theology there is much emphasis on being, which is the reality we encounter in special moments of religious experience or knowledge of ourselves.

Pesher is a Hebrew word for “interpretation.” The *pesher* technique involves taking an Old Testament statement out of its original context and giving to it a new reading or application.

Postcolonial reading refers to the emergence of a culture, writings, discourses, attitudes, positions and even ideologies which deconstruct, expose, reject and condemn a colonial reading. It is an active confrontation with the dominant system of thought, its lopsidedness and inadequacies, and underlines its unsuitability for colonized people. It is a process of cultural and discursive emancipation from all dominant structures whether they are political, linguistic or ideological.

Reading is used in this study in the sense of interpretation or criticism.

Supersessionism is the assumption of Christian superiority and monopoly of salvific truth and life.

Ultimate reality is the term that is used in this study to refer to what is usually called “God”

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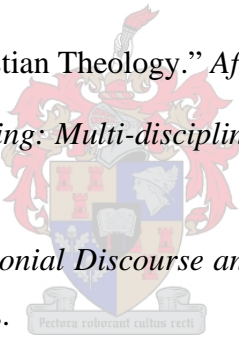
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