AN AFRICAN RESPONSE TO THE POSTMODERN BIBLE: IS IT HELPFUL IN BREAKING THE STRANGLEHOLD OF IDEALIST HERMENEUTICS?

BY

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis 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

The purpose of the thesis is to determine the relevance of postmodern insights as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* for Africans and evaluate their significance for African biblical scholarship. The thesis argues that postmodern insights are a powerful instrument to free interpretation from its idealist captivity. My argument is that the advent of postmodernity heralded more benefits and opportunities for Africans and their churches than the supposed collateral demage. Postmodernity has created greater opportunities for Africans and other non-western peoples to resist Euro-American domination than modernity. It deconstructs the dominant Euro-American tradition and epistemology, thus enables marginalized discourses and groups to become counter-discourses and counter-movements.

The first chapter gives a treatment of the purpose and methodology of the thesis, in terms of its structured development. To understand postmodernity attention is given in the second chapter to a description of selected contours of modernity and an evaluation of the causes of its decline.

Because of the decline of modernity, it is important to ascertain what alternative paradigms are emerging in its place. The third chapter presents an introduction and description of selected contours associated with postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* in order to gain some understanding in the philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations of postmodernists.

Some aspects of shona worldview as a background against which to mirror the relevance of postmodernity for Africans are featured in the fourth chapter. Here the relationship between the shona and their ancestors is explained, as distinct from the God concept which is acknowledged by them as the origin of life. The ancestors as the living-timeless are viewed as a connection between the living and the spirit-world, as well as guardians of traditions, land and the natural environment.

An evaluatory critique of postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* from an African perspective is the fulcrum of the fifth chapter. How does postmodernity formulated for a people of Euro-American cultural and social milieu become effective

and relevant in an African cultural and social milieu? Faced with the need to define themselves, Africans are led to place both modernity and postmodernity in a new context and critically evaluate their relevance for them.

The significance of postmodern insights for African churches and African biblical scholarship is the theme of the sixth chapter. Here my argument is that a postmodern critique of modernity can help African churches become authentic, contextually-appropriate hermeneutical communities of the gospel. It explores the implication of a postmodern critique of individualism, rationalism, scientific/materialistic positivism and technology for an African paradigmatic understanding of being one, holy, catholic and apostolic community of faith.

The concluding chapter offers critical observations and implications of the research for African people and their churches. It identifies practical challenges which, if taken seriously, are radically life transforming.

Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie tesis is om die relevansie van postmoderne insigte (soos dit uitdrukking gevind het in *The Postmodern Bible*) vir Afrikane te ondersoek, en om hierdie insigte se belang vir Bybelinterpretasie in Afrika te bepaal. Die tesis voer aan dat postmoderne insigte 'n kragtige instrument is om interpretasie te bevry van die bande waardeur dit deur idealisme gehou is. My argument is dat die opkoms van postmodernisme meer voordele en geleenthede as nadele inhou vir Afrikane en hul kerke. Postmodernisme het meer geleenthede geskep vir Afrikane en ander nie-Westerse volkegroepe om Euro-Amerikaanse dominansie te oorkom as wat die modernisme het. Dit dekonstrueer die dominante Euro-Amerikaanse tradisie en epistemologie, en laat dus diskoerse en groepe wat voorheen gemarginaliseerd is toe om teen-diskoerse en teen-bewegings te vorm.

Die eerste hoofstuk behandel die doel en metodologie van die tesis, in terme van gestruktureerde ontwikkeling. Om postmodernisme te verstaan word in die tweede

hoofstuk aandag gegee aan 'n beskrywing van sommige kontoere van modernisme sowel as 'n evaluasie van die oorsake vir die mislukking van die moderne denkraamwerk.

In die lig van die ondergang van die modernisme is dit belangrik om te bepaal watter alternatiewe paradigmas in die plek daarvan ontstaan het. Die derde hoofstuk verskaf 'n inleiding en beskrywing van sommige kontoere wat met postmodernisme geassosieer word, soos dit in *The Postmodern Bible* uiteengesit word, om sodoende die filosofiese denkpatrone en wêreldbeeld oriëntasies van postmoderniste te begryp.

Sekere aspekte van die shona wêreldbeeld word in die vierde hoofstuk as agtergrond gebruik om die relevansie van postmodernisme vir Afrikane aan te toon. Hier word die verhouding tussen die shona en hul voorvaders verduidelik, in onderskeid met die God-konsep wat hulle erken as oorsprong van die lewe. Die voorvaders as lewende, tydlose persone word beskou as 'n verbintenis tussen die lewende en die geesteswêreld, sowel as die bewaarders van tradisie, grond en die natuurlike omgewing.

Hoofstuk vyf bevat 'n evaluasie-kritiek op postmodernisme soos in *The Postmodern Bible* uiteengesit, uit 'n Afrika-perspektief. Hoe word postmodernisme wat vir 'n Euro-Amerikaanse kulturele en sosiale milieu geformuleer is, effektief en relevant vir die kulturele en sosiale milieu van Afrika? Afrikane moet hulself definieer en plaas daarom beide modernisme en postmodernisme in 'n nuwe konteks en evalueer hul relevansie vir die Afrika-konteks op kritiese wyse.

Die belang van postmoderne insigte vir Afrika-kerke en Afrika-Bybelinterpretasie is die tema van die sesde hoofstuk. Hier is my argument dat 'n postmoderne kritiek op modernisme die Afrika-kerke kan help om egte, kontekstueel-gepaste, hermeneutiese gemeenskappe van die evangelie te word. Dit ondersoek die implikasies van 'n postmoderne kritiek op individualisme, rasionalisme, wetenskaplik/materialistiese positivisme en tegnologie vir die Afrika-verstaan van die belydenis van een heilige, katolieke, apostoliese gemeenskap van geloof.

Die laaste hoofstuk verskaf kritiese observasies en implikasies van die navorsing vir Afrika-volke en hul kerke. Dit identifiseer die praktiese uitdagings wat, indien dit ernstig opgeneem word, radikale transformasie kan inlui.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The implosive memory dreams up an imaginary exchange. It implodes in two ways: on the one hand, it closes itself in the nostalgia of a dead time and its entropy; on the other hand, endures the present as if it is a dream, or rather a nightmare. But both past and present can exist only if they are transformed, enriched by the exploration of men and practical thought. The past comes back in our memory through metamorphosed forms. In principle, each nation is a plurality, a mosaic of cultures if not a plurality of languages and genealogies. This plurality is never set in a real relationship of equality (between groups, cultures, sexes, powers) but in one of hierarchy and asymmertry (Kathibi 1988:10).

A society is modern in as far as it constantly but vainly tries to embrace the unembraceable, to replace diversity with uniformity and ambivalence with coherent and transparent order – and while trying to do this, it inevitably turns out more divisions, diversity, and ambivalence than it has managed to get rid of (Bauman 1993:5).

Throughout social science circles in Euro-American culture and society there is a dramatic shake-up and realignment of ideas and theories as a result of the forceful postmodern whirlwind which is sweeping through, challenging the very ontological and epistemological bases of all major paradigms, ranging from liberal-humanism to eco-feminism (Best & Kellner 1991:1).

The phenomenon of postmodernity is both puzzling and tempting. Postmodernity is almost an empty epithet that is forever chasing a meaning. There are many competing schools of thought filing for a patent on the term postmodernity (Aichele et al 1995:8-9). In my effort to indicate how the term might be investigated, I will focus on postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible. The Bible and Culture* (Yale University Press, 1995). This postmodernity is the deconstruction of the Cartesian-Newtonian metanarrative of modernity (pp. 10-11). Literary and philosophical postmodernity (Marxism, psychological theory, feminist theory, radical empiricism, ideological theory, new historicism etc.) is post-Cartesian since it looks upon the subject as decentered, as inseparably involved with the unconscious and the irrational, and as inherently shaped through particular social relations, language and culture (p. 306). Belief in historical and cultural variability, fallibility, the impossibility of getting beyond language to reality (p.124), the fragmentary and particular

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nature of all understanding (pp.129-131), the pervasive corruption of knowledge by power and domination (pp. 119-120), and the need for a pragmatic approach to the whole issue characterizes postmodernity as an intellectual moment in the academy.

According to postmodernity it is believed that the idea of reality itself is strictly a fiction, a construction of the imagination. The logocentric tradition from Plato to positivism of the correspondence between language and reality has been overturned (pp. 122-123). It entails the death of God (p. 202), the displacement of the sovereignty, the dismantling of Cartesian construction under the sovereignty of the subject, the disappearance of the self (pp. 278-280, 303), and the end of history (p.64).

Underlying this phase of postmodernity is the linguistic turn, which sees human identity as an interplay of various systems of signs and symbols (pp. 108-110, 124). The great masters of suspicion (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche) challenged the modern model of the enlightened rational thinker as mythical and even illusory. This 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. Postmodernity has provided a demystifying critique of modernity's basic assumptions about knowledge and action (pp.140-141).

This postmodernity has to do primarily with a new view of the nature of the interpretive process. Modernity intended to replace the premodern givenness of interpretation from the hands of institutional authorities with various ideas of the autonomy of interpretation. Autonomous interpretations were based on the data of the senses (empiricism), or coherent and speculative thought (rationalism), or special qualities of consciousness (romanticism). Authority for modernity lay in science or logic or experience or feelings. Postmodernity, on the other hand, throws off all givenness of interpretation, claiming that all interpretation arises in a historical process, namely in the interplay between the object that interprets us and we who interpret the object (p. 51). Reality is interpretation all the way down. It is a chain of signs. Ideas of meaning and truth are constructed by interpretations, and interpretations interprets nothing but earlier interpretations. "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" (p. 130). "There is nothing absolutely primary to be

interpreted since fundamentally everything is already interpretation; every sign is … but the interpretation of others signs" (pp.139-140).

The main agenda of postmodernity is the relativization of norms and of values and of what used to be certainties that are associated with this concept. Bent on undercutting the foundations for any clear and certain knowledge by some correlation of the mind with objective reality, postmodernity emphasizes the power of the imagination to construct a world linguistically. The dominant theme is that reality is linguistic through and through. There is no other reality than the reality which the mind constructs through language. The results are a pluralizing of social and ethical issues, stemming from the impossibility of reaching a binding legitimation of truth on the ground of reason (pp.144-147).

There are a number of reasons why *The Postmodern Bible* could be remarkable for Africans. The mushrooming of novel approaches in Biblical interpretation necessitates evaluation of these approaches. Though other books evaluating novel approaches of biblical interpretation have been produced, *The Postmodern Bible*'s intellectual depth, scholarly rigour and radical challenges, as well as its radical and consistent inclination to postmodernity, puts it in its own category.

The exegetical efforts of *The Postmodern Bible* are exciting - not only because they violate most norms and groundrules established by modernity, but also because they break away from the dominant hermeneutical practice of individual engagement with the text. The interpretive efforts of this book highlight the exciting possibilities of corporate exegetical enterprise. *The Postmodern Bible* is a product of a collective effort by ten North-American scholars. It is not a collection of distinct essays by each of the scholars, but all ten scholars take responsibility for every aspect of the book. It is a conscious effort to skirt or contest the historical-critical methods usual preoccupation with the author in favour of a much more embracing conception of author (p. 16). This is a quite unique phenomenon in the humanities.

The Postmodern Bible engages the intellectual, epistemological, political, ethical and cultural challenges of Euro-American postmodern cultural epoch. The book's exegetical scope of argument is masterly. At each point in the book, the authors sort out various possibilities of meaning, list them and the scholars who have supported them and rehearses briefly the arguments for and against each, before coming down in favour of a postmodern meaning, often adding a nuance of their own as they do so. The reader has a sense of following a detailed, precise line of thought, as though being led through a well-arranged

treasurehouse by wise and expert guides. The book stands firmly against mainstream interpretation, backing up its position with weighty arguments which, if taken seriously, are radically lifetransforming.

The Postmodern Bible brings contemporary practices of biblical interpretation into the fullest possible critique with the practices of contemporary literary theory. Literary theory has transcended its traditional bounds (of literary texts) and has developed into a general cultural critique with the aim of impelling biblical interpretation in the direction of a wider and general cultural critique (Botha et al 1998:1).

As can be seen from the above description, certain traits of postmodernity present themselves as a direct negation of Christianity. Their acceptance should result logically not in the interpretation of the biblical message, but in its dissolution. But, notwithstanding this, *The Postmodern Bible* has taken up those tools and used them, despite their not being exactly designed for the task, in the service of the gospel. A tribute is due to the resilience of the authors who have actually made constant and not always unsuccessful attempts to turn the attackers weapons to the use of the Church. They have offered various interpretations of the Bible. Looking through the book after having read it, I not only find exclamation marks, question marks, excited underlyings and other signs of eager agreement and frustrated disagreement; I also find in myself a renewed excitement at the task, a fresh desire to get to grips with the problem at every level. As a result I have been challenged to such a degree that I have decided on an African response to this product of a North-American group of scholars. Is there anything in these interpretations which could lead Africans to a better understanding of their faith? Or is there anything for the African interpreters to learn when examining the way by which the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* came to their interpretations?

1.1 Problem

Although postmodernity is on the cutting edge of research in the field of religion, it is not an African concept but an Euro-American one. And Euro-Americans and Africans are culturally, socially, geographically, politically, economically and religiously quite distinct. Economically, Euro-America is a developed world while Africa is still in a developing phase. While Euro-Americans crave for postmodernity, Africans are still craving for modernity and may not even attain that developmental and economical stage. While Euro-

Americans have reached the moon, Africans have not yet reached the village. While Euro-Americans are connecting their PC's to the global internet, Africans are craving for a telephone connection - let alone internet. The question arises: How does postmodernity which is formulated for a people of the Euro-American cultural and social milieu become effective and relevant in an African cultural and social milieu? This thesis is an attempt to articulate a theoretical instrumentation by which an answer to this crucial question can be given. Faced with the need to define themselves, Africans are led to place both modernity and postmodernity in a new context and critically evaluate their possible relevance and impact for them. This thesis proposes to respond to this challenge.

Translated to the field of Biblical studies, the postmodern insights are a powerful instrument by which interpretation can be set free from its idealist captivity. This thesis will argue that the advent of postmodernity has heralded more benefits and opportunities for Africans than it has inflicted collateral damage. The development of postmodernity has created greater opportunities for Africans to resist Euro-American domination than modernity. Modernity has provided "warrant for the subjugation of women whether in the church, the academy, or society at large, justifying colonialism and enslavement, rationalizing homophobia, or otherwise legitimizing the power of hegemonic classes of people" (p.4). Postmodernity deconstructed the dominant Euro-American tradition and epistemology and thus enabled marginalized discourses and groups to become counter-discourses and counter-movements.

These two discourses, liberation and deconstruction, embody demands for freedom which are revolutionary vis-à-vis the established system. Liberation embodies the demand from the dominant culture's political and economic "other" - both from the geographical outside, the Third World, and form within (movement of sociopolitical and personal liberation ...). Deconstruction embodies the demand from the "withinest" of within, setting out to interpret what is really going on in freedom from the dominant culture's most basic assumptions - assumptions so deep that the culture doesn't notice them. The "other" which deconstruction makes heard is what has aptly been called the "political unconscious" of the West, the assumptions which generate our sociopolitical structures, and which these structures serve to conceal (Jobling 1987:4).

The paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity is most significant for Africans, those on the underside of history, because they have more at stake than others in focusing on the tenuous and provisional vocabularies which have had and do have hegemonic status in past and present societies (West 1985:270-271). Generally, the dominant biblical scholarship has

shied away from the needs of the weak and the needy. Very rarely has it focused on people's experiences of hunger, sickness and exploitation. The questions posed by the historical-critical theory might be relevant to the Euro-Americans, but they are not always the questions which best allow the text to speak to Africans. The Biblical texts speak to practical issues about life, particularly life within communities. But these are not always the questions which interest the Euro-American scholarly guild.

Because I deem *The Postmodern Bible* to be doing something vitally important, the points at which I find myself either differing from some of its assumptions and conclusions or desiring to press harder for clarification are articulated in this thesis with some vigour. What follows is a mixture of description and African critical reaction to postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible.* Some might think of the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* as the great exponents of the postmodern criticism. They simply make explicit the hermeneutical ideas latent in the great flow of postmodernity.

It would be quite misleading to see the authors of this book as sworn enemies of the Christian faith/truth. What they are opposing mainly is prejudice. Not that they have no prejudice of their own. We all do. The important thing is to be aware of them as they have shown themselves to be. Just as cautious non-Germans need to be assured that Bultmann, held in some circles to be the archenemy of truth because of his demythologization programme, is in fact someone from whom a very great deal can be learnt, so it is important not only to disagree with postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* and articulate that disagreement, but to be prepared to learn from it at point after point, even if that which is so learnt is then to be integrated into a different overall hypothesis.

The Postmodern Bible is a presentation of the major postmodern interpretive strategies. My reading of it will not involve acceptance of its authority in an unquestioning manner, but rather engagement with its performance critically. Postmodernity is no chimera. It has set up a ferment which no serious Biblical scholar can disregard. This African response to *The Postmodern Bible* should be read as issuing from a broad appreciation of its interpretive enterprise, and in the aim of impelling the discussion which it has initiated further.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the relevance and impact postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* for Africans and evaluate its significance for African churches. Africa has been at the bottom of the heap in relation to Euro-America centers. For a long period designated by Euro-Americans dark and its peoples primitive and uneducated, Africa in general has suffered radical peripheralisation - even in comparison with other parts of the Third World. With reference to critical biblical scholarship, the epistemological center has been Euro-America. To date, biblical interpretation has been almost exclusively in the hands of Euro-American scholars. Their academics and scholarly guilds have been the arena where hermeneutical theories, interpretive constructs and exegetical discourses were constructed and from where they were prepackaged and exported to other cultures and contexts as having universal validity. *The Postmodern Bible* attempts to work out new paradigms and approaches that are vastly different from those of the dominant biblical scholarship.

The quest for new ways of biblical interpretation is paramount for African churches. There are various reasons why this hermeneutical task is paramount to the life of African churches. There is the need to avoid dependence on sources of authority outside Africa. This desire to build approaches of interpreting the Bible form within the cultural context of Africa is not a manifestation of misplaced nationalistic zeal. Two thousand years of Western Christian heritage and the enormous contribution of Euro-American scholars to theological reflection cannot and should not be dismissed as of no consequence to the glowing and growing life of African Churches. To do so is to repudiate Africans' citizenship responsibilities in God's household. This quest is not in the spirit of unwillingness to learn form insights gained by others living in different areas of the oikonmene, but merely a sign of growth in maturity.

The shifting sounds of biblical interpretation in Euro-America(n) have proved undependable bases for theology even in Euro-America itself. Why should African Churches be bound to them? There are Euro-American scholars themselves who feel that historical interpretation of the Bible, seeking to uncover the immersion of biblical texts in the myriad counting exercise of history, has now come to the end of its usefulness to theology. Each time a Euro-American scholar sneezes African theologians "should not catch a cold and manifest the symptoms all over the footnotes" (Samantha 1987:2). Dependence on rules of interpretation developed in continents alien to African life is a hindrance to the African Churches' growth

in maturity. It reduces Africans' credibility, diminishes their spirit and negates the universality of Jesus Christ to whom the Bible bears witness.

There is a deeper reason why African hermeneuticians need to develop their own distinctive character and direction. The basic question here is not so much about rules of interpretation as the perception of truth/reality. The question to how reality is to be perceived, is the first concern. What are the rules of interpreting the Bible which points to/explains/communicates the experience of that reality?

Postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* confronts Africans with a challenge to search for more appropriate modes of hermeneutics by which the New Testament can be demonstrated as relevant to Africans, even as it stands locked into the socio-religious framework of the ancient Mediterranean World. Of all the mandates confronting the present churches, the mandate of world community predicated on a renewed commitment to pluralism and the attendant acknowledgement 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 Eurocentric theological and ecclesiastical traditions that continue to marginalize African people throughout the present world (Felder 1989:185-186).

Postmodernity announces the creation of a new world of interpretation as the old world of interpretation ends. It can necessitate a shifting of epistemological centers so that biblical scholarship of Africans be done by Africans themselves, taking into account two realities of African-religious pluralism and economic poverty. Postmodernity enables a shift in method from Euro-centricism and its attendant text-centricism, to a people-centered and context-centered biblical scholarship (Hinga 1996:279). African scholarship must be answerable not to the Euro-American scholarly guilds, but to the hopes, dreams and fears of the society in which it is practised. African scholarship must participate in a socially engaged biblical scholarship. Critical biblical scholars seeking hermeneutical strategies suitable for the African situation would have to address the cultural and socio-political context of Africa.

The dilemma facing historical-critical scholarship is largely due to the lack of a real life context that would serve as a galvanizing orientation point of the research effort. This bracketing off of the day-to-day socio-political crisis in Africa, has not only made biblical scholarship largely irrelevant to the Africans, it has also had the effect of distancing the reading of the Bible, entrenching the idea that the Bible is a Euro-American property.

1.3 Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the relevance of postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* for Africans and evaluate its significance for African churches. It will articulate a theoretical instrumentation which will answer to the following crucial question: How does postmodernity, formulated for a people of the Euro-American cultural and social milieu, become effective and relevant in an African cultural and social milieu? This thesis will be both descriptive, comparative and evaluative. Where I stand methodologically, I start with this: I am a product of the Shona culture. That is not to mean that I am nothing but a product of the Shona culture, but that the Shona culture is the sun and moon under which I live and the light which the Shona culture casts always influences what I see. Therefore no analysis I make can claim objectivity, for certain prejudices and empathies will unavoidably creep in.

Where I sit, that is, my social location, I start with this: I am a poor Shona who comes from one of the poorest families in Zimbabwe. My family background made it impossible for me to attend formal school beyond primary level. I had to battle my way (all by myself) through private studies up to high school level. Then a good friend provided for my undergraduate studies at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Zimbabwe as well as for my postgraduate studies at the University of Stellenbosch. I was born in Zimbabwe and spent all my formative years there. I am a Shona with both rural and urban insights, having been both an active and passive participant and observer in many Shona cultural and religious activities. Although I rely more on literary resources than field work, I am able to write about what I have experienced throughout my whole life.

My experience as an African and African reality pushed my theology and my politics to the left and I view myself as a "radical African Christian". While an undergraduate student at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe, I took a course with Dr. H. Mugabe on African Biblical interpretation. My interpretive eyes were opened as never before as I studied the Bible. I developed an interest in literary biblical studies and over these years I have been thinking about developing a study appropriate to Africans. It was within this context that I decided to specialize in the interpretation of the New Testament within an African context. Dr. J. Botha of the University of Stellenbosch suggested An African Response to *The Postmodern Bible* as my possible theme for my Master's thesis. I accepted the challenge and in preparation for this thesis I spent time attending seminars and classes at the University of Stellenbosch. I have also carried research among the Baptist Theological

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Seminary community where I teach and in and around Masvingo which is my home town. All this, coupled with my continued interest in the role of an African reader in literary studies, pushed me into the direction of this thesis.

These are the salient points of my social location and I cannot escape their influence when I read. What I can attempt is to guard against the danger of reading texts mainly by maintaining an awareness of how my Shona culture affects how I read and by embracing the idea that an awareness of reading from outside one's culture enriches interpretation. By my interaction with Euro-American and other African responses to postmodernity, I hope to escape or expose some of my own blind spots and to shed new light on how biblical readers in my culture might see in postmodernity. The goal is to read as African readers in dialogue with Euro-Americans.

In this thesis I hope to advance the cause of what Patte refers to as "ethically responsible biblical criticism" which consciously moves away from a model of reading the Bible that refuses to take seriously: first, the unavoidable influence of the real reader's social location and second, the harmful effects that culturally insensitive scholarship can produce (Patte 1995:40-65).

The modern world view dominated the scene for a long time. However, it appears that its dominance is in the decline. To understand postmodernity some attention is given to describing modernity. Chapter two provides a description of the contours of modernity and an evaluation of the causes for its decline in order to adequately understand the phenomenon of postmodernity.

Because of the demise of modernity, it is important to ascertain what alternative paradigms are emerging in its place. Chapter three presents an introduction and description of selected contours associated with postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* in order to gain some understanding in the philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations of postmodernists.

Faced with the need to define themselves, Africans are led to place both modernity and postmodernity in a new context and critically evaluate then the possible relevance for and impact on them. How does postmodernity formulated for a people of Euro-American cultural and social milieu become effective and relevant in an African cultural and social milieu? What is an African worldview? Chapter four provides the Shona religious worldview as a background against which to mirror the relevance of postmodernity for

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Africans, especially the Shona people. These three chapters form the descriptive section of this thesis.

These chapters also provide a theoretical framework for the comparative section of this thesis in chapter five which compares postmodernity and the Shona religious worldview to determine its possible relevance for African people. The fulcrum of chapter five and indeed the whole thesis is to articulate a theoretical instrumentation which answers to the crucial question of how postmodernity formulated for Euro-Americans become relevant and effective for Africans.

How can a postmodern critique of modernity help the African Churches become authentic, contextually-appropriate hermeneutical communities of the gospel? What practical challenges are identifiable if the bright side of postmodernity is incorporated into the life of African Churches. Chapter six provides the evaluative section of this thesis which evaluates the significance of postmodernity, as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* , for African Churches. The conclusion offers a synoptic evaluation of the argument in this thesis.

1.4 Explanation of Terms

The terms used in this thesis need some clarification. Though most of the terms are quite clear, they need to be explained in order to avoid confusion and to convey a better perspective. The terms to be explained are "African", "Shona", "Shona religion", and "Postmodern".

1.4.1 African

The epithet "African" relates to a large continent offering great diversities in terms of peoples, cultures, temperament, ect. Africa is a polyethnic continent as well as polyracial. It is not easy to delineate the culture of the one fairly homogeneous group of the Shona. Therefore, it is more difficult to proceed to the ethnically complex nation of Zimbabwe. It follows that it is infinitely more difficult to talk of African culture. I, therefore, submit that one cannot describe "African culture" but only some African cultures. I wish to submit a description of only one African culture, the Shona culture. I refuse to pretend to representativeness which is not there. Furthermore, I also admit that I am presenting a selective picture, i.e. stressing traditional elements or new elements, or attempting to present

a balance between them, which will also be of a subjective nature. Therefore the epithet "African" in this thesis should be understood as refering mainly to the Shona people of Zimbabwe.

1.4.2 Shona

Shona people are the indigenous peoples living in central, northern and southeastern Zimbabwe and parts of Mozambique (Beach 1980). Their language, also called Shona, is one of the Bantu languages. The word "Shona" was first used by linguists and missionaries when referring to an agglomeration of dialects found in Zimbabwe and parts of Zambia, Mozambique and Botswana (Doke 1954:21).

Shona is composed of six clusters of dialects: Karanga in the South, Zezura in the north and center, Ndau in the southeast, Mamjika in the northeast, Kalanga in the west and Korekore in the north (Kahari 1990:70). Almost ninety percent of Zimbabweans speak the Shona language.

1.4.3 Shona Religion

Shona religion refers to the traditional religion of the Shona people. It is one of the many traditional African religions. The Shona traditional religion refers to the indigenous African religion which was practiced by Shona people before the advent of Christianity and is still being practiced today. Like other African religions, the Shona religion is community orientated.

Traditional religion belongs to the ethos of the people and is orally communicated to the youth by the living carrier of tradition (Booth 1976:816-894). Tradition is not only communicated verbally but it is also observable. Tradition is integrated within the lifestyle of the community and belongs to the phenomena of the people in their reflections on the past.

It is important to note that, whereas tradition has its strong roots in the past, it is not confined to the past. It is impregnated within the present and the future as well. It is an identity complex upon which succeeding generation must inevitably rely. The tradition through stories, songs, plays, dances and training enables each new generation to participate in its reality.

The Shona religion belongs to the matrix of communal life. It is practiced in the community and its beliefs and practices reflect the ethos of a particular community (Boundillon 1987). As such it is anthropocentric with its main focus on human values. There is no demarcation between what is considered to be sacred and secular. Thus, the Shona religion is holistic. Physical life and the world of phenomena are dimensions of faith and belong to life as a unity. God is viewed to be the source of life and ancestors are accepted as being his vice-regents. The Shona religion is not systematized, credulized or rationalized. It is a living event within the structure and functions of society and features within the dynamic processes of adaptation to change. It also contributes to the ethos of community life, both catalyzed within the "chemistry" of the people and as that which is normative within the mindset and unifying worldview of the Shona (Mugabe 1993:23).

1.4.4 Postmodern

Postmodern is almost an empty epithet which is forever chasing a meaning. There are many competing schools of thought filing for a patent on the term postmodern. In my effort to indicate how the term might be investigated, I will focus on postmodernity as expressed in the book, *The Postmodern Bible* . The Bible and Culture Collective (Yale University Press, 1995). This postmodernity can be called literary and philosophical postmodernity or might be called deconstructive postmodernity. It is the deconstruction of the Cartesian-Newtonian metanarrative of modernity (pp. 10-11). It looks upon the subject as decentered, as inseparably involved with the unconscious and the irrational, and as inherently shaped through particular social relations, language and culture. Belief in historical and cultural variability, fallibility, the impossibility of getting beyond language to reality (p. 124), the fragmentary and particular nature of all understanding, the pervasive corruption of knowledge by power and domination (pp. 140-141), and the futility of the search for certain or sure foundations and the need for a pragmatic approach to the whole matter, characterizes this postmodernity.

It believes that the idea of reality itself is a fiction, a construction of the imagination. The logocentric tradition from Plato to positivism of the correspondence between language and reality has been overturned (pp. 122-123). It entails the "death of God" (p. 202), the displacement of the sovereignty of subjectivity, the dismantling of Cartesian construction under the sovereignty of the subject, the disappearance of the self and the end of history (p.64).

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Chapter 2

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MODERNITY AND ITS DECLINE

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Modernity refers to the period in the West that stretches from the European Renaissance in the sixteenth century to the present. Modernity is the guiding assumption and primary project of the cultural leaders of the Euro-American world from the mid-seventeenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. But even then, several noted scholars questioned the relevance of modernity in view of significant events and observations associated with the twentieth century. After providing a definition and discussion of some selected contours of modernity, I will also discuss the reasons for its decline, out of which postmodernity emerged.

2.1 Modernity

Modernity is believed to have come into existence with the Renaissance and the Reformation (Bosch 1991:263). Bosch asserts,

> Through a series of events ...the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation (which destroyed the centuries-old unity and therefore power of the Western Church), and the like ... the church was gradually eliminated as a factor for validating the structure of society. Validation now passed directly from God to the king and from there to the people. During the Age of Revolution (primarily in the eighteenth century) the real power of kings and nobles was also destroyed. The ordinary people now saw themselves as being, in some measure, related to God directly, no longer by way of king or nobility and church. We find here the early stirring of democracy (Hunter 1992:26-27; Bosch 1991:263).

The birth of modernity, therefore, came into being in the Enlightenment (Holland 1989:10). The Enlightenment through its sanction of reason as the only sufficient epistemology, became the intellectual base for modernity. The Enlightenment excluded God from society's validation structure (Bosch 1991:263). The critical contribution of modernity was the paradigm shift away from the idea of truth coming from the outside, to truth which could be discovered within the social order via science and reason. In this framework God was deposed as a sound demand to influence (Gelder 1991:411).

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Euro-Americans discovered that they could ignore God and the church for answers to life's questions and looked to the sub-human level of being to find confirmation and substantiation for life. They began to look purposefully at their environment instead of beyond it (Smith 1991:6). In the public arena the craving to know and comprehend the objective, physical universe prevailed over interests in ontology and cosmology.

Hunter (1992:27-28) maintains that Nicholas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud greatly influenced modernity's thought patterns. To quote from Hunter:

> Copernicus and Galileo, by discovering the structure of the solar system, challenged the Church's traditional understanding of the cosmos. Ptolemy had placed the earth at the center of the universe, with the sun revolving around it. But Copernicus and Galileo demonstrated that the earth revolves around the sun, and the earth's rotation on an axis gives us our days and nights; the cosmology assumed from the New Testament through the Middle Ages was now ludicrous.

> Newton's theory of gravity challenged the doctrine of providence, as traditionally understood. Prior to Newton, people assumed that God's providential hand kept the moon, planets and stars in place. Newton's principia demonstrated, mathematically, that the universe's cohesion could be explained by his theory of gravity and for many people God was edged out of the providence business. The long-term effect of the Newtonian revolution was even greater as people came to see the universe as a self enclosed system, or a "machine" that did not require "God" to explain or manage it.

> Darwin's theory of evolution challenged the doctrine of the creation and nature of humankind ... as traditionally understood. Darwin's "Origin of Species", with theories of natural selection, survival of the fittest and progressive evolution, made it possible for people to understand their species in a very different way ... as rational animals, without the dignity and purpose assumed in the biblical doctrine of creation.

> Marx's writings provided an alternative to the traditional Christian (sic) understanding of the goal of history. Marx seems to have retained the Indeo-Christian structure of history, but he substituted for Christianity's promised Kingdom of God a promised economic utopia.

Freud wrote a question mark over religious belief and religious experience, charging that belief in God and experiences of God could be explained psychologically and thereby be explained away as "illusion" (Hunter 1992:27-28).

The cosmological transformation demanded by these discoveries were earthshaking and provocative in theological and philosophical circles. People like Rene Descartes and others also added a series of disturbing philosophical statements (Ahlstrom 1972:351). Latourette comments on Darwin's contribution to modernity as:

> The evolutionary hypothesis associated with the name of Charles Robert Darwin seemed to render absolute the story of the creation of living things, including man (sic), in the first chapters of Genesis and thus cast doubts upon the reliability of the Bible. Stretching out as they did the history of the universe and of the earth to time dimensions which numbered the imagination, astronomy and geology discredited the chronology which the learned Archbishop Usher had worked out in the middle of the seventeenth century on the basis of what he believed that he found in the Bible and which placed the creation of the world at 4.000 B.C. Since this had been printed in the margin of the King James or authorized version of the English Bible, it seemed to many readers to be part of the scriptures and in the minds of some of them the latter suffered in credibility (Latourette 1975:1070-1071).

Feuerbach's thought and writings also influenced modernity. He developed a psychogenic explanation of religion. His conclusion was that religious consciousness exhibited in alienated form the inner core of human reality that is, a fantasy projection of the human ideal essence. His contention was that "the secret of theology is nothing else than anthropology ... the knowledge of God nothing else than a knowledge of man (sic)" (Feuerbach 1957:206-207). Therefore, theology is anthropology. There is no God. There are only humans. God is the personification of the infinity within human nature projected on the universe. The knowledge of God is selfknowledge.

Because of these perspectives, science became the new metaphysical realism: the fountainhead of ultimate and objective truth (Anderson 1990:72). Modernity was thought of as the society which realized the Enlightenment enterprise, in which scientific understanding regulates all social interactions (Callinieos 1990:32). It is not a doctrine but a campaign for world renovation grounded on presuppositions which are informed by the achievements of the new science (Ahlstrom 1972:352). "Modernity is less a time than a conceptual place, an ideological tone. It is less a distinct period than an attitude" (Oden 1990:44). Several

significant conceptual and ideological attitudes of modernity are discussed in the following section.

2.2 Contours of Modernity

The specific phenomena of modernity are: an emphasis on reason, a subject-object dichotomy, a non-teleological perspective on reality, a unilinear progress, secularisation, a religion-society disengagement, and freedom and equality. I will describe these phenomena to provide insights into modernity's philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations against which postmodernity is protesting.

2.2.1 Emphasis on Reason

The Enlightenment was grounded upon the principle of the omnicompetence of human reason. Reason superseded revelation as the judge of truth. Reason shared the platform with other principles, forming a unified whole at the heart of the Enlightenment mindset, but it remained the first and most important principle of the Enlightenment (Grenz 1996:68-71).

The Age of Reason placed great emphasis on human capabilities, but in the Enlightenment understanding, reason comprised more than just a human faculty. The concept recalled the assertations that a fundamental order and structure lies within all of reality and is evidenced in the working of the human mind. Enlightenment theorists assumed that a correspondence between the structure of the world and the structure of the human mind enables the mind to discern the structure inherent in the external world (Grenz 1996:68).

Therefore, the Enlightenment principle of reason presumed a human ability to gain cognition of the fundamental order of the whole universe. Belief in the objective rationality of the universe gave the Enlightenment theorists confidence that the laws of nature are intelligible and that the world is capable of being transformed and subdued by human activity. Their commitment to the consonance of the rational world and the workings of the human mind made the exercise of critical reason so important to these theorists (Grenz 1996:68).

The defining feature of rationalism and modernity is a loss of transcendence. When transcendent explications of the universe are no longer persuasive, rationalism is a continuous option for people.

> The fundamental assumption of naturalism is that nature is all there is and that any existing reality … from subatomic particles to the stars and planets to living organism to human life to mind … is a natural part of the spatiotemporal process in the universe. All things come to be and pass away solely from natural causes (Cunningham 1988:77-78).

The naturalist explains all things, including human life, in terms of natural laws. Human reason was viewed as natural … as derived from the order of nature … and thus independent of the norms of traditions or presuppositions. Reason was a heritage for all humanity in equal measure.

A humanistic emphasis.

The leading Enlightenment theorists had great confidence in humanity. Humanists were optimistic about the human condition and the scope of human achievements (Roseman 1992:48). Humanists taught that people were good by nature. They were concerned with life here and now, not some "hypothetical existence hereafter" (Cragg 1987:244). People must strive to accomplish good life in this world. They believed that the main destination of people is happiness in this world. They also believed that rightly disciplined and employed, human rational powers provide a means for solving life's problems and thereby attaining happiness. They had so much faith in the potential of people to influence the future toward a better life for all the human race. They believed that the essential truths of the preceding views are so self-evident and that people are so responsive to such evidence that unilinear progress in human happiness is unavoidable (Ahlstrom 1972:357).

A deistic emphasis.

The deists believed that God was abstract and remote. God stands outside the drama of human history. He cannot be linked to anything that happens on this planet. God built the machine and set it in motion, but is now runs its predetermined course in complete freedom of God (Gragg 1987:237). The deists rejected revelation, dispensed with the Bible and the church. God disappeared into the abstraction of "a first cause" (Gragg 1987:237). Because God authored creation, natural revelation was considered sufficient for religious experience. The idea that God created the universe but left it to run on its own, pushed God and religion to the margin of intellectual discourse. God was not ruled out by modernity. It merely referred the question to reality's pattern as revealed by reason. The being of God came to

"stand or fall on whether reason, surveying the order of nature, endorsed it" (Smith 1991:11).

2.2.2 Subject-object dichotomy

The Enlightenment separated humans from their environment and enabled them to examine the material world from the vantage point of scientific objectivity. Enlightenment has been one in which "human consciousness is characterized by a strong separation ... between the human sphere and the sphere of nature" (Liechty 1990:26). The sense of ontological continuity between the knower and the known is destroyed (Peters 1985:223).

Descartes divided the universe into the domain of matter and the domain of mind or spirit. He distinguished the thinking subject from the world of physical objects and cultivated the principle of doubting the truth of one's perceptions and conceptions (Williams 1967:344-355). The sciences were concerned with matter and physical objects, and developed rational mathematical and mechanical models to account for the behaviour of entities in the material domain. The domain of the mind or spirit was totally different from that of matter. The mind was the realm in which divine revelation and theological authority prevailed. As a result of this a horizontal dualism was established in the Euro-American cultural psyche (Miller 1989:3).

The Enlightenment divided all reality into thinking subjects and objects that could be analyzed, controlled and exploited (Bosch 1991:264).

> The *res cognitans* (humanity and the human mind) could research the *rest extensa* (the entire non-human world). Nature ceased to be "creation" and was no longer people's teacher, but the object of their analysis. The emphasis was no longer on the whole, but on the parts, which were assigned priority over the whole. Even human beings were no longer regarded as whole entities, but could be looked at and studied from a variety of perceptions/perspectives: as thinking beings (philosophy), as social beings (sociology), as religious beings (religious studies) as physical beings (biology, physiology, anatomy and related sciences), as cultural beings (cultural anthropology) and so forth. In this way even the *res cognitans* could become *res extensa* and as such the object of analysis ... The physical world could be manipulated and exploited (Bosch 1991:264).

Everything objective is now understood by the model of a machine, as an impersonal mechanism. The human being was treated also as a mechanism. The scientific theory was greatly reductionistic (Smith 1991:152). The higher was interpreted in terms of the lower. Reductionism is:

> The belief that human activities can be reduced to and explained by the behaviour of lower animals, and that these in turn can be reduced to the physical laws that govern inanimate matter (Smith 1991:201).

The parts were, in essence, more important than the whole. A reductionistic approach to reality tends to fragment life, promote individualism and lead to alienation.

2.2.3 Non-teleological perspective

The Enlightenment brought with it the elimination of purpose as a component of scientific study and introduced direct causality as the clue to grasp reality (Bosch 1991:265). Modernity dropped all references to purpose and viewed every process in terms of cause and effect only (Newbigin 1986:24). The scientific theory operated on the assumption of a simple mechanistic, billiard-ball-type causality. The cause determine the effect. If the cause was known, then the effect could be explicated. To have discovered the cause of something is to have explicated it. There was no point to involve purpose as an explication (Newbigin 1986:24).

The scientific theory was completely deterministic since unchanging and mathematically stable laws guaranteed the desired outcome. All that mattered was sufficient knowledge of the laws of cause and effect. "The human mind becomes the master and initiator which meticulously plans ahead for every eventuality and all processes can be fully comprehended and controlled" (Bosch 1991:265).

In physics and astronomy teleology has no place. All the movements of tangible bodies and the change in the visible world could be explicated without allusion to purpose and in terms of efficient cause. The rotation of the planets showed not the planlessness of the divine will but the uniform operation of the laws of inertia and gravitation.

2.2.4 Unilinear progress

The Enlightenment put a high premium on progress, expansion, advance and modernization (Bosch 1992:3). After discovering that the universe extended beyond imagination, people began to feel that expansion itself was a liberation (Buardini 1956:49). Planet Earth was no longer viewed as the center of the universe. The unexplored lands of the world were a challenge to meet and subjugate.

The Euro-American nation took ownership of the planet and introduced the system of colonies and development programs in these colonies (Bosch 1991:265). The goal was to use the accumulation of knowledge generated by individuals working freely and creatively for the pursuit of human freedom and enrichment. "The scientific domination of nature promised freedom from scarcity, want and the arbitrariness of natural calamity" (Harvey 1989:12).

In pursuit of progress, modernists viewed all things in instrumental terms (Liechty 1990:26). By utilizing the power of nature and exploiting nature's raw materials, modern nation states became very rich. The pursuit of progress intensified the sharp dichotomy between the subject and the object. This mode of producing wealth destroyed any link between human and nature.

2.2.5 Secularisation

Secularisation is equated with worldliness. The birth of science and scientific theory are equated with secularisation. This link was made because society viewed science as the new Messiah with all the answers (Meland 1966:70). More emphasis was put on science as a novel religion. The development of empiricism and rationalization via science were the incipient forms of secularisation (Merton 1957:579). Secularisation is viewed as the recognition and maintenance of the worldliness of the world (Smith 1968:29). Secularisation peeled the world of its transcendent quality. The sacred was superseded by the secular. Secularisation is defined as the historical process by which the world is de-divinized as far as human consciousness is concerned (Leon 1965:7) People are no longer conscious of God in the cosmic order and of God's direct activity (Leon 1965:8). God was removed from the world in this kind of society.

The popular view of the decline of religion is associated with the advent of science and technology (Cox 1975:91-92). A certain school of thought believed that the loss of community contributed to the secularisation of society (Wilson 1976:259-276). This loss of community is grounded on the concepts of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Lyon 1987:7,18). In the former one observes a spontaneous organic social relationship characterized by strong reciprocal bonds of sentiment and kinship within a community. In the latter one observes a rationally developed mechanistic type of social relationship characterized by impersonally contracted associations between persons. In *gesellschaft* there is little or no identification with the community. Society moved adrift from the closed, dependent community to the pluralistic, independent society. This process was defined as "societalization", which means life is largely enmeshed and organized, not locally but societally (Wilson 1982:154). Religion served well in the former context. "The simpler culture, traditional societies and past communities ... appear to have been profoundly preoccupied with the supernatural" (Wilson 1982:150). As humanity moves toward societalization, religion loses its grip on people. Since the strength of religion was in the local group, the decline of the latter means the decline of the former (Lyon 1984:17). Religious thinking, praxis and institutions sprang in the local communal group. As society changed to an urban, technological, fragmented group, religion lost its social significance because of its imbeddedness in *gemeinschaft*.

2.2.6 Religion-society disengagement

David Bosch comments, "It was contended that scientific knowledge was factual, value-free and neutral" (Bosch 1991:266). It sprang from such assumption that all true knowledge was factual, value-free and neutral. Over against facts were values which were not objectively true and the holding of which were a matter of taste (Peters 1985:223). The dichotomy between the world of facts and the world of values was introduced through the emphasis upon the need for knowledge of the objective world and the dichotomy between the subject and the objective world.

> Liberalism produces a progressive privatization and marginalization of religious energies in order to expand the automony of the secular, advanced by science and technology (Holland 1989:14)

The scientific theory emphasized objectivity and in turn relegated personal feelings, moral values, religious institutions and aesthetic judgements to the domain of subjective ones.

Science and technology became the religion of the public domain, while individualistic pietism became the religion of the private domain. With the passage of time, religion was relegated to the domain of the private world of opinion and divorced from the domain of the public world of facts. Religion became largely differentiated from the rest of society (McGuire 1987:235).

> Religion tends to embrace smaller and smaller portions of social life. Originally, it pervades everything; everything social is religious ... Then little by little, political, economic, scientific functions free themselves from the religious functions (Durkheim 1949:169).

The continual removal of the various functions traditionally associated with religious institutions and subsequent incorporation of these functions into diverse segments of social life, is defined as "institutional differentiation".

Differentiation cannot eliminate religion in any form. Religion remains a viable entity within society. It is immortal. But religion no longer controls the core functions of the society and is no longer as influential as before. The influence of religion is not through "organizational jurisdiction ... but through value-committed and motivational commitments of individuals" (Parsons 1970:307).

2.2.7 Freedom and Equality

The Enlightenment regarded people as emancipated, autonomous, individuals, no longer under the guardianship of superiors (Bosch 1991:267). The Enlightenment promised freedom and progress for all people. The Middle Ages prioritized community over the individual. The Enlightenment prioritized the individual over the community. The individuals became important and interesting in and to themselves. Secularity defined identity in terms of individualism. The community is an inhibition to be overcome in attaining personal freedom (Waters 1986:114).

Privileged persons and classes were deposed. People were born equal and had equal rights. These were derived from nature not from religion. Personal freedom equalled the sacred in the secularized modern world (Peters 1985:223)

> The rise to prominence of the individual in modern thought was not unconnected with the epistemological changes instigated by Descartes. In the Middle Ages authority had

been a central epistemological category. Thought in the modern period might be characterized as flight from traditional authority (the Church, the philosopher, the Bible) and as relocation of authority within the individual. Thus epistemological authority was granted to the individual's foundational beliefs (Murphy and McClendon 1989:196)

Freedom is believed to imply being left alone by others, not having other people's values, ideas or styles of life forced upon you (Bellah 1985:23). It implies allowing people to be their own in the sense that they have defined who they are. It is the ability to live wherever one chooses, do whatever one wants and believe whatever one wants.

The modern individuals want to be free to think, to behave and govern themselves as they wish. Hierarchy after hierarchy has fallen to the forces of egalitarianism because:

> All hierarchies are believed to be illegitimate and subject to dismantlement in order to embrace the freedom of the increasingly autonomous individuals and his or her self interest group (Peters 1985:223).

People contend that to be enlightened was to be "liberated from the authority of repressive institutions and traditions and most particularly from the institutions and traditions of religion" (Neuhans 1988:1).

The craving for freedom from traditional patterns of authority was closely linked to the appeal to reason and to natural law (Gragg 1987:237). Organized religion promoted supernatural stories in order to keep people shrouded in darkness and to retain social control. Reason subjugated superstition and supernaturalism. Reason challenged the principle of supernatural authority, rejected divine revelation, flouted at miracles and attacked the principal doctrines of faith (Gragg 1987:245; McGrath 1994:84-86).

2.3 Decline of Modernity

After several years of observation, scientific research, sociological analysis and philosophical reflection, noted scholars have declared that the pervasiveness of modernity is coming to a close (Allen 1989, 1990:12–31). Several reasons for this conclusion are explicated below.

2.3.1 Pre-eminence of reason challenged

The grounds which gave preeminence to reason is being challenged now. The central assumptions of Newtonianism, which supported modernity, are being challenged. The world is now understood to be relative, indeterminate and participatory. Existence is totally relative. Nothing exists in and of itself. To be is to be related. James Miller asserts:

> In a Newtonian World, it was possible to conceive of absolute contexts of space and time within which an object could be isolated. But with Einstein's development of relativity physics, common-sense notions of the absoluteness of space and time have been abandoned. It can no longer be taken for granted that measurements of either distance or duration in one frame of reference will be identical to those taken in another (Miller 1989:9-10).

The development of quantum theory has made it evident that certain aspects are coupled in such a way that to determine one aspect is to disable one from determining the other. This finding is expressed by Heisenberg in his principle of uncertainty or indeterminacy (Heisenberg 1962; Miller 1989:9-10). It seems that at the heart of reality is an uncertainty or indeterminacy which no amount or quality of observation can overcome.

This scientific conclusion contradicts modernity's presupposition that the world is open to full and complete description. It also proposes that at the heart of reality is an immeasurable mystery, an unpredictableness and that even the future cannot be fully determined. One cannot be certain what the outcome will be beforehand (Bosch 1991:350). The world is understood as operating with law and chance, with order and chaos (Gelder 1991:411-412).

Recent development in philosophy and cosmology actually point toward God (Allen 1989:3). The order and existence of the world pose real questions that scientists cannot solve and cause them to realize that God is the sort of reality that would solve them.

Hans Küng asserts that a "holistic way of thinking has become established", one that has undercut the classical mechanistic physics of modernity (Küng 1991:13). The world is now viewed as an unbroken wholeness in which every part is enfolded "in the whole and the whole in every part in such a way that meaning and values are integral aspects of the world as well as humans" (Bohn 1988:65-68). The reductionistic tendencies of modernity are passing away.

2.3.2 Progress' realized costs

Belief in unilinear progress has led to the demise of modernity (Allen 1989:4-5). Science and technology so improved life that they led to a belief in unilinear progress. People believed that science and education would free them from social enslavement and vulnerability to nature (Allen 1989:4-5). This is an ideal assumption because war, crime, disease and hunger are within the present world (Gelder 1991:411). Two major events tarnished the optimism of unilinear progress - two wars and the Holocaust.

Two world wars ruined the belief in unilinear progress toward peace and prosperity (Küng 1991:11). Within forty years two world wars ravaged much of the earth's surface and several local wars were also waged. Never before had so many people been engaged simultaneously in war which might be called internecine because it was really a civil war within the entirety of the human race (Latourette 1975:1351). The outbreak of the first world war in 1914 disrupted the cosy complacency of Euro-American bourgeoisie (Smart 1990:21). The two world wars exposed a series of problems inherent with/in rapid technological change and the persistence of political and economic inequalities. These problems raised a corporate awareness that Euro-American civilization could in essence destroy itself. Toynbee asserts:

> The discovery of a know-how for tapping the titanic force of atomic energy and applying this to the destruction of human lives and works had brought home to the imagination of Mankind (sic) in the mass some inkling of a tragic lesion in the affairs of men (sic) ... A geometrically progressing technology had now armed a perpetually reborn Original Sin with a weapon potent enough to enable a sinful mankind (sic) to annihilate itself (Toynbee 1954:422).

The demises of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are testimonies of the destructive side of modernity (Holland 1989:11). The devastation of modern warfare indicates that modernity came with a very high price tag. The events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki make any belief in unilinear progress questionable (Roseman 1992:5). Several other modern events such as the rise of Nazism (Roseman 1992:5), concentration camps (Küng 1991:5-6) and genocide (Roseman 1992:5) - especially the Holocaust, made any belief in the idea of progress questionable.

The idea that knowledge is inherently good, was dismissed by the Holocaust. People are now aware that there is no inherent link between knowledge and its beneficial use (Allen 1989:5). Scientists do not control the uses to which their knowledge is put. The Holocaust

demonstrated that technological and scientific advancement can be a tool of destruction rather than a tool to better society. Hans Küng asserts that:

> Auschwitz is a place where modern science collapsed under the lies of propaganda, democracy was defeated by the control of the mass through seduction and terror of one man and his party, technology resulted in the murder of millions and industry in the extermination of an entire people (Küng 1988:23).

The plausibility of modernity came to a halt in the Holocaust. The assumption of moral progress and the sense of tolerance, love and brotherhood came to a halt in the Jewish experience of the Holocaust (Greenberg 1978:457). Auschwitz was a world dominated by a "logic of destruction" (Fackenheim 1989:130). Dying was not what it was in other worlds. Although the life of the soldier was not worth much, the state did not order him/her to die, but to serve. In contrast, the final goal of the Auschwitz prisoner was death, "that of an animal intended for slaughter" (Fachenheim 1989:130). Modernity was capable of both demonism and liberation.

2.3.3 Consequences of subject-object dichotomy

Modernity was characterized by a strong separation between the human sphere and the sphere of nature. This modern consciousness of historicism and individualism has necessitated the development of capitalism. The capitalist mode of production created an environment in which wealth was fabricated at a level never before seen in human history. In no previous time did people understand the material abundance available to them, hidden in the sphere of nature. By harnessing the power of nature and exploiting nature's raw materials, modern nation states became very rich (Liechty 1990;26). Capitalism has "contained and aggravated social stratification in the distribution of labour and wealth" (Liechty 1990:27). A gulf between the rich and the poor appeared. Rich countries became richer and the poor still poorer (Bosch 1991:357; Roseman 1992:5). The use of science and technology was a "mixed blessing" (Piet 1981:26). On the one side, modernity has seen the world become a more comfortable place for some. On the other side, modernity has witnessed an increase in the poverty of others. "While some has too much, others have too little. While some watch their weight, others starve" (Latourette 1975:1065; Piet 1981:26). These economic and social dislocations have given rise to family crisis, exploitation and oppression in the conditions of modernity (Guiness 1990:283-288).

Modernity, which viewed all things mainly in instrumental terms, has finally put people at war with each other and at war with the natural order. The dominance over and objectification of nature and the subjecting of the physical world to the human mind and will had disastrous results. In stead of liberating people the Enlightenment theory has enslaved them. Bosch asserts that:

> First the machine replaced the human slave, then humans were turned into slaves of the machine. Production became the highest goal of human being, resulting in humans having to worship at the altar of the autonomy of technology (Bosch 1991:355).

Individual self-interest was pursued at the risk of destroying the fabric of society and ecology. The technological innovations of modernity have degraded the earth by treating it as an insensitive object. "Now the earth is dying under our very hands. We have damaged the ozone layer" (Bosch 1991:355).

The ill-founded belief that science could solve all problems confronted the obvious incapacity of modern science to solve the main problems of the contemporary world. Modernity has not proven to be an adequate guide for living or for managing a society (Roseman 1992:10).

2.3.4 Non-exclusivity of science and religion

In spite of the common perception that science excludes religion, it is growingly being realized that this is not the case. The Christian religion was a main stimulus and ingredient in the origins of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century (Allen 1990:xiii). The recent findings of science, especially in cosmology, are consonant with the Christian conviction that the order of the world is the result of the divine. Science cannot explain everything (Allen 1990:xiii).

There has been a switch away from the modern perspective which gave a dominant place to scientific language over the language of faith (Burnham 1989:x). Revelations in contemporary physics have undermined the epistemological paradigms of science and brought modernity to a close. "Scientific propositions about the essence of matter are at best enlightened approximations" (Burnham 1989:x). Science has ceased to be the final fountainhead of hard facts (Anderson 1990:159). Because science ceased to have correct answers, it is no longer epistemologically superior to religion. All human experience is

shaped, molded and constituted by cultural and linguistic forms (Lindbeck 1989:76). Lindbeck also averts that, "science is one of those cultural linguistic systems; religion is another. Neither is epistemologically superior to the other" (Lindbeck 1989:76). Subsequently, the cultural hegemony of science has ended.

A consequence of the rise of quantum physics relates to the issue of objectivity. From the modern perspective, the sciences deal with knowledge which is derived from detached impersonal observation of the facts of nature. Contemporary physics has shown effectively that, while there can be a relative objectivity in the practice of science, there is no observation in which the object observed and the subject observing are absolutely separate. Scientific theory yields an extremely restricted kind of knowledge.

> There are four things science cannot get its hands on: 1) Science cannot deal with intrinsic and normative values; science can only deal with instrumental values; 2) Science cannot deal with ultimate and existential meanings. Science cannot answer, "What is the meaning of it all?" Science cannot define the kind of meaning we have in mind when we say something is meaningful; 3) Science cannot deal with purpose or teleology; 4) Science cannot measure quality; quality is immeasurable (Smith 1989:147-148).

Moreover, the scientist's enterprise is not value-face (Newbigin 1986:77). The scientist undertakes the experiment only after a preliminary act of faith - faith that the enterprise is worthwhile. Even the facts are interpreted facts (Bosch 1991:359) and that interpretation is conditioned by the scientist's plausibility structure. The plausibility structure is dependent upon the authority of the tradition within the scientific community. The authority of the tradition is maintained by free assent of its members.

> Even science ... is no longer seen as a collection of objective universal truths, but rather as a set research traditions carried by particular communities of inquirers and unintelligible outside the lived practices of such communities (Bellah 1989:76).

Scientists practise personal judgement before undertaking experiments. There is a close parallel between the ways in which the authority of tradition works within the scientific community and within the Christian community (Newbigin 1989:39-51). Thus the dichotomy previously drawn in modernity between facts and values begins to disappear.

2.3.5 Immortality of religion

Modernity is secular. Secularisation tends to strip the world of its transcendent quality. The sacred was superseded by the secular in modernity. The standard secularisation hypothesis held by many is that religion, especially Christian religion, decreases as modernity increases. This hypothesis persisted unquestioned for decades. But recently this hypothesis was challenged. Science and technology have failed to solve all problems of the world. There are causes to suggest a need for re-examining the secularisation theories of the past (Lyon 1985:228-243).

The standard secularisation hypothesis have proven inadequate. The popular idea of secularisation is that religion declines with the onset of modernity. Recently this hypothesis was challenged. Science has not solved all the problems of the world. Because of misapplication of science in society, the cognitive authority of science has "taken some severe knocks" (Lyon 1985:233). Humanism has emerged as the dominant force. It is not correct to view the passage from traditional society to modernity as a movement from a sacred to a secular age. (Seidman 1985:125). People thought that religion (Christianity in particular) would sooner or later die out. But the opposite seems to be true (Bosch 1991:352-353). Religion is alive and well, even flourishing in contemporary society. "The death of religion expected in late modernity has not taken place" (Küng 1988:16). People who adopted the view that religion is dead were mistaken and are criticised severely.

> There is little indication in recent decades that … religion has undergone what might be termed secularisation in any absolute sense … religious commitment is as strong as it was 35 to 40 years ago (Wuthnow 1989:15).

Secularisation theorists have a hard time finding proofs for a linear religion-in-decline theorem. Sociologists have amassed statistical material that showed the perpetuity and often increased vigor of religions belief in any society which has issued along the road of rationalization, industrialization and urbanization (Newbigin 1989:212). Conservative and evangelical elements have flourished, religious belief has become a serious factor in public politics and new religious movements have appeared in large numbers.

> Never before has any civilization openly made available to its populace such a smorgasbord of realities. Never before has a communications system like the contemporary mass media made information about religion … all religions … available to so many people. Never before has a society allowed its people to

become consumers of belief and allowed belief … all beliefs … to become merchandise (Anderson 1990:188).

The world has more religions than ever before (Anderson 1990:187). The development of new religious movements showed that religion is adaptive to new societal structures.

Modernity's belief that religion would decline was totally mistaken. Modernity did not offer sufficient nourishment for the human spirit (Newbigin 1989:213). The Enlightenment's limited perception of rationality with its refusal to answer or inability to answer the *why?* question, has proven itself to be an insufficient base upon which to build one's life.

> Our sciences and other ways of gaining knowledge reveal a great deal about the order and structure of the physical universe, the movement of history, the organization of societies and the working of the individual psyche . But none of these wonderful features of the human spirit (sic) are concerned with our significance (Allen 1989:xv).

The status of religion is not high in many people's awareness and practices in Euro-America, but that does not mean the disappearance of the religious theme from human life. Although repressed from consciousness, it is present as the need to give meaning to life.

The definition of religion is significant, because it affects the whole direction of the secularisation question. Is religion experience, beliefs or attendance in an institution? The equation of religion with religious institutions is problematic for secularisation theorists. To them religion and religious institutions are synonymous (Johnstone 1975:254). This secularisation theory must be resisted since scholars have based their conclusions on institutional religious ideas. This leads to misinterpretations as all institutions evolved through series of declines and increases (Martin 1978:244-277).

> To define secularisation as the decline of participation in organizational religion and then to document such a decline says something in regard to organized religion, but very little about the truth and persistence of religion (Bongioranni 1984:36).

A definition of religion should be specified when analyzing secularisation theories.

The standard measurement of secularisation by various scholars have been the comparison between the past and present. Various studies of secularisation have been grounded on a naïve view of historiography. A before and after analysis is totally insufficient (Lyon 1985:235). It is an over simplification to assert that at one time society was non-industrial, rural, traditional, community-centered and religious, but now affirm that society is industrial,

urban, rational, individualistic and secular. This naïve view of the past should cease to be asserted. Modernity has fallen into the trap of thinking that once upon a time society was more religious (Lyon 1984:19). Anti-religion elements, particularly anti-Christian elements, have been around for a long time and will continue to be around for the unseen future.

2.4 Concluding remarks

Modernity was characterized by an emphasis on reason, a subject-object dichotomy, a non-teleological perspective on reality, a unilinear progress, secularisation, a religion-society disengagement and freedom and equality. Various noted scholars have declared that the pervasiveness of modernity is approaching an end. The following causes are noted for this phenomenon: the preeminence of reason is being challenged, heavy costs are associated with unilinear progress, significant negative consequences accompany a subject-object dichotomy, a non-exclusivity of science and religion and the immortality of religion.

An alternative paradigm is evolving in its place. The philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations associated with postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

POSTMODERNITY

Because of the decline in the pervasiveness of modernity, it is important to discover what alternative paradigm is evolving in its place. This chapter contains an introduction to postmodernity as expressed in the book, *The Postmodern Bible*. A description and discussion of selected contours associated with this postmodernity are provided in order to gain some insight into the philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations of postmodernity.

3.1 Description of the phenomenon

Some scholars contend that postmodernity was born in the late 1960's and 1970's (Anderson 1990:44), though postmodernism has been evolving for the past 150 years (Roseman 1992:5). The following movements are believed to have been instrumental in the shift from modernity toward postmodernity: the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the peace movement, the women's movement, the sexual freedom movement, the hippie movement, the drug scene, rock music and new religions. These movements criticised modernity boldly and bravely and educed attacks on all belief systems. A new age was born (Githin 1989:73).

Other scholars disagree about whether modernity and postmodernity overlap or are separate, whether postmodernity shows a marked break with modernity or is only its logical continuation (Aichele et al 1995:11). Giddens believes that postmodernity is a radicalisation of modernity (1990:51). Calinescu believes that postmodernity is a new face of modernity (1987:265). Waters believes that:

> Postmodern is an adequate term if it is viewed as an interim phrase ... a catch–all word to identify a growing reaction to a historical epoch characterized by Western intellectual, political and technological dominance (1986:113).

According to Waters, postmodernity is an intellectual, religious and moral reaction against modernity. On the other hand, Turner feels that postmodernity is beyond, not against modernity (1990:11).

The Postmodern Bible posture is that the evolving postmodernity represents a transition from the philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations characteristic of modernity to something distinct. Hans Küng borrows from Kuhn and calls this transitional phase a "paradigm change" in the larger context of society as a whole. Kuhn claims that scientists do not make their progress by adding one fact to another in a mechanistic, objective sort of way, but rather they leap ahead from time to time in sudden creative bursts which Kuhn calls "paradigm shifts". Major scientific advances happen when scientists shift from one mode of viewing their data to another mode of viewing it A paradigm is a social construction of reality. It is a belief system which prevails in a certain community. Kuhn writes:

> Paradigms are models from which spring 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 1970:10-11).

Kuhn writes that when paradigms change, the world changes with them. Therefore, a major paradigm shift is consonant with a leap into a new thought pattern, into a new worldview (1970:11).

The modern paradigm is in transition to an evolving postmodern paradigm in which change occurs in the whole configuration of beliefs, values, techniques, etc. shared by the members of a given community (Küng 1988:11). An observable change is evident in the manner in which people generally view themselves, society, the world and God.

Küng insists that postmodernity is a heuristic term (1988:10) which serves as a code for an epoch which has only begun in Euro-American culture and society, a period whose intrinsic value is acknowledged but has not quite been understood. It is neither an apology for modernity nor a self-confident condemnation of it. The issue of religion shows that,

> Modernity ... is not ... as it is for some reactionaries ... a finished program, nor is it ... an unfinished project, rather, modernity is in transition, it is a paradigm that has grown old that must be built up anew (1988:17).

Subsequently postmodernity will be used to designate a paradigm shift from modernity. This paradigm shift has occurred because of the reasons explicated in the previous chapter. Some philosophical and ideological patterns once associated with modernity have been reconsidered and re-appropriated within the postmodern paradigm.

3.2 Selected contours of postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible*

The spesific phenomena observed in postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* are: a relativity and plurality attitude; a post-foundational epistemology; a revised text-reader interaction; a revised view of historiography; a post-subject-object dichotomy; and a post-mechanistic view of reality. I will describe and discuss these phenomena in order to offer some insight into the philosophical thought patterns and worldview orientations of postmodernity.

3.2.1 Relativity and plurality attitude

Postmodernity is relativistic. Truth is relative. Truth is either meaningless or arbitrary (Aichele et al 1995:135, 1138, 139-140). Postmodernity believes that different people have different ideas of what the world is like. Modernity assumed universalism, unifying integration, the view that the same rules and standards apply everywhere at anytime. Postmodernity argues that each context/situation is distinct and summons for a special grasp. There is no room for universal reason in postmodernity because all paradigms/worldviews are equal and each one has its own logic (pp. 129. 303). Reason is inconsistent with postmodern confidence in emotion, feeling, introspection, intuition, autonomy, creativity, imagination, fantasy and contemplation.

Relativism is defined as a perspective in which all concepts must be understood as relative to a conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society/culture (pp. 48-50). Relativism believes in an irreducible plurality of conceptual schemes. There is no substantive overarching framework/single meta-language by which people can rationally judge or univocally evaluate competing claims of alternative paradigms/worldviews (p. 303). There is no standard of rationality. But relativism is not synonymous with subjectivism. Relativism is not necessarily subjectivism because relativism's essential claims is:

> 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 postmodernity. The polarization is a division between different types of believes rather than between different beliefs (Anderson 1990:19). What people believe define the truth (1990:183).

Modernity with its hunt for the center/central thesis of life has shifted to postmodernity which is characterized by an understanding that there is no center/central thesis, only a plurality of possibilities or perspectives (Aichele et al 1995:129-131). In postmodernity there is a celebration of relativism and pluralism rather than a mood of despair. Postmodernity is developed from the outside in rather than the inside out. Relativism is accepted as the nature of human condition and the assumption is made that there is no center, therefore nothing has been lost or given up. Pluralism represents alternative possibilities of experience and expression. Gelder 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 (1991:415)

3.2.2 Post-foundational epistemology

Postmodernity does not depend on foundationalism. It is post-foundational and it is uncomfortable with philosophical foundationalism (Giddens 1990:46-50). Grounded upon its relativity and plurality attitude of reality, postmodernity contends that issues of fact, truth, correctness, validity and clarity can never be posed or answered (Aichele et al 1995:120-125). Postmodernity objects to all-encompassing worldviews such as capitalism, secular humanism, modern science and Christianity and dismisses them as logocentric, transcendental totalizing meta-narratives that anticipate all problems and provide predetermined solutions (pp. 122-123, 184, 129). The goal of postmodernity is not to

develop an alternative set of assumptions but to register the impossibility of establishing any such foundations for knowledge and to de-legitimate all meta-narratives (pp. 115, 129-131). Postmodernity is at home with the absence of certainty. It is contented with ambiguity, uncertainty and inexplicable life. Smith asserts that,

> Postmodern theology builds on its own foundations. Instead of attempting to justify faith by appeals to the objective world, it points out that as such appeals indicate nothing about reality one way or the other, the way is wide open for free decision … or what Kierkegaard called the leap of faith. One hears little these days of the proofs for the existence of God which seemed so important to the modern world (1989:12).

Applied to theology, the foundationalist model called for a source of indubitable knowledge of God.

Postmodernity rejects grand narratives, meta-narratives and narratives that claim to be scientific and objective, that function to legitimate modernity and assume justice and truth (Aichele et al 1995:129-131, 146, 303). Meta-narratives are defined as:

> Narratives which 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)

Postmodernity has adopted a post-foundational stance in philosophy, social and cultural theory which suggests that the foundational meta-narratives which ground modernity's claims for privileged universality in its ideas of science and humanism are flawed (Aichele et al 1995:278-280, 302-307). People should seek to produce less showy modes of knowledge. The postmodern posture is one of incredulity toward all statements which make out that things have to be done in one particular manner and that manner only (pp. 136, 278-307).

3.2.3 A revised text-reader interaction

The first waves of an approaching storm for modernity came with the advent of the New Critical (p.25) intellectual movements. This movement informed the reader that:

> The poem is yours. Read it. Read it closely and find its meaning right there, in the poet's own words … This meant staying close to the text … sometimes chewing through it word by word, thought by thought … rather than staying too far into history or biography (Anderson 1990:81).

Lecturers in academia began to teach several theories of interpreting a literary work. Some of these theories, especially reader-response theory, located meaning in the reader's experience. Regardless of the type of literature one reads, one is likely to find a similar subtext concerning human condition … a message that life is telling stories concerning life and this story is not just concerning life but is life itself (Aichele et al 1995:48-49, 100, 109). The self is a text/narrative, a plot continually being revised with much creative borrowing from various sources (p. 130). These stories give purpose and shape to social existence (pp. 34-38). The author's importance is diminished in postmodernity. The demise of the author symbolizes a decline of responsibility and a protest against author(ity). Postmodernity privileges the text and elevates the reader. Readers are bestowed the power to define and create textual meaning (pp. 28-30).

Michael Foucault examined the birth of the idea of the author and contends that among primitive people there was no author. Primitive narratives were oral and collective in characters. Foucault conceives of authorship as a "concoction of the modern bourgeoisie seeking to assign responsibility for controlling or policing what was written" (1979:143). Foucault contends that the literary author did not become important until modernity. The idea of the author tended to emphasize the importance of the individual.

The postmodern reader is autonomous. The reader is not a passive subject to be entertained or instructed. The reader is bestowed the freedom to attribute meaning to the text without consequence (Aichele et al 1995:28-30). But the reader does not become a new center for authority. Nor is the reader allowed to set up a meta-narrative or establish a new foundation for knowledge since postmodern readers are equal in the sense that none can claim special expertise (pp. 130-131). Meaning does not inhere in a text. It resides in the interaction between the text and the reader (pp. 51-59). The modern objectification of the text has given way to a postmodern hermeneutical paradigm of understanding the text through participative dialogue (pp. 55-56). One reads for the pleasure of the experience, not in pursuit of truth/knowledge.

The interpretant of the text makes no universal truth claims. One's view is only valuable if it is personally meaningful. Any particular truth is relevant and valid only to the community

members within which it is formulated. Knowledge is relative to the community. Any rules of knowledge apply only inside the community. In so far as postmodernity diminishes the importance of the author as a writer of texts, it is less concerned with authorial intentionality (pp. 130, 140).

The events of modernity allowed critical thinking to push a first naivete off the center stage of human consciousness. A naïve literalness was rendered impracticable, so the ancient truths could be doubted (p. 130) Contemporary people who read these texts, assume a critical distance between a text's now lost meaning within its original context and its meaning for today. The postmodern hermeneutic is one of a post-critical appropriation of ancient texts which makes contemporary life meaningful and which fosters a sense of cultural unity over time – a second naivete. The philosopher of a second naivete speaks with authority but this authority rests in the philosopher as a subject. The postmodern story-teller's authority is personal. "I see it this way. This is my story." In telling their stories, people give themselves identity (pp. 28-19). They recognize themselves in the stories they tell concerning themselves (p. 28).

The postmodern perspective on texts is related to the biblical record and the influence of the texts upon a person is discussed by Lindbeck as follows:

> Once they (texts) penetrate deeply into the psyche, especially the collective psyche, they cease to the primarily objects of study and rather come to supply the conceptual and imaginative vocabularies, as well as the grammar and syntax, with which we construe and construct reality (1989:39-40).

Texts can become the lens through which people can see nature, humans and God. In modernity the Bible became more and more exclusively an object of study with fixed and univocal meanings. The Bible was no longer a language with various senses, a dwelling place for the imagination (1989:43). Modernity seemed deeply prejudiced against teaching the Bible as a language and lens with various meanings or uses with which to construe reality and view the world. Modernity viewed texts primarily as objects of study possessed of a univocal meaning, a single meaning ascertainable only by historical critics (1989:50). In postmodernity, however, people read texts to see what the world looks like in and through them (1989:51). Classics are viewed as clear guides to life and thought.

Is there a novel way into the Biblical text which can allow it to be religiously meaningful? I affirm Lindbeck's interpretation that the modern biblical theory was an object to be studied

and analyzed with the tools of higher criticism. There is a direct correlation between this phenomenon and the subject-object dichotomy so pervasive in modernity. The modern objective was to derive from the text historically accurate accounts concerning the people, events and religious understanding of the ancient times in which the texts were produced and about which they spoke (Archele et al 1995; p. 130). Postmodern scholars, however, realized that the locus of revelation for the contemporary Christian is not the events behind the texts, or the theology of the biblical authors or even the preaching of the texts in the community, but the texts themselves as language that involves the reader (pp. 130-131, 134). Schneiders comments on the postmodern perspective of biblical texts:

> The focus of interest is not so much on what produced the biblical texts as on what the texts, when fully engaged, produce in the reader. The positivistic objectification of the text which resulted inexorably in the dilemma of the subject-object paradigm of understanding by analysis has begun to give way to a hermeneutical paradigm of understanding by participative dialogue (1989:61-62).

Interpretation is a matter of getting into genuine dialogue with the text as it stands. The reader does not need to defend the biblical text. Let it stand on its own! Through a dialogical encounter with the biblical text the reader and the text are mutually transformed. The reader is transformed not by surrender, but by conversion. The text is transformed not by dissection, but by multiple interpretations/readings to which it gives birth by its surplus meaning which can only be actualized by successive generations of readers whose interpretations enrich the texts themselves.

3.2.4 A revised view of historiography

Because of a novel hermeneutical approach to texts and life in general, history has a much diminished status in postmodernity. Postmodernity believes that conventional versions of conventional history constrain thought and limit understanding. Postmodernity rejects the idea of history with a starting point, a normal progression and a conclusion – a linear story (pp. 50-51, 139-140). It is suspicious of inquiries concerned with the knowledge and representation of the past (pp. 139-140).

Giddens equates postmodernity with the close of history (1990:50). From the modern perspective, the future became a liberation from the past and the discovery of novel scientific truths. The postmodern perspective of history focus upon a dialectical view of history as an

ongoing creation. This dialectical view of history is marked by a dynamic inner tension, conflict and interconnectedness of its components (Aichele et al 1995:140-144). For postmodernity, the new future evolves to challenge the present but it remains a future rooted in the past. The past is not rejected but is re-focused to deepen the creative energy of the historical whole.

3.2.5 Post-subject-object dichotomy

The evolving of postmodernity is accompanied by the demise of epistemologically centered philosophy. Postmodernity means the end of the subjective and objective world (pp. 51-55). Postmodernity 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 (p. 122). Postmodernity attributes renewed relevance to the traditional and the sacred. All that modernity has set aside, including emotions, feelings, intuition, reflection, speculation, personal experience, custom, metaphysics, tradition, cosmology, magic, myth, religious sentiment and mystical experience, takes on renewed importance in postmodernity (pp. 6-8).

Postmodernity is at home with continuity between personal and cosmic wholeness. Postmodernity affirms the ontological continuity between the knowing human subject and the objective world which is known by the human subject (pp. 54-55). Scientific or objective knowledge is incomplete. It should be complemented with some form of participatory knowledge, with affective or aesthetic knowledge, or even with mystical knowledge (p. 305). Modern science concretised everything and forgot the poetics. Postmodernity in the social sciences is a response to the perceived insufficiencies of scientific social science. There is a growing unwillingness to claim that science is either the best or the only way of knowing (pp. 139-144; Corenz 1996:131-134).

Postmodernity is reconstructive instead of reductionistic. Postmodernity evolved from the desire to reconstruct what modernity had destroyed (Aichele et al 1995:121). A catch-all term for postmodernity is wholism/holism. Postmodernity tries to intermingle the aesthetic, the epistemic and the socio-cultural senses.

Modernity considered the parts to be greater than the whole. Postmodernity considered the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts. Postmodernity, in contrast to modernity, does

not view space as a hierachical pyramid, nor as a collection of Newtonian particles. Rather the parts exist in holistic communion with one another. Holland asserts that,

> Each part has distinct dignity, while each corporates 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 (1989:19-20)

Postmodernity moves beyond epistemology into ethics and advocates programs for personal transformation, solving the ecological problem, defusing the nuclear threat and establishing world peace. Postmodernity provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist and other emancipatory movements (Aichele et al 1995: pp. 306-307). Postmodernity has a sharpened sense for the protection of the natural and historical environment (Küng 1958:13-14).

Postmodernity seeks toward a deeper and lasting relationship and is committed to issues that will contribute toward a more just, sustainable and peaceable society. It also seeks out the mystical by focusing on the interiority of the self, its thoughts, emotions and spiritual life. Postmodernity has a preference for the natural and is convinced of the essential rightness of nature. It believes in holistic medicine and seek out opportunities to commence with nature. Postmodernity is also deeply concerned with social issues. Conservation, consumer issues, environmental wholeness, social justice and peace issues are some of the key concerns of postmodernity. Postmodernity believes in the:

> ...integrity of nature, that it is not to be dominated but cooperated with, that it has a wisdom of its own, that the world really is one and that in a materialistic society the non-material dimensions of living are richer and more meaningful (Sample 1990:28).

Postmodernity is pro-nature and post-materialistic (Gosnell 1993:84-85).

3.2.6 Post-mechanistic view of reality

Postmodernity is critical of empiricism, rationality, universalistic science and direct mechanical causality. Contemporary science has reputed the negative views of irreversibility and chance upheld by modern scientists. Historically, the deterministic mechanical model of the universe and the negative approach to chance contributed to the modern scientific disenchantment with the world. Contemporary science, with its discoveries which have reputed some of the scientific propositions of modernity, re-

appraises the role of irreversibility and chance and promises a full re-enchantment with the world.

Postmodernity seeks to integrate human consciousness with the larger reality and to actualise a newly-conceived sense of community with one another and with nature. Postmodern spirituality is described as:

> emphasizing internal relations, organicism (feel at home in the world and sense of kinship with other species – not like aliens in a hostile or indifferent nature), human self-determination, a new respect for the past, a naturalistic panentheism, experience of norms and a post-patriarchal vision (Griffin 1988:14-24).

Postmodernity does not contend that individual minds construct realities. It believes that it is minds working together (i.e. societies) that are the agents that construct realities. Theoretical wholism argues for the organic character of thought. Concepts cannot be understood in isolation. Their meaning derive from the theoretical systems in which they are embedded. God is contended as the cosmic voice which summons people into supra-individual community with each other and with nature. According to postmodernity, God is the embodiment of the human's drive to seek unity beyond the egotistical individualism of modernity.

Community is the foundation of the creative act of wholistic communion. The communion is not simply social (among people), but also religious (with God) and ecological (with nature). Postmodernity rejects secularism and rediscovers the sacred. The sacred is revealed in the creativity of natural, social and religious communion. God is viewed as revealing himself in ongoing creation and recreation.

3.3 Concluding remarks

Postmodernity represents a paradigm shift within modernity. Some philosophical and ideological patterns once associated with modernity have been reconsidered and re-appropriated within a new paradigm. The following theoretical contours are associated with postmodernity as expressed in the book, *The Postmodern Bible*: a relativity and plurality attitude; a post-foundational epistemology; a revised text-reader interaction; a revised view of historiography; a postsubject-object dichotomy and a post-mechanistic view of reading.

The shift from modernity to postmodernity challenges African Christians to evaluate the relevance and impact of this paradigm shift for their context. The history of Christianity in Africa is too filled with instances of an ideological and manipulative use of the Bible for Africans to continue to be so offhanded in its regard. I shall have an occasion to return to this point fully in chapter five. The next chapter provides a good idea of the contours of the morphous group of people called the Shona.

Chapter 4

ASPECTS OF THE SHONA RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW

The epithet "African" relates to a large continent offering great diversities in terms of people, cultures, temperament, etc. Africa is a polyethnic and polyracial content. An African is a multiheaded hydra, exhibiting diversities not only against outsiders but also against other species of African (Pobee 1979:43). Because of these diversities, I can only speak properly of one African worldview, though there may be similarities. For this reason, I propose to dwell on the Shona religious worldview as an example of an African worldview.

The epithet "Shona" also needs some explanation. Shona people are the indigenous peoples living in central, northern and southeastern Zimbabwe and parts of Mozambique (Beach 1980). Their language, also called Shona, is one of the Bantu languages. The designation Shona is used as a linguistic classification to distinguish a group of people who not only share common a language, but also have certain cultural and, to some extent, historical connections.

Shona is comprised of six clusters of dialects. They are the Karanga in the south, Zezuru in the north and center, Ndan in the southeast, Mamyika in the northeast, Kalanga in the west and Korekore in the norht. Almost ninety percent of Zimbabwe are Shona-speaking people. The presentation in this chapter will be from a Karanga perspective since it's my dialect and most familiar to me.

The best way of understanding the contours of the morphous group of people called the Shona, is by understanding what is intrinsic to the service to ancestors in the life and thought of these people. We came to this understanding by discussing their morphological constructs for God. How God is perceived in terms of the ancestors and ancestors' relationship to the Shona people, is the most important sphere of cultural activity that nursed the health of the Shona nation. These relationships have significance in family, civic and national affairs. Like other African traditional religions, the Shona religion is constructed in such a manner that it is integral and inseparable from societal and personal human life. The central focus of the Shona religion is on communal and individual practical faith imbued with certain concerns and right actions for the social welfare of the people. God-ancestors' talk always relates mainly to the Shona people themselves within the context of their own collectivities. Zahan asserts that,

All of African spiritual life is based on this vision of man's (sic) situation and role. The idea of finality outside man is foreign … Man was not made for God or for universe … It is not to please God or out of love for God that the African prays, implores or makes sacrifices, but rather to become himself and to realize the order in which he finds himself implicated (1979:5).

4.1 God and ancestors (*Mwari nevadzimu*)

The Shona views 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 other factors contingent in serving this goal. This human-centered concern means that in times of trouble, their sacrifices to God (*Mwari*) and ancestors (*vadzimu*) is to implore blessings from them to give relief to the people in trouble, not to appease God. Worship of God and service to ancestors are enacted to serve people. The object is to deal with people or human welfare. "No one prays to God … to be accepted or enraptured" (Qnumura 1991:68).

Shona people give recognition to God in terms of an awareness of a transcendental spirit reality. The Shona religion is not creedal. Thus the use of belief systems usually devised by theologians is foreign and a departure from the Shona morphological constructs and perceptions of God. The Shona concepts of God are dynamically viewed and never dogmatically encapsuled into belief systems. The mystique of God articulated in the Shona anthropomorphic terms cannot be construed within Euro-American mindsets. Euro-American explications of God in terms of monotheism, polytheism and animism are not correct, but misleading. For the Shona people, the cosmic dimension of God'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. The Shona theology is viewed dynamically within human life. A paradox of transcendence and immanence are witnessed here.

One should note that the characterization of God, who is integral to the natural world, is also a portrayal of the geographical contours of the landscape of the Shona country. God is the vibrancy of the ecological reality. The Shona theology has to do with MWEYA, the mind-spirit of the eco-system of Zimbabwe. Explaining this in terms of pantheism or animism would be a perversion of Shona morphological understanding. This should be seen as the *gestalt* of all that adheres together within the complex of African life.

The Shona understanding of God, the Creator, is marked by wholism and complexity (Aschwanden 1989:200). The epithet High God should not be used in reference to the Shona Mwari (God). This would be a misnomer since the Shona Mwari is never far removed from life's realities in this world of living people and things. The use of this epithet, when applied to the Shona religion, reflects an uncritical application of Euro-American Christian thought patterns imposed on the African religious phenomenon (Ukpong 1984:187-203). Although Daneel calls Mwari a High God, he rejected that categorisation.

> 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 (1971:81).

I maintain that the Shona Mwari is neither far and remote nor pushed through the sky and lost sight of. It would appear that the ancestors are more prominent, with Mwari enshrined within these ancestral assumptions. This interfluence is reflected in the social norms and etiquette in Shona society. The Shona always approach an elder or someone in authority through a mediator. Anything short of this is seen as disrespectful. Ancestors serve the role of mediators between God and his people. "If you approach God directly … you display a lack of manners and your prayers mean nothing" (Gombe 1986:59). God is given due respect when ancestors are honored. But that ancestors are also honored in their own right, cannot be ruled out. In fact, everything is so clear that the Shona people could never see someone pushing God to the background. To think that God can be pushed into the background negates the Shona panentheistic and panpsychic understanding of God.

4.2 Shona religious revelation

Revelation is viewed as self-evident in Shona life, thought and practice. To make an issue for revelation is never deemed to be necessary, nor is revelation as a theological idea ever explored or explicated as a separate category. Revelation relates to what is known of God through the phenomenological world as a whole. This ability to know God in creation means that the world of phenomena always points the Shona people to the creator. These conceptions of the creator relate to the God of life, the one who speaks where natural

phenomena are celebrated as a sacred shrine (Daneel 1970:11). God is never silent. The mystique of transcendence within the natural world is a kind of quantumphysic which is always breaking through into human awareness, attempting to say something to the Shona in everything that happens. Because the Shona is integrally enmeshed within the natural environment from cradle to grave, this dynamic constitutes in a Shona a type of *"imago dei"* which enables a Shona to hear and respond to God.

The Shona have the perception of transcendence both in matter and in the psyche. God is the subject of all created things and all created things are subjected to the *logos*, the purposive voice of God to which ancestors 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 Shona.

God is always integral to life. No part of life can be thought of without the idea of God. No conceptions of God as ontological reality are feasible apart from God's being flesh of Shona flesh, bone of Shona bone. God is never a detached abstraction. God is always thought of in anthropomorphic terms. But this should not be viewed in terms of allegorical understanding, but as intrinsically belonging to the natural world of phenomena itself. God belongs to the anatomy of life and the physiology of life depicts the activity of God's dynamic presence. This perception of God is not generalized, but is constructed and elaborated within the specifics of the traditions of the Shona experiences. Meteorological and ecological factors are inextricably one, with God holistically understood within events and ocurrences in the empirical world. Because of the complexities of the world, the precariousness of existence and the ambiguities of human life, certain people towering above others evolved as prophets (*masvikiro*) and wisdom teachers. Certain women and men in the Shona society are always recognized as having outstanding intuitive wisdom into the realities of the transcendental world. They are acknowledged as mediums (*masvikiro*) who have the capacity to communicate with God, with ancestors and with people.

God is revealed through a "voice" among the Shona people. Shona traditions believe that they were led by "the voice of Mwari" as a nation when they moved form Gurunswa (long grass), the legendary place of Shona origin, somewhere in the North of Zimbabwe. As a spirit and voice speaking from the sky, Mwari led Shona people from Gurunswa to their present homes, *nyika* (land) where they live today (Hodza and Fortune 1979:10). The voice of Mwari is still heard at the sacred shrine at Matopo Hills, known as *Matonyeni of Mabwe aDziva* (The Rocks of Dziva, one of Mwari's praise name). 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 (Daneel 1989:160). They hear the voice but do not see Mwari.

The separation between general and special revelation ought to be discarded as it negates the Shona conception which acknowledges the full revelation and knowledge of what is manifested in various people's actions and thoughts clearly (Kibicho 1983:170). It is not correct, it's insufficient and it's a negation of the Shona mindset to describe revelation in Shona religion as being general, with all that the term entails (Kibicho 1983:170). The separation between general and special revelation has been employed in Euro-American theology to convey the assumption of its superiority. This has led some theologians, including Africans, to deny any salvific significance in African traditional religions. These theologians have argued that salvation is to be found only in colonial Christianity. This is contrary to the Shona perception of revelation in which everything is thought to be special and specific. One needs to guard against a subtle Christian imperialism which does not allow any manifestation of God which is not under the control of its claims (Kibicho 1972:319). A pluralistic revelation which at the same time is not relativistic is called for by Kibicho. This is an acknowledgement "that there may be other ways" and that "this faith in the One has had its occasional manifestations elsewhere" (Kibicho 1972:319). Richard Niebuhr 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 (1941:16).

This is a helpful approach as it looks at each religion in the context in which it is practiced. Each religion has the potential of its own authenticity. Leonardo Boff claims that other faiths are not realities external to Christianity but "they are steeped in something that we find everywhere active: the Word that acts within them and within Christianity (1991:72).

Maimela argues for the futility of discussing salvation in African Traditional Religions without appreciating that salvific issues in these religious can only be detected and appreciated within the African context (1985:63-77). From an African perspective there are signs of salvific activity in African religions. Such an assertion is possible only when Euro-

Americans understand that salvation means different things to different morphological understandings of social cultures and religious situations.

The Shona language is descriptive in its vocabulary and idiomatic expressions which reveal the Shona philosophy of life and its perception of God. This God is revealed in the created order, in something within human nature, through mediums, seers and prophets and in the acts of God in the life experiences of the Shona. Mwari, who has been with the Shona since their pilgrimage form Gurunswa is the sole proprietor of life. Mwari is the giver of life, rain, light and all good things in life. Mwari is the creator (*Musiki*) who sustains all creation. The Shona people and communities consequently lived, moved and had their being in Mwari or in religion.

4.3 Ancestor's role in Shona society

The ancestors in Shona society are progenitors of life and guardians of the land (*myika*). But what constitutes an ancestor 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 ancestor service is integral to the Shona religion.

The importance of ancestors among African societies is best articulated by a Chanamian woman when she claimed that "to take ancestors away from an African is to rob him (sic) of his personality". This statement was made when the publication department of the WCC omitted the following stanza from Setiloane's meditation "I am an African":

> 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 (1978:407).

That this woman wondered and reacted is no surprise, for the meditation goes to the very heart of African ethics, religion and spirituality. It is sad that this aspect has been criticised by ill-informed and prejudiced Euro-Americans (Commission 1991:67). Every person who has procreated children is attributed to be an ancestor after death. The spirits of the dead are

so much part of the Shona life that they can be aptly called spirit elders, senior members of the society, who now act as spirits (Bourdillon 1987:199). Ancestors are the natural patrons of families, guardians of family affairs, morals and traditions. They see to it that taboos are not violated. Ancestors take care of their children and have power either to bless or punish them. The powers that ancestors have over their children is a continuum of the same power 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 ancestors and spirits among non-Shona people. The epithet "ancestral spirit" should be avoided in reference to ancestors as it fails to communicate the Shona understanding of ancestors. It is insufficient and misleading. Ancestors are a mystery and defy any simple definition. They are both human and spiritual. There is also a very close tie between elders and ancestors in Shona thinking. Elders are metaphorically referred to as ancestors and assumed to be imbued with some mystic powers. The Shona youth are always admonished to take care of their elders, because they are their ancestors. Ancestors are qualitatively distinct from elders, but elders are so imbued with ancestral authority that the youth can refer to them as their ancestors.

In spite the fact that ancestors 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 ancestors and the living. Banana asserts that,

> African traditional 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 time offer their gifts and thanks-giving sacrifices (1991:22-23).

Banana calls this mutual tie "eternal communism". There is mutual interdependence and interfluence between ancestors and the living, and the one cannot do without the other. The living need protection, care and blessing from the ancestors. The ancestors 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 an ancestor, without which the dead person is doomed. When the living have played their part, they expect the ancestors to do their part.

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

Ancestors are quite distinct from the other types of spirits in which the Shona believe. They believe in ngozi, an aggrieved spirit of someone who was grieviously offended during one's time on earth or after death. Ngozi is the precarious element in life, believed to afflict individuals or 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 answer or solution to placate an avenging spirit is by costly payment to the wronged person's family. Sometimes the payment is accompanied by humiliating acts. The payment is not only made by the offender, but by the whole family or kin-group. 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 (Bourdillon 1987:235). An avenging spirit is a frightening idea among the Shona people. Thus, it is to be avoided at all costs, analogous to the fear of hell among Christians. Like the fear of hell among Christians, the fear of an avenging spirit contributes to ethical behaviour. The wisdom of Shona ancestors says that the remedy of an avenging spirit is payment (Hodza 1991:viii, 28-30). An avenging spirit ensures harmony because it discourages cruel and unbecoming behaviour in the society.

The Shona people also believe in another category of spirits called *Mashavi* (sing. *Shavi*). *Mashavi* are stranger spirits, not tutelary, which possess a human host (Hodza 1991:6-8). *Mashavi* may be spirits of Euro-Americans or baboons 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, divining, etc. But what remains a mystery is the origin of *Mashavi*. Accordingly the host of a *Shavi* can get rid of it. It can be exorcised by mangas or Christian exorcists. The same is not true of ancestors. Ancestors cannot be exorcised from their hosts. They are not foreign or alien spirits which can be exorcised.

There are different categories of ancestors such as family ancestors, territorial mediums and national hero ancestors, such as Chamimnka and Nehanda.

4.4 Service to ancestors (*Kupira Vadzimu*)

The idea of *kupira vadzimu* as refering to ancestor worship is rejected by Shona people (Nyevera 1983:23). The Shona term *kupira* has no English equivalent. Worship is misleading since *kupira* is never used in relation to God. The Shona term used in relation to God is *kunamata* - "to pray" or "to worship". The so-called ancestral worship is not worship at all according to the Christian understanding of worship. Ancestral worship has pejorative connotations. It is a derogatory term used by Euro-American Christians to speak disparagingly of any service to ancestors. Setiloane uses the word "service" to translate the Tswana word *tirelo*,

> Africans, unless they have grown to internalize the Westerners' view 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 answers. 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 (fulfill all proper duties towards, that is, provide them with the necessities of life, food, clothing, etc.) but *Re rapela Modimo*: We pray to Modimo (Setiloane 1988:18).

Although this refers to the Tswana, the word "service" is the best rendering of the Shona term *kupira*. The word *kupira* does not stand alone. It is always an action toward someone or something. *Kupira* always stands with *vadzium* (ancestors) but never with Mwari (God). Ancestors still have desires and needs which they want to be fulfilled. They are fed and remembered by the living. Ancestors are feared but not as Mwari since they can be scolded if they failed to fulfill expected duties (Jongwe 1983:36). It is noteworthy that this would not be common in the Shona relationship with Mwari.

In order to put service to ancestors in its proper context, let me discuss the Shona understanding of death and associated rituals (Mugabe 1993).

4.4.1 Death (*Rufu*)

The Shona 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 of ultimacy, that the deceased has fully departed. The death of a person is not sharply expressed but referred to in

some euphemistic words/phrases: *Watisiya* (she has left it behind), *Watungaira* (she has proceeded), *Wappuura* (she has passed on), *Waenda* (she has gone), *Watorwa* (she has been taken) etc. All these terms suggest a continuity of life.

When one is about to die, the dying person is removed from the homestead to a prepared place outside the home. Immediately after death the body is returned to the home of the deceased (Edwards 1929:34f). 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, 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 the coffin is made. It is important that the next of kin be informed immediately to avoid bad omens. The headman is informed and 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.

Death is a communal issue. All people, relatives, friends and neighbours come to pay their last respects or tributes 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 last respects to the deceased. A white cloth is used as a shroud (Edwards 1929:35).

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

4.4.2 Burial (*Kuvisa*)

Every community member is entitled to a burial. Cremation is foreign in Shona society. The body is buried to keep it away from witches (Aschwanden 1987:247). The site of the grave is usually chosen by elders or the deceased before death. Usually each family have a piece of land reserved for this purpose. Graveyards are considered sacred. When the burial place has been chosen, either 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 antihill is chosen for a grave site. Chiefs are buried in mountains and small children are buried in the river beds to avoid drought (Aschwanden 1987:247; Gelfffand 1962:124).

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 Shona. The niche is called *imba* (house). Before they take the deceased for burial, the body is spoke to and most of the speeches are farewells.

The family head will request the deceased for permission to carry her/him to the grave which is now her/his house (Marais 1990:107). At this point the body is carried out of the house. The body is carried on the stretcher to the burial place. The elders walk in front, followed by pall-bearers who are usually surrounded by relatives and others crying and singing. All adults take part in the procession to the grave. It is an honour to carry the body; so it is usually carried by the next of kin. On the way they rest three times. Several meanings are attached to this. It may mean that they are not in a hurray to get rid of the deceased (Aschwanden 1987:256); it may symbolize the three stages of birth (Aschwanden 1987:262) and it may mean 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 (Aschwanden 1987:256) This is consistent with the Shona belief in the oneness of body and spirit.

On arrival at the grave, the crying and singing stops 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. From now on that is the house of the deceased. Burial always takes place either in the morning or late 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. All relatives present throw a handful of soil in the grave (Gelfand 1966:81). Some of the deceased's personal objects are placed in the grave and the deceased is told to use them on the journey (Aschwanden 1987:262). The grave is then filled with earth. In rocky places, a mould 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.

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 (cry). 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 by using a bowl of water into which crushed leaves of certain trees have been added (Aschwanden 1987:263).

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 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 whether the grave has been disturbed. If the grave has been desecrated, a *wanga* (diviner) is consulted.

A ritual to introduce the ancestors about the coming of another ancestor and to request them to welcome the deceased is performed by the family elders before leaving the grave for the homestead. Mandaza 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 ancestors. 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" (1970:54).

Other rites are performed at the homestead. The deceased's possessions are sealed away until after the *kurova gura* ceremony, after which they will be available for use. 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 of admission into the world of the ancestors (Kumbirai 1977:123).

4.4.3 Postmortem and associated rituals

Nowadays there are two types of postmortem that are carried out in the Shona society. An autopsy is done by hospitals. Doctors trained in Euro-American medicine perform the autopsy. Autopsies would be sufficient for Euro-Americans and may be for Christianized Shona people. The other type of postmortem is the traditional one which is done after the body of the deceased has been buried.

The traditional postmortem is done by a *wanga* (diviner). This postmortem is grounded in the Shona belief that nothing happens by chance. There is always a cause for everything (Hammutyinei and Plangger 1987:208). Therefore a delegation must be appointed to go and consult a *wanga* on the cause of death (Mutizwa 1984:19). It is customary to choose a *wanga* who lives some distance from the deceased to avoid the possibility of prejudice.

Normal death is easier accepted than those which stem from witchcraft, murder of suicide. Mwari is not the cause of death though. Mwari lets death happen. Thus God is ultimately responsible. Death is timely when it comes at a senile age (Banana 1991:27). Nevertheless, death is never fully accepted. Witchcraft is believed to be the most common cause of death, even among those who believe that a purely natural death is possible (Bourdillon 1987:206). Whenever there is a death, a witch is always accused. Banana summarizes this Shona attitude towards death:

> The Shona ... people have a 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(s) of their fatal break of their physical ties in their family. Death is never acceptable as inevitable. The Shona ... literary do not want their kin to die (1991:27).

Thus every cause of death is "investigated" to prevent the continuance of death among the living. Even in cases where death is the result of AIDS, it is investigated for other causes besides aids. A witch could be accused even in these cases. Aschwanden asserts that,

> Therefore, the *Karanga* investigate every death thoroughly, even an apparantly 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 a dead at his burial: 'Do not return to us', they mean, in particular, the evil that killed him and the deceased himself (1987:214-215).

If the death was the result of an avenging spirit, then the spirit must be appeased. Ancestors are believed not to cause death in their families. Nevertheless, if they are displeased about something, they may withdraw their protection in order for witches to inflict harm. Witches are the equivalent of the demonic in Christian understanding. The Shona religion has no devil figure save witches. Witches only harm you if ancestors allow it. This is a significant motivating factor of morality in the service to ancestors. Usually a number of *wangas* are consulted to see whether they agree. *Wangas* are always viewed with suspicion though they are higly esteemed. Malpractice is also present among Shona wangas. *Wangas* 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 to accuse anyone of being a witch (Charunduka 1977:145), the Shona people still continue to consult the *wanga* for the cause of death.

After discovering the cause of death, the *doro remvura* ritual follows. This ritual is based on the Shona belief that the deceased at first just wanders 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 all their help in the burial of the deceased. It also officially mark the mourning period. This is the time when the delegation, which went to consult the *wanga* on the cause of death, reveal their findings to the gathering kins so that a collective decision is made and a collective action is taken. Someone is also chosen to take care of the deceased's family at this gathering (Gombe 1986:81).

4.5 Restoration and installation of an ancestor (*Kurova Guva*)

The most important postmortem ritual is the restoration and installation ritual called the *kurova gura* ceremony. This ritual takes place a year after burial. *Kura gura* literally means "to beat the grave", but metaphorically means "to put the spirit of the deceased to rest". The ritual is believed to give birth to a new being as the deceased acquires full ancestorhood through this ritual (Daneel 1971:101-102). The purpose of this ritual is to bring back home the roaming spirit of the deceased. It is a restoration of the ancestor to come and live with the family and it is also an installation to service. The deceased now has permanent residence and no longer wanders out in the veld. Daneel 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 (Daneel 1971:120).

The deceased will be able to extend protective powers to the living only after this ritual. The ability of ancestors to play their role is conditioned by the faithfulness of the living. If rejected, ancestors will send a reminder by causing various troubles (Lan 1985:32). Maternal ancestors 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, etc. do not deserve this ritual. Beer is brewed and food is provided for everyone present. This beer is brewed by an old woman beyond child-bearing age. She is assisted by a young girl before the age of puberty who has not yet developed breasts or started menstruating (Banana 1991:30). Meat and beer are shared together and there is communion with the ancestors.

Some beer is poured on the ground, meat is roasted and eaten unsalted. Zvarevashe described the role of ancestors 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 see 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 holding ceremonies for them and dedicating animals to them. If a person's illness is caused by a *mudzimu*, a doctor will not be able to cure it. Only a *wanga* has the power to diagnose such an illness and prescribe the appropriate ritual to appease the *mudzimu*.
>
> 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 may afflict them, but do not usually kill them because they want their clan to multiply (1970:46).

All ancestors care for the living. Anyone can be chosen as a medium (*homure*) 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 take place on the concluding day of the *kurova guva* proceedings. The last event on this day is the distribution or sharing of inheritable property (Holleman 1952:318-368). A deceased wife's personal belongings are distributed differently from that of a deceased husband. The deceased woman's blood relatives take care of all her possessions. Her possessions consists of her clothes, kitchen utensils, cattle or anything that belonged to her personally. Her husband has no say over her property. Holleman asserts,

> A married woman could also acquire personal property by making a special effort apart from her duties and responsibilities regarding husband 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 and 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 not 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) were entitled to claim. (1952:321).

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

The distribution of a deceased man's property is involved and complex. 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. The fact that a wife can be inherited does not mean she is property. It is a complete fabrication and misrepresentation of facts to include a deceased man's wife (wives) among his material belongings (Aschwanden 1987:313-314). A Shona woman always belongs to her people throughout her life. Women have identity in their own right of personhood, not as utilities or property. A woman has a choice and cannot be inherited against her will (Gombe 1986:84-85).

The rules of succession are based on Shona tradition of inheritance. Holloman asserts,

> Shona law of succession is based upon one fundamental principle which may be formulated as follows: the oldest surviving son succeeds (*Kugara nkaka*) 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 (1952:330).

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

4.6 Spiritual resurrection in the Shona religion

The Shona people believe in a spiritual form of resurrection. Banana asserts that ancestors resurrect to protect their children.

> Ancestors 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 ... (1991:31)

Resurrection in African religion is not a bodily resurrection, but a "reintroduction of the living-timeless into the ranks of the family through spiritual presence" (Banana 1991:31). Another Shona ritual gives the ancestor's name to a bull. The bull is a symbol of the presence of ancestors. The ancestors are honoured in these bulls as providers and protectors of their people. It is believed that these bulls can prevent coming disasters by behaving strangely (Aschwanden 1987:133-134). These bulls are believed to raise alarms at night when witches approach the houses. These bulls cannot be castrated, nor used for ploughing or anything else. They are treated with great respect.

Children are also symbols of ancestors. Ancestors resurrect and continue living through children who bear their names and traits. The bull and the child are symbols of the ancestors' presence. The same ritual performed when giving the name of the ancestor to a bull is also performed when giving the name of the ancestor to a child. Usually the ancestor does not demand his name to be given to a child, but the deceased's son of his own accord will give the name of his deceased father to one of his sons as a living symbol of the ancestor (Aschwanden 1987:339). The Shona is comforted by the deceased's presence in a child. This should not be viewed as a reincarnation, but as an African form of resurrection. Resurrection relates to the features of the ancestors which are perpetuated in the behavioral

of their children's children. But in spite of these traits of the ancestors, the two are two separate personalities.

4.7 Ancestors: custodians of ecological survival

What I have discussed so far are family ancestors chiefly concerned with a particular household's welfare. In contrast to family ancestors are tribal ancestors who are concerned chiefly with the community's welfare and their involvement in the lives of the people is of multi-ethnic significance (Daneel 1971:93). These tribal ancestors (*Mhondors* – lion spirits) are concerned with the community or nation as a whole. In the Karanga society these *mhondors* may reside in actual lions which are believed to be harmless unless provoked (Gelfand 1974:95). *Mhondors* are custodians of ecological survival and their responsibility is to mediate between Mwari and the community when rain is needed (Daneel 1971:93). The Shona people have religious urges in religion with a very significant ecological element (Klostermaier 1973:134). This is evident in how the Shona attitude towards nature determine the use people make of the environment, particularly the land. This Shona relationship to their environment is highlighted by Hodza:

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

> The founding fathers and their other ancestors 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 the interpretation of a diviner. Communication is made according to the degree of the relationship and the seniority of the ancestor. The ancestors 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 (1979:14).

The Shona 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 God and ancestors. Shona religious observances, taboos and totems work for the preservation of the environment (Klostermaier 1973:136). The fact that ancestors, particularly chiefs, are buried in mountains, created a deep emotional attachment to the land and the entire environment and this creates respect for it. Whereas Euro-Americans have attempted to control and overpower the environment (Klostermaier 1973:134), Shona religion helps its members to adapt themselves to the environment and its mysteries. Shona environmentalism grows out of the need to survive, not for nature's sake. Aesthetic considerations were secondary (Daneel 1991:14). This has caused a clash between Euro-American and African environmentalists. Euro-American priorities and values concerning the environment were imposed on Africans and Africans were refused the right to determine the environmental policies that best suited their context. African views on the environment are being overshadowed by those of Euro-Americans. This is caused by the Euro-American sense of cultural and moral superiority which led them to adopt a paternalistic attitude in dealing with Africans. But before the advent of Euro-Americans in Africa, African farmers and pastoralists acted as caretakers of the environment. For centuries they succeeded in balancing their subsistence needs while protecting the local eco-system (Daneel 1991:14).

The environment was safeguarded by communal ownership of land. If the environment is harmed, it would result in a chain reaction which would work against community interest (Chapeyama 1987:182). Daneel advocated for an African 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 Africa and seek the intuition that has lain at the roots of earth-keeping in African traditional religion and philosophy all along (1991:100).

To understand the role of ancestors as guardians of the land, let me discuss the traditional ownership and use of the land in Shona society itself.

4.8 Ownership and use of land in the Shona society

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

> In African cosmology such an important natural endorsement as land does not have a marketable value. Prior to the advent of colonial rule in the country now known as Zimbabwe, the prevailing African 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 endorsement 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 man was and still is entitled to the natural endorsement mentioned above (1948:13).

Land belonged to the community. It was communal property belonging to the living and the dead. Nevertheless, individuals had possession rights to those pieces of land apportioned 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 ancestors and ultimately to God (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. Hodga describes the chief's area as:

The Shona **nomenclature** reflects the structure. The chief (**ishe**) of a territory (**nyika**) is called **sanyika** (master of the land). The administrative head of a district (**duuhn**), normally a kinsman, is called **sadunhn**. The heas of a village (**musha**) is called **samusha** or, because he keeps the tax register, **sabhukn**. The head of a **hanclet** is called **samana**, and a household head **saimba**. If **vatorwa** (non-ruling elite member) from a sufficiently numerous group, they may constitute a **dunhn** with a **sadunhn** 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 (1979:15).

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 greater responsibilities.

When white colonial settlers came to Shonaland, the Shona did not resist to the point of shedding blood, because they thought that they were just gold miners. It was only when the Shona realized that these settlers had taken the "untakeable land" that there was the first Chimurenga (uprising) of 1896 – 1897 (Samkange 1980:56). This "untakeable land" was also the cause of the second Chimurenga which resulted in the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980.

These days even Shona people residing in urban areas still has homes in communal lands. They always want to be buried on the land of their ancestors. Many Shona people never view the city as a real home (**musha**).

4.9 Ancestors as guardians of the land: Shona environmental religion

Schoffeleers summed up the ecological value of African 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, territorial cult 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 action appear as parts of a coherent worldview. What sets territorial cults apart from other religious institutions is the combination of communal and ecological concerns and the primacy accorded these concerns (1978:2).

Let me, with these words, discuss Shona religious practices and taboos which are contributive to the protection of the environment.

4.9.1 The Mwari cult

The Shona people believe in a supreme creator. The Mwari cult, firmly entrenched in the southern part of Zimbabwe, 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 his people today. Because Mwari is the final authority figure above and beyond the living-timeless, the Mwari shrine based at Matonjeni in the Maopos regulated the fertility, both human and agricultural, throughout Shona country and as the ultimate source of rain, his help is sought not only in times of drought, but also when other forms of national crisis threaten.

Yearly, seeds were blessed by the cult officials and distributed to all areas to be mixed with other seeds for planting to ensure good crops (Bourdillon 1991:123ff). Even when the Changamire-Rozvi state was overthrown by the Zulu-speaking Ndebele, the cult did not only survice, but became a central feature of the religious orientation of the entire area. 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 divination and observed all the rules and regulations concerning the sanctity of these temples (Bhebe 1978:289).

Though Mwari is rarely mentioned in family rituals, nevertheless, Mwari is mentioned when a senior tribal medium (*Mhondoro*) is requested to plead for rain through "those (ancestors) whose names have been forgotten, to the great *Mambo* behind them" (Daneel 1971:84).

4.9.2 Territorial cults

Territorial cults (Mhondoro, wild lions) take on some of the characteristics of the Mwari cult of the Mtopo Hills. Mhondoro cults hold important rituals at the onset of summer to request sufficient rain (Gelfand 1962:13-16). They are central to the "eco-religion" of communal modes of production. There are rituals of thanksgiving after harvest too. Rituals for rain are very important. When people are approaching summer, they hold these ceremonies known as **mukwerera**. Well-known Mhondoro cults are those of *Dzivaguru* and *Karuva* among the *Korehore* 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 she is seduced by a man, it is believed that drought will result and this man will be burnt to death for such a crime.

People usually honor the *mhondoro* in their chiefdoms, but *Dzivaguru* and *Karuva* are honored by people from all over the Shona country (Bourdillon 1987:235-255, 258). Their influence cover a wider area. It must be noted that rituals for rain (*Mukwerea*) have endless local variations among the Shona people.

4.9.3 Totems and taboos

The Shona totem system is based on wildlife and it regulates their social life such as marriage, food which they may eat and their succession to chieftainships. Sebahire 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 (1990:21).

Each individual has a totem animal or bird or part of an animal which is one's totem (*mutupo*). This *mutupo* gives identity and provides collective aspirations. The Shona totem system is paternal. Eating your totem animal is believed to leave one vulnerable to

misfortunes. It is never done (*zvinoera*) (Tobayiwa 1985:229-236). 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 the Shona 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 animals one sees and fruits one eats in the forest, because one should not despise what the ancestors 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 dedicate to local ancestors (*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 untampered 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*) etc. 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 or pots with soot. Only traditional containers are permitted.

During the Chimurenga II uprising ancestors 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 were a symbol for ancestral protection for animals and people. Important community gatherings meet under these trees. Certain trees are also not allowed to be used as firewood, especially the *mushozhona* tree, which is used to exorcise spirits. Using it as firewood is believed to result in the home coming of the exorcised spirit.

Mountains evoke the sacred among the Shona people. They inspire them to experience the wholly other. 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 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, centers of the universe, sources of life ..., abodes of the dead, temples of the gods, expressions of ultimate reality in its myriad manifestations (1990:10-11).

Mountains, though loosing most of their sanctity, the very presence of divine power, they still remain an unspoken presence.

The Association of Zimbabwean Spirit Mediums (AZSM), also known as the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecological or Ecologists, has responded to the ecological crisis in a positive way. The ancestors are actively addressing modern ecological problems when ancestral inspiration meshes with new tree planting techniques. Daneel asserts,

> Just as they (ancestors) through the *masvihiro* did not hesitate to combine traditional motivation with modern warfare to liberate the land from colonialism, they now urge the colonial liberation of nature by modern techniques. Their mystical inspiration leads to conscientization programmes in which new tools, such as the printed word are used; joint seminars, in which the AZSM and government departments cooperate and share the latest agro-economic insights, are conducted and so forth (1991/2:136).

4.10 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have described and discussed the role of ancestors which is broader than it is traditionally viewed and portrayed. It is political, socio-economic, religious and pharmaceutical. Ancestors are God's vice-regents. They are concerned with the survival of the community and the environment. The main concerns are about body, mind, spirit and environment, all viewed holistically as a "gestalt" (Mugabe 1993:138). In summary, the Shona has 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, and chiefship, an art form or aesthetics and a socio-political reality of poverty. Theology that does not deal with these ancestral perceptions and prescriptions cannot speak to the African people in general and to the Shona people in particular in any significantly creative and meaningful way.

Can postmodernity formulated for a people of the Euro-American cultural and social milieu become effective and relevant in an African or Shona cultural and social milieu? Is postmodernity, as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible*, relevant to *homo Africans*, especially *homo Shonensis*? My analysis of these two - postmodernity and Shona culture – can now be taken further as I compare and contrast them in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

AN AFRICAN RESPONSE TO *THE POSTMODERN BIBLE*

5.1 General Overview

Any great discovery, in archaeology as in science, set bells ringing down all the corridors of the world. Inevitably rash statements are made and great temerarious theories advance. Time gives perspective, the dust is beginning to subside and people can see a little more clearly the real bearing of this postmodern new fund of information with regard to the interpretation of the Bible and of life (Neill 1988:328).

Postmodernity has been subjected to fierce and vitriolic attacks by various Euro-American conservative scholars who still cling with blind and touching devotion to the inerrability of the historical-critical theory and who believed that the postmodern paradigm is a subtle attempt to debase and deprave the pure word of God, a charge too readily listened to by simple Christians whose love of the Bible is greater than their understanding of the problems which the Bible presents (PMB:81).

It seems to me that the history of scholarship over the period has seriously misled people at this point. It is absurd to imagine, just because Euro-American scholars happen to have moved from source- to form- to redaction criticism, that this is the natural, logical and correct way of proceeding (PMB:401). The idea that the historical-critical line carried automatic evaluative judgements should now be regarded as decidedly outdated. There was a time when the historical-critical theory could effect a kind of conversion. It could liberate the person captive to orthodox and other stereotypes. But in Africa, as in other third-world contexts, it has lost much of its power in personal and social transformation. By detaching the text from life, biblical interpretation 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. Thus, many of the questions asked of the biblical text are not those being asked by Africans. The dilemma facing historical-critical scholarship is largely due to the absence of a real life context that would serve as a galvanizing orientation point of the research effort. This bracketing off of the day-to-day socio-political crisis in Africa has not only made much of Western biblical scholarship largely irrelevant to the

African context, it has also had the effect of distancing the reading of the Bible, entrenching the idea that the Bible is the property of Euro-Americans and their academy.

It is important that periodically every alleged conclusion be challenged and tested in light of fresh evidence, or of a change in the premises on the basis by which the evidence is weighted (PMB:124). A considerable number of what had come to be regarded by Euro-Americans as established principles, have been challenged by postmodernity. Much of what has been done in recent years will be found to be in need of revision and scholars may in find it prudent in the future to test more carefully the foundations for any statement they wish to make as to the relations between language and theology (PMB:358).

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 is asked about familiar themes. Such a change never takes place suddenly. A 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 the door to a new period of adventurious discovery (PMB:252).

Modernity is irrecoverably dated. Its work is of permanent value, but it belongs to a period and expresses an outlook with which we can no longer identify (PMB:146). Now the time has come for a concentrated effort to rewrite the history of interpretation, to understand what it is really all about and to pose new questions (PMB:187). *The Postmodern Bible* attempts to meet this challenge.

Looking back at *The Postmodern Bible* after reading it, I not only find exclamation marks, question marks, excited underlyings and all other signs of eager agreement and frustrated disagreements, but I find also in myself a renewed excitement at the task, a fresh desire to get to grips with the problem at every level (PMB:418). This book is a document of great importance. Every brick in the building has been rung before it was laid, its extreme sobriety and caution, never overstepping the limits of proof and always scrupulously discriminating degrees of proof; the clear distinction that is observed between assured results and speculative probabilities or possibilities.

The authors' exegetical method is masterly. At each point in the book they collect various possibilities of meaning, list them and the scholars who have supported them and rehearse briefly the arguments for and against each, before coming down in favour of the postmodern meaning, often adding a nuance of their own as they do so. The authors have read and made good use of commentaries. The reader has a sense of following a detailed, precise line of thought, as though being led through a well-arranged treasurehouse by wise and expert guides (PMB:421-422). The authors stand firmly against mainstream interpretation, backing up their position with weighty arguments which, if taken seriously, are radically life transforming.

The Postmodern Bible has great strengths. It is ruthlessly honest. It goes in search of a hypothesis, finds one which is simply in a different league from anything offered by the historical-critical theory and asks crucial questions. The book stimulates, even by its negations, a vital interest in aspects of interpretation and theology which has been neglected to our loss. All this remains an obligation which even its critics must thankfully acknowledge. Historical-critical theory has reached a point of development at which it is no longer possible to play tricks with us. A new epoch in the field of interpretation has opened. What we see in the postmodern criticism is the shuffling of the cards into a new pattern. The event of Jesus is far too great to be caught and be held in one interpretation (PMB:204). The theologian must take the form of philosophy which is dominant in one's day and reinterpret the event of Jesus in terms and categories of that philosophy. This philosophy starts from the particular person, in one's existence, in the situation in which one finds oneself, with all its turmoil and all its uncertainties (PMB:245).

The Postmodern Bible is a part of the priceless legacy which scholarship has bequeathed to the twenty-first century. Postmodernity calls for closer and more expert attention than it had hitherto received. I am amazed at the lightness with which it is being dismissed or altogether ignored by African Christian scholars in particular. When I looked at postmodernity, I rubbed my eyes and wondered how Africans could have been so blind before. The postmodern values could make a new approach to the Bible possible and open new spaces for theology. The postmodern values do not contradict the Bible. On the contrary, they are much more appropriate to the biblical context than modernity with its one-sided emphasis on reason and on linear thinking within a closed view of the world, which insists on absolutes and binding laws (Gunther 1997:427).

However, there are without any doubt numerous points of detail in *The Postmodern Bible* which need to be modified or rejected outrightly by African scholarship. No human work is perfect and the achievement of even the greatest theologians is open to criticism at certain points. But the breathtaking audacity of much of this book, which will be discussed below, should not blind African scholarship to the very great achievement it represents. The very tools of analysis, criteria of judgement between good and bad, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical and criteria for envisioning just futures have been challenged radically. In what follows, I will isolate the bright side of postmodernity for rethinking my faith as an African. I will consider the bright side of postmodernity which is relevant and applicable to religious praxis in Zimbabwe. From there I will identify and critically locate certain problematic aspects or the dark side of postmodernity in the picture.

5.2 Bright side of *The Postmodern Bible*

When people have said all that can be said in the way of criticism, *The Postmodern Bible* could render a great and notable service to biblical interpretation in the African context. Africans could recast the biblical material into forms appropriate for their own context and age. The book is one of the few epoch-making books in contemporary studies. A closer inspection of postmodernity and the African Shona religious worldview should convince most Africans that they are in fundamental agreement with the postmodern holistic view of reality, communitarianism and politics of difference. The more postmodernity drew near its aim of decentering Euro-American norms, the simpler for Africans to recognize themselves in the mirror postmodernity holds up to them. This section will advance the thesis that the advent of postmodernity has heralded more benefits and opportunities for Africans than it has inflicted collateral damage. I am convinced that it is possible to see beyond exaggerations and aberrations to the positive values of postmodernity.

To see life as open in principle, and no longer as determined, is indeed a value for Africans. Africans rejoice when uncertainty causes absolute laws to lose their validity as principles, for this is a process of liberation. It enlarges the life options for a community if everything does not have to come down to an either ... or ... but rather if, according to the context (method of observation), complementary solutions are also available, which may seem to contradict one another and yet belong to one whole. It leads to a new wholeness when our thinking self and our supposedly objective reason have to think of themselves as part of a larger whole. In place of purely rational thinking, a considerably wider integrated perception

of reality opens up for Africans. This perception is dialogic in nature and takes into account the importance of intersubjective knowledge, rather than seeking objective truths. The fact that these values can degenerate into "anything goes" and into a new absolution of radical relativity and laissez faire can be seen in distorted forms of postmodernity. Very few Africans can take the complementary theory to mean that from now on everything is decided on subjective grounds.

Therefore, Africans dare not allow a resounding no! to postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* at this central point to blind them to the validity of its critique of modernity. Unfortunately Africans have often uncritically accepted modernity despite the fact that at most points the postmodern critique is more relevant to the African context. The bright side of postmodernity is discussed below.

5.2.1 Holistic view of reality

Both postmodernity and the Shona religious worldview share a holistic view of reality. They do not allow for a subject-object dichotomy. Both view the world holistically. For them there is no division between the body and soul, the physical and mental, the self and nature and the text and the reader. Both are comfortable with a continuity between personal and cosmic wholeness, affirming the ontological continuity between the knowing human subjet and the objective world which is known by the human subject.

Because of the inter-connectedness between human beings and their environment, both move beyond epistemology into ethics. Conservation, consumer issues, environmental integrity, social justice and peace issues are among the key concerns of both Africans and postmodernists. Both have a sharpened sense for the protection of the natural environment and are convinced of the essential rightness of nature. Both are societally conscious. They all believe in the

> Integrity of nature, that it is not to be dominated, but cooperated with … that it has a wisdom of its own, that the world really is one, and that in a materialistic society the non-materialistic dimensions of living are richer and more meaningful (Sample 1990:28)

Both Africans and postmodernists address human beings in their personal lives and as members of the larger social world of which they are a part. The gospel of Jesus calls people to turn away from personal and corporate sin in all its manifestations and demands

responsible stewardship against the raping of the natural environment (Van Seters 1988:20-21).

Both Africans and postmodernists affirm a text which involves them and a text with which they can enter into a genuine dialogue. The modern objective was to derive from the biblical text historically accurate accounts about the people, events and religious understanding of the ancient times in which the texts were produced and about which they spoke. The modern agenda was to discover the original intent of the author. Both Africans and postmodernists, however, are interested in how the text can be personally meaningful to them today regardless of the original intent. Most forms of both African and postmodern readings have little concern for the historical circumstances of the text's production. The stories of the Bible have an immediate presence and applicability as stories about the oppressed and the poor as the object of God's present concern and activity. The African reader's struggle takes on postmodern readings and it does not always issue in the happy ending of the first world exegetes. Both Africans and postmodernists are interested in sermons which challenge the wrongs in society, especially wrongs related to environmental and justice issues. Thus the holistic view of reality of postmodernity is relevant for Africans as well.

5.2.2 Communitarianism

Africans and postmodernists also share a communitarian epistemology and ontology. The hallmarks of modernity is the elevation of the individual. The modern world is an individualistic world, a realm of the autonomous human person endowed with inherent rights. Here Africans join the postmodern assault on the modernist epistemological fortress. Both Africans and postmodernists reject the modern paradigm with its focus on the self-reflective, self-determining, autonomous subject who stands outside any tradition or community. In its place both offer a constructive alternative: the individual-within-community. Africans and postmodernists are all communitarian in nature. Both have always sought to integrate human consciousness with the wider reality and to actualize a sense of community with one another and with nature. Both point out the unavoidable role of community or social network in the life of a person. They both affirm that community is essential in the process of knowing. Individuals come to knowledge only by way of a cognitive framework mediated by the community in which they participate. Likewise the community of participation is crucial to identity formation. A sense of personal identity develops through the telling of a personal narrative, which is embedded in the story of the

communities in which humans participate. The community mediates to its members a transcendent story that includes traditions of virtue, common good and ultimate meaning. Africans share the postmodern communitarianism. For Africans and postmodernists, God is the embodiment of our motivation to seek unity beyond the egotistical individualism of modernity. Authentic humans requires community and relationship, not privitization and individualism. People are humans only in the context of relationship.

In the postmodern world and in the African world, they can no longer follow the lead of modernity and position the individual at the center stage. Both remind themselves that their faith is highly social in nature. This gives some indication that the divine purpose for creation is directed toward the individual-in-relationship. The gospel must address the human person within the context of the communities in which people are embedded. Both Africans and postmodernists seek to integrate human consciousness with the wider reality and to actualize a newly conceived sense of community which is social (among humans), religious (with God) and ecological (with nature) (Holland 1989:19-20). Community is the foundation of the creative act of holistic communion. With their focus on community both postmodernists and Africans recognize the importance of the community of faith. Neither are impressed by the verbal presentation of the gospel. What they want to see is a people who live out the gospel in wholeness and in authentic and healing relationships. Their ecological interests, their belief in coherent wholeness and their integration of the emotional and the rational are dimensions of the interrelated unity of all things.

5.2.3 Politics of difference

Perhaps postmodernity is most relevant in the realm of politics of difference. A big question for Africans pertains to issues of identity: Who am I? What does it mean to be an African? How does one retain, expand and protect one's identity? What does it mean to be an African woman when not only patriarchal structures have been left untouched, but also when Western feminism itself has been responsible for the oppression of African women? Yet the discourse in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa today is that of national unity: which implies the suppression of difference in the name of national conformity and culture. Against this background it is paramount that the significance of cultural politics of difference be raised and debated on national level. But what is a politics of difference all about? How applicable and relevant is it to the African context? These questions capture better what postmodernity entails.

The purpose of a politics of difference is to struggle for the widening of multiple spaces to name, unmask and challenge the socialised assumptions which empower dominant groups to stay powerful and dominant. Its aim is to unburden the technologies of domination which includes micro-practices concealed in daily routine behaviour, attitudes and actions. In a country such as Zimbabwe, where such technologies have been shaped and entrenched with the influence of a colonial state machinery and a supportive private sector, it would be naïve to assume the disappearance or transformation of these dimensions simply because the formal reigns of political power are in the hands of a black African elected government.

There will be prevalence and continued entrenchment of prejudice and oppression in Zimbabwe society, even if the law and social politics treat black and white, man and woman, literate and illiterate, as equals. There is a danger of assimilation here. In a situation where certain dominant groups effectively camouflage their dominance through assumptions of normalcy, this is greatly problematic. A counter-argument to this problem involves an egalitarian politics of difference (Young 1993:295-311). The big problem is how difference is defined, either in essentialising it or in a relational way. In the latter, difference is taken as a product of social relations. The problematics of essentialising difference will be discussed below.

Assimilation is not only empty but it also perpetuate oppressive relations. In this way, assimilation is at the expanse of the disadvantaged communities since it entails coming into the play after it has already begun; assumptions of universal humanity, which is a fallacious construct since the dominant group ignores its own specificity; and fertile ground for internalised oppression and devaluation since any experience of difference is treated or perceived as irrelevant (Young 1993:303).

What fuels ambiguity in a politics of difference is the dilemma of organizing and asserting group identity as a means of demonstrating equality. But the issue of group identity concerns the crucial and critical dividing line between modern and postmodern politics. Since the social upheavals in the West during the 1960's, there has been an appreciation of other sites of resistance besides class struggles. The issues of gender and race came forth with serious consequences for the privileging of class agents in the process of social change. Other identity dimensions of class and nation were important and were factored into the revolutionary project. Postmodernity did not discover identity or plurality politics but they point out that the limitation of modernist identity politics is that other radical subjectivities (race, ethnicity, nationality, colonial states, sexuality and gender) are rooted in theoretical

categories which follow a similar trajectory of assertion and articulation as formulated in the 19th century class-grounded politics, which was mainly grounded on a bipolar understanding of society and social change. Euro-American thought is grounded on binary oppositions such as "transcendent-immanent, intelligible-sensible, spirit (mind, soul)-body, necessary-contingent, primary-secondary, simple-complex, nature-culture, male-female, white-black (brown, red, yellow), inside-outside, object-representation, history-fiction, content-form, conscious-unconscious, literal-metaphorical, presence-absence, text-interpretation, speech-writing" etc. (PMB:122).

These oppositions are based on suppression, the relation being one of hierarchical violence instead of equal partnership. The first word has been forcibly elevated above the second. Modern identity politics function on such dichotomised assumptions of domination and subordination. This approach sets up an inescapable referential confinement for its liberation. It always has to be in terms of the dominant. The political activism here is engrossed with the dominant and it fails to appreciate the multiplicity and dispersed nature of power and dominance (Soja & Hooper 1993:186). Insofar as this logic goes, other forms of oppression and subjectivity are not of liberatory importance. This is recognisable in the rhetoric and assumptions of radical nationalists who identify their primary contradiction as most salient and other contradictions as secondary. This is recognisable as well in the area of false consciousness.

5.2.3.1 Anti-essentialism

It is important to know that identities are not static. Even obvious ones such as race, gender and sexuality are deeply ambiguous, unstable and fluid. Human instinct tends to capture, fix and concretise social phenomena. Anti-essentialism, in relation to identity politics, is crucial to escape simplistic and dichotomous understandings of groups. Anti-essentialism permits a theoretical and experiential ability to appreciate diversity and multiplicity within a group. This is a challenge to re-articulate the ground of collective coherence. Postmodernity seeks to provide a framework which transcends engraved essentialisms of modernist-identity politics and envisions a true world inhabited by multiple subjects with various identities situated in changing subject positions (Soja & Hooper 1993:187). In the critique of essentialism, what is meant is the drive people have to always seek unity as a prerequisite for the success of revolutionary enterprises, or the urge Christians have to always seek to determine *in aeternum*, the essence of Christianity or the essence of faith, or the essence of

the Church, etc. This is also to fall victim of the illusion of essentialism. Such an effort only succeeds in canonizing what is no more than one historical, cultural form of Christianity or faith or Church. This lack of a sense of history is truly a failing in humility. It is the sort of metaphysics that leads inevitably to inquisitorial intolerance and the spirit of domination.

Far from yielding to the tendency to control and dominate the pretended essence of a text, people ought to conceptualise the text as a spring of meaning rather than a cistern, a focus of energy rather than a traffic light. The text of the Bible is pregnant with all the virtual senses that will come to light upon contact with historical currency.

Related to this, is the confidence that people have discovered the truth concerning the future and it is out there waiting - to be achieved through (class/popular) struggle. In this narrow-minded commitment people become greatly intolerant and suspicious of people, ideas, organisations, strategies and processes distinct from theirs. The significance of the postmodern critique is that it permits one to recognise the oppressive and marginalized tendensies within one's approach and understanding.

Perhaps the most serious threat to the religious status quo of Euro-America, but the most relevant aspect of Africa, has been the postmodern religious plurality and relativity attitude that accompanies it. Euro-Americans are greatly sceptical of this postmodern decentering of universals like equality for all, insistence on the absence of reality and prevalence of the text, since it invites relativity in an epoch of unprecended proportions in economical, political and cultural domination.

It is interesting enough to note here that the aspect of postmodernity which perhaps disturbs the Euro-Americans the most, is the aspect in which the Africans see more relevance for their own context. While plurality and relativity may be criticised and deplored by many Euro-American Christians, it provides African theologians with an opportunity to speak and be heard, since this plurality asserts that every view deserves to be given a hearing, including those views which are decidedly religious.

One of the most important consequences to evolve from this, is to see other cultures as equal. Because postmodernity insists that the totality within which people live their lives is a constructed whole which gains unity only through a process of exclusion, one must face the reality of equally constructed wholes which exclude them even as they (others) exclude them. One feature of modernity was the exclusion of other cultures as undeveloped, backward, primitive and inferior. In postmodernity other cultures are challenging Euro-

America on issues such as democracy, human rights, economic and trade relation, foreign policy and international programmes of development. Other cultures are telling Euro-America that they too have their constructed reality and now it's their turn to exclude Euro-America.

Plurality is a reality in the African context. In Africa there is political, economical, social, cultural, psychological, philosophical and religious plurality. Religious plurality is very significant, especially since it relates in the African context to Christianity. People of different African Traditional Religions, Islam and Christianity live together in families and cities. The African culture is pluralistic in its ethnic composition as well as in religious and ethnical issues (Pobee 1996:169).

Whereas many Euro-Americans are often disturbed by the loss of a centre, "Africans" don't get disturbed by that. Most Africans are pragmatics. All interpretations are judged on the ground of pragmatic standards, on the ground of what will work. Africans accept a practical and communal knowledge which tests the truth of a position by asking whether and how it might apply to the practice of the community.

Africans can live quite well without a centre. Most Africans are comfortable with the absence of certainty. They can live without explanation, are content with ambiguity and uncertainty. The African universe is a collection of incompartible and competing local narratives. They agree with the postmodern perspective that all knowledge is historically implicated. Nothing is known apart from its cultural setting and that setting is constitutive of what is known. There is/are no culturally neutral facts. Each society/culture becomes a universe unto itself with its own rules, values and structures for evaluation. There is no cross-cultural norms by which evaluation can be carried out. There is no single meta-narrative encompassing all peoples and all times. This is a Euro-American concept of domination which was imposed on African societies. Africans accept that in the world they will forever witness the struggle among conflicting narratives and interpretations of reality.

Africans deny that the rational, scientific method is the only measure of truth. They affirm that certain aspects of truth lie beyond reason and cannot be measured by reason. The African world is understood to be relative, indeterminate and participatory. Africans have a holistic way of thinking. Emotion, feelings, intuition, reflection, personal experience, tradition, religious sentiment and mystical experience take on renewed importance for both Africans and postmodernists. Both want to know in order to participate, not to dominate.

> This kind of knowledge confers community, and can be turned communicative knowledge, as compared with dominating knowledge. It lets life be life and cherishes its livingness (Moltmann 1985:32)

To lose any belief in pure knowledge is not to deny the possibility of knowledge itself. What we know, we know with relative adequacy and we know it is bounded by the realties of language, society and history. Africans do not think that if something is not established objectively, then it is merely relativistic and therefore meaningless. Africans do not have the same problems about relativity and plurality as Euro-Americans have with their Euro-American scientific mentality.

While many Euro-Americans might not be willing to relegate Christianity to the status of one more faith amongst others, this poses no problem for Africans. In all honesty, Christianity in the black population of Africa has been just one more faith amongst others. Many black Africans who belong to the mission churches by day, also belong to the African Traditional Religions by night. The reason for this is that Africans were presented with a gospel alien to their context, thinking and needs and because many Euro-Americans were intolerant of African worldviews and cultures as a whole. In keeping with the modernist mode of thinking of the time, Euro-American Christianity was prepackaged and exported to the colonies and expected to be a good fit universally. Colonial missionaries were determined to instill in African converts Euro-American values and a distaste of African traditional religious values and cultures, which were considered inferior and primitive. African converts were expected to adopt a new identity grounded on the Euro-American order.

Part of this alienation was brought on by an underestimation of simple, but important issues such as songs, dances, dramas and rituals, which are meaningful forms of discourse for articulating life. But Africans were not convinced about the inferiority of their religious and cultural values. Their continued appreciation of African religious worldviews in the face of structured derogation, is an act of political resistance against cultural imperialism. African people believe that each religious narrative makes sense for its people, providing the fulfillment of the longings and aspirations of its people.

In retrospect, one is able to re-evaluate and figure one's experience in a postmodern politics of sorts in Zimbabwe or elsewhere in Africa. The multivocal character of the economic struggle and the interfaith processes are intuitive everyday efforts to find meaningful expressions of commonality and unity on the ground of diversity amongst economical

oppressed sectors. Yet this struggle never escaped the long shadow of essentialist-aspirations which embodied the naïve hope that a black African government will usher in an egalitarian social order. It is exactly within these contexts that organisations cohere around cultural identies as a political front.

5.2.3.2 Public space and discursive context

Another important aspect of the postmodern political agenda is the need for a public space and a discursive context which will be most appropriate for interaction and change, in contexts of definite asymmetries between dominant and subordinate groups (Phillips 1994:235-252). The reference here is to a politics of difference which makes it easier for subordinate groups to articulate their interests, experiences and demands to dominant groups. A public space is constructed within which subordinate classes have the opportunity to voice and name the specificities of their oppression and peripheralization (Phillips 1994:249). From a different angle the church is a site of politics of difference, if one considers the diversity of its members. The fact is that even an average congregation in Zimbabwe today is a micro-ecumenical movement, composed of many individuals who come from different contexts and no longer expect to have to drop their individuality at the church door. Their feeling of not being accepted, with their individual and varied experiences and yearnings, is one reason for the crisis in church attendance. Local churches need to become practized in new forms of dialogue - to transform the tension between the variety of individual (perhaps even opposing) contexts and the catholicity of the congregation as a whole, into a creative tension. The more individual members testify about their faith in terms of their life stories and experiences, instead of saying what is theologically proper, the better the chance that this will succeed.

However, the problem is that difference is glossed over by appealing to people's oneness in Christ. The essence of this argument is that dominant groups need to be confronted directly with their totalizing and universalizing tendencies, to disentangle their positions of power. The church should act as a catalyst to articulate this perspective as well as serve as the embodiment of the subject voices which challenge the complacency of current power relations within the church and society.

Reflexive politics of difference enables subject groups to recognise their own presumptions to make clear internal restraints. This gives subject groups a close-to-practical framework in

which to think about processes of questioning domination, be it external or internal. Narratives of domination often flow continuously from the external environment, through the internal consciousness and practices, and back to the external. So people can identify a definite connection between postmodern activism for a sensitive public space where politics of difference can find expression, and internal (church and Christian) understandings about complicity with processes and systems of domination prevalent in all realms. Often these realms are perceived to be neat opposites or exclusive of each other.

5.2.3.3 Decolonization

The importance of decolonization as a practice and as an integral part of postmodern activism, particularly in a context where there is no stable political grounding, should be noticed. It is imperative that people seek to define their ethics and principles in relation to their subjective experiences of oppression, but not to alleviate this to a universalizing status. It should be the ground of realising the flourishment of other subjective experiences of which they may be perpetrators of oppressive practices, and people need to continuously be on the lookout for areas of meeting between these experiences and perspectives. In the spaces of meeting, people need to define and continuously reformulate agendas for political articulation. The main dimension here is an inward-looking posture to complement and inform their outward political activism since the boundaries between the public and private are deconstructed.

Africans must applaud this prophetic postmodern dimension. They must welcome the challenge to epistemological comfort which deconstruction represents:

> There is no mastery, story, or master name, no metaphysics of presence, no tradition. There are only stories, names and traditions. The meaning scatters in the wind. Efforts to still the reality of flux by chanting a master name and constructing man-made islands of safety are inherently violent. Such totalizing moves have always historically left a wide swath of destruction and suffering, coopting or dominating others (Wilkinson 1996:136).

One needs only to reflect on the violence of religious wars, inquisitions and witch hunts of every stripe to see the truth in this warning against any hermeneutics which is so sure of itself that it turns truth into a weapon with which to defend epistemological privilege. The truth of systematic violence and of the marginalized, oppressed and voiceless in our time and

throughout history is irrefutable. Africans need to recognize that the constructions of truth which Euro-Americans impose on reality have been the source of much pain and evil - particularly in Africa and other developing countries. Africans who have had the experience of being involved in a battle over some spesific issues of biblical interpretation – be it eschatology, economics, polygamy or the role of women in the church – know the rancour which can seep in, all the more because Euro-Americans are convinced that the Book on whose interpretation people disagree is of ultimate authority. Most of Euro-American authoritative interpretations end up inflicting some sort of violence either on other people or on other interpretations.

Deconstructionism launch an attack on all conceptions or concentrations of power, be it militarism, racism, sexism, academia and theology and totalizing visions, wherever they are found. All incarnations of metaphysics of presence need to be deprivileged and unmasked as appearances, for it is in their name that minorities or marginalized groups are excluded. The deconstructionist theory, indeed the whole postmodernist emphasis on the interdeterminative flux of meaning, stresses variety and difference. Africans affirm postmodernism in declaring war against any system and its possessors which declare that truth is present in them. Better the abyss of uncertainty than the totalitarian presence of meaning and its cauldron of oppression (Wilkinson 1996:138).

The complexity and insecurity-inducing character of postmodern political practice, is imputed to the fact that it seeks to state its case, not by appealing to liberal-democratic values of equality and difference, nor to decry the negative effects of differences, but because it advocates in favour of a sharper and more pronounced articulation of difference (Soya and Hooper 1993:185).

Postmodernity advocates that attention be given to shared sensibilities which cross boundaries of class, gender, race, etc. which could be better ground for the construction of sympathy-ties and would thus advance recognition of common commitments and serve as a ground for unity and union. This captures the simultaneity of the liberatory potential of postmodernity – the desire to experience sympathy and unity in the now, but actively engaging in processes to attain an egalitarian and better future. Practices which are epitomized in the idea of prefigurative politics. In this postmodern appropriation of theoretical insights, Africans read deep resonances for their faith. Does not the kingdom of God on earth have an actual concern for the importance of the prefigurative politics, as expressed aptly in the saying: practice what you preach?

A large part of postmodernity appeals to African activists and religious sensibilities because it is open-ended and tentative. It forces one to appreciate contradictory, risky, ambiguous, conflictual, insecure, peripheral and creative dimensions of everyday life and radical political activism. Postmodernity permits space for an African humanity and simultaneously injects a restlessness into any moment of contentment, since any configuration of people, environment and resources often excludes/marginalizes someone's voice or identity. In this continuous watchfulness for who and what is being marginalized, a certain ability emerges to develop a politics and agenda that seeks to tie different kinds of margins without relinquishing to the motive to simply be another or different center of power, in the foucauldian sense of how a power/knowledge link functions (PMB:138-144).

The similarity with the central occupation and message of Jesus is unmistakable, a person who sought to contaminate his mission by seeking out the margins, living and learning with the sectors of society which was despised and pushed to the dark corners of contemporary society. His ministry served as a united movement of sorts of women, prostitutes, tax collectors, fishermen, etc. Unfortunately this has been translated as an imperative to deliberately and consciously align with the poor in society. The affirmation remains to be crucial in active faith, although I feel uncomfortable that the poor are so rarely disaggregated. This is exactly why I find a postmodern reading and analysis of modernity to be a valuable instrument to develop more concrete and action-defined understandings of people's roles in society as well as in a differentiated community of believers.

5.3 Dark side of *The Postmodern Bible*

No human work is perfect and the achievements of even the greatest theologians are open to criticism at certain points. The terrain of postmodernity is complex, expansive and marked by intense disagreements. The goal for dealing with it is a deliberate choice to isolate and extrapolate the dimensions and insights which are instructive for a radical agenda in an epoch of globalisation – increased interdeterminacy between societies and peoples and intensified inequalities along various trajectories. The postmodern theorising that is evolving to analyse, critique and deconstruct these processes of deepening inequalities at all levels from the local to the global, inspires me (rf also Pieterse 1996:53). Postmodernity is a double-edged phenomenon. The development of postmodernity have created greater

opportunities for Africans to resist Euro-American domination. But it also has a dark side which has become very apparent to me. This section discusses five main critiques which can be launched against postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible*.

5.3.1 Mono-Culturalism

The Postmodern Bible makes many contributions, both in theory and empirical analysis. Not least important is the fact that it skirts historical-critical theory's usual preoccupation with the author in favour of a much more embracing conception of the authorless. The collective scholarship in itself is part of the authors' implicit critique of prevailing understandings of authorship and their effort to transform disciplinary practice. The collective scholarship is the authors' means to contest an epistemology and set of disciplinary practices which privilege the autonomous self, an ideology which values private ownership and a professional discursive practice which legitimates the production and dissemination of knowledge in one form at the expense of another. The authors' collective effort seemed an apt platform for such a process since its composition is collective, its chapters unsigned and its cultural milieu predating the advent of the modern authorial self and copyright law. This is a new epoch in this field. Their struggle with issues of identity and purpose as well as their learning to read and write corporately, differently and in a manner which is appropriate for their time and space, should be celebrated.

This is a better alternative to think and write about the Bible. The humanistic ways of scholarship seemed wooden and stultifying in comparison. Humanistic ways are often individualistic, selfish, dominant and oppressive towards others. The collective process is communal, unselfish, less dominant and unoppressive towards others. The group process is better than the humanistic isolationist ways of scholarly work. Ideological biases would be exposed and insecurities of lack of knowledge could be admitted after a certain degree of trust had developed. Infighting could occur without degenerating into a personal affront. True friendship could be established.

The collective effort is a significant way of resistance, revitalization and transformation, promising other ways of producing knowledge in a discipline that has relied heavily on individualistic ways of scholarship. Truly, the authors' collective endeavor will inspire others to greater enterprises.

However, the issue of collective scholarship sounds very interesting and innovative though it lacks true or international collectiveness. The authors' collective effort is intriguing, yet resorts to an American-middle-class white bourgeois. All ten authors share an unmerited racial privilege attendant to being white and professionals in their society. Their collective efforts reflect the bourgeois individualism of their culture. They are thoroughly systematized cultural models of Euro-America. Their efforts were created and are sustained by trained scholars through privileged institutions of financial donors, publishers, professional societies, universities, colleges and seminaries.

One might be tempted to think that this is just an intellectual exercise for the benefit of these whites to enhance their positions in the academic world. One might have expected that the authors completed the whole collective process by not copyrighting their book. What difference does is make to copyright a book by a single author or by ten authors? An occasional resulting awkwardness to style is a small price to pay for a valuable theological statement. This collective enterprise may remain the monopoly of educated Euro-American middle-class white bourgeois. This leaves the authors' collective effort hanging in limbo, as a philosophically critical yet culturally lifeless rhetoric mirroring a culture permeated by scientific ethos and regulated by racist and capitalist norms. These authors become critically ingenious yet politically deluded ideologues who rightly attack bourgeois humanism, yet who also become the ideological adornments of late monopoly capitalist academics.

The collective scholarship should have included people from other cultures and contexts such as Africa, Asia and Latin America. This multiplicity of contributions could have made the collective scholarship both specific and international. Now what we read in this book is a mono-cultural collective scholarship – of one culture and one people. The various expertises, interests, critical perspectives, reading styles and working situations are all American. The composition of the group is narrow and as a result failed to deal sufficiently with the issues of oral critical exegesis and liberation exegesis simply because orality and liberalism are not American. It could be argued that all the seven strategies dealt with in *The Postmodern Bible* are about the preoccupation of American middle-class white bourgeois. Any interpretative theory which suffers from and unstructural understanding of African experience and struggle and which does not operate with an epistemology which regards the struggle of the poor and oppressed as the *"locus theologicus"* will not be relevant for Africans.

Nevertheless, these audacities of much of the collective scholarship should not blind Africans to the very great achievement of the authors' collective efforts as represented in *The Postmodern Bible*. We should never lose sight of the main forest in studying the trees. The humanistic models of scholarship need severe re-examination. There is a possibility of a new way forward evolving out of an old impasse. These are very small criticisms of a book that will remain an important milestone in the interpretation of the Bible. Sometimes the best works of scholarship are those which, after a first draft, are put down like a good wine, to be brought out again when properly matured.

5.3.2 Euro-American centricism

Another problem of postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* is the deeply Euro-American centric character of the materials coming from the postmodern philosophy and social science circles (Slater 1994a). This has to do with the teleological slipstream which the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* slide into by discussing postmodernity as a reflection and feature of late modernity. Bauman is quoted asserting that,

> Postmodernity may be interpreted as fully developed modernity taking a full measure of the anticipated consequences of its historical work, as modernity that acknowledged the effects it was producing throughout its history, yet produced inadvertently, rarely conscious of its own responsibility, by default rather than design, as by-products often perceived as waste. Postmodernity may be conceived of as modernity conscious of its true nature - modernity for itself ... The postmodern condition can therefore be described, on the one hand, as modernity emancipated from false consciousness; on the other, as a new type of social condition marked by the overt institutionalization of the characteristics which modernity - in its designs and managerial practices – set about to eliminate and failing that, tried to conceal (1992:187-188 in PMB:11).

In this approach the possible theorisations could almost by definition only be applicable to Euro-America. Furthermore, beyond this slight-of-hand Euro-American centricism there are more essential aspects. There are several ways this is accomplished: ignoring and nullifying theorisations from African shores and other third world shores. The authors who reject the historical-critical theory as oppressive and dominant also seems to display oppressive Euro-American civilizing attitudes towards African and other third world theorisations. In this

sense, such authors, though rightly critical of historical criticism, remain captives of the worst of Euro-American culture. Another way is essentialising Euro-American through discussing it as superior and permanently central, philosophically and culturally (Slater 1994b:4). With reference to critical biblical scholarship, Euro-America is viewed to be the epistemological center. Biblical interpretation is almost exclusively in the hands of Euro-American scholars. Their academics and scholarly guild are the arena where hermeneutical theories, interpretive constructs and exegetical discourses are constructed and from where they are exported to other cultures and contexts as having universal validity. This is a hegemonic reading of world history, with Euro-America as the pivot. This problem is a long-standing blindspot in the Euro-American social theory as well. This lack of a sense of history is actually a failing in humility. It is the sort of metaphysics which leads inevitably to inquisitorial intolerance and the spirit of domination. It is sobering to see the peripheralisation and silencing which are reinforced along with the postmodern turn.

Euro-American's attitude can be likened to that of a chameleon. In the postmodern environment one changes one's colon so as to adapt and be as accommodating as possible. One's essential nature, however, does not change. With a sense of desperation, they cling to the Euro-American way of doing things, especially to Euro-American standards, otherwise they are moving inexorably downhill. For example, the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* advocated collective scholarship to contest or skirt the historical-critical theory's usual preoccupation with the author in favour of a much more embracing conception of the authorless. But they copyrighted their collective book. What difference does it make to copyright a book by a single author or by ten authors. This is clinging to the Euro-American way of doing things and to Euro-American standards. I concur with Michael Foucault that authorship is a concoction of the modern bourgeoisie seeking to assign responsibility for controlling or policing what was written (Foucault 1979:143).

One might have expected these authors to serve as a useful springboard for a more engaged, even subversive, philosophical perspective in this regard.

> This is so primarily because it encourages the cultivation of critical attitudes toward all philosophical traditions. This crucial shift in the subject matter of philosophers from the grounding of beliefs to the scrutiny of groundless traditions – from epistemology to ethics, truth to practices, foundations to consequences – can lend itself to emancipatory ends in that it proposes the tenuous self-images and provisional

vocabularies that undergird past and present social orders as central objects of criticism (West 1996:27).

The postmodern shift allows biblical scholars to abandon their quest for the certainty of the right way of doing in favour of the more humane concern for useful doings and resources. With its destabilizing of the interpretive process and its decentering of the interpretations of experts, one might have expected the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* to give opportunity to the different subjectivities of others.

5.3.3 Globalisation

Another problem associated with postmodernity, is that postmodernity is on the ascendancy at the same historical moment when globalisation has struck a high mark in the 1990's. Globalisation is a world phenomenon capturing the attention of industrialists, economists, bankers, financiers, statepersons, politicians, social scientists, military strategists and even church leaders and theologians. This global phenomenon affects the lives of common people all over the globe, including members of our African Churches.

The advancement of science and technology has switched into high gear and picked up speed. Information and communication sciences have multiplied the speed in which technology has progressed. Because of the mass media which use this advanced information and communication technology, the world has become a global village or a networked society. The industrially advanced nations are increasingly moving towards post-industrially nations and are becoming information nations (Ramo 1997:36-45).

Globalisation is a keyword in economical, political and cultural life. Economically, Third World countries can no longer plan their national development without taking cognisance of this globalisation aspect. No Third World country can plan its national development without the interference of IMF or incurring huge debts, loaned by Euro-American nations and other international banking syndicates. What happened on October 19, 1987 in the New York Stock Exchange had an immediate repercussion which affected stock markets all over the globe and triggered the global recession. In turn, this aggravated the difficult lives of people in Third World countries. Batra asserts that the global economic depression in the 1990's is the outcome of "the rising concentration of wealth" which created the "wealth disparity ... generating a worldwide leap in stock prices and worldwide fragility in the banking system"

(1990:6-7). Only a small percentage of the richest people own the greater part of the worlds resources.

Politically, the instant availability of news from many parts of the globe, is made possible through the revolution in electronic media which continuously spread its global networks (Ramo 1997:35-46). No one will forget the scene on television of the crumbling Berlin Wall, symbolising and visualising the demise of communism and the Cold War which have haunted the world for decades. Neither will one forget the scenes depicted by the television cameras on the war in the Persian Gulf, the defeat of Saddam Hussein and the ongoing disarming of his military force. These events have repercussions and rippling effects worldwide, because through television receivers people all over the world can see and hear about events and life just about anywhere in the universe, almost at the same moment as it is recorded by the television camera.

What is often forgotten is the fact that these global media networks are by no means unbiased when presenting the news. They cannot, because these global mass media networks are owned and controlled by big business of Euro-American countries with vested interests.

One cannot deny the fact that the victims of the Persian Gulf War were not Kuwaitis and Iraqis only as most mass media would like to portray. Neither can one claim that this war affected the people in the Persian Gulf only, for it has victimised millions of people worldwide, causing casualities on all sides. Many thousands of Indians, Pakistanis and Filipino migrant workers lost their jobs and life's savings when they fled the region. Many millions of dollars of revenue were lost by the countries of these Asian workers and many billions of dollars in the countries of the region. In fact, this war has aggravated the dire economic condition worldwide.

The instant and continuous spreading of news through the mass media on the dreadful situation in Sarajevo, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, has caused the EC an UN to impose the strictest sanctions against the Serbian government. No doubt this action will have global consequences.

The brutal murders by the army of unarmed civilians in China in 1989 and in Ciskei, South Africa, have caused the world to condemn such inhuman acts and Euro-American countries applied political pressure on these governments to restore democracy. Though unsatisfactorily, changes did occur in these countries, because of worldwide political

pressure. On the other hand, the vivid pictures depicting the starving people in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, Angola, the devastation caused by Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines, the hurricane Andrew in Florida in the USA and earthquakes in various parts of the world have moved people worldwide to show their humanitarian and social solidarity. Global solidarity is made possible by the global networks of the mass media. Pressure for democracy and market economy and global social solidarity seem to be part of the globalisation phenomenon.

The recent monetary crisis in Europe on the eve of the French referendum on the Maastricht Treaty has heightened the anxieties and the frustrations of many people, bringing more uncertainties which impinge on the lives of common people, including members of African Churches. The public broadcasting of the USA president's sexual scandal attracted many people worldwide, because what happen in one area will have serious bearing on the lives of people globally. These and other events anywhere in the world have global cause and effect relations, thus having serious global consequences. We can no longer speak of any main event which does not have global significance.

Environmentally, it is very clear that we can no longer be indifferent to what happens thousands of kilometers away, for the earth is the only "globe" with one natural ecosystem. The holes in the depleted ozone layers, the global warming and acid rain, which affects all of us, regardless of where we live, are phenomena which are not independent of the testing of nuclear and hydrogen bombs in the Pacific islands or elsewhere. Besides, this "green-house effect" has also been scientifically proved to be caused by air (populace) polution produced by heavy industries in Europe, Japan, North American and other places as well as by carbon monoxide produced by cars around the clock worldwide, and by carbon dioxide produced by cattle which supply our meat and milk.

The dumping of nuclear and other toxic industrial waste in oceans or in remote lands in the Third World countries, are poisoning the land and the waters, which is the fountainhead of life for people in those regions. The transfering of heavy industries, which cause polution, from Euro-American countries to Third World countries, is part of the globalisation policy of the unjust political and economic systems dominated by the group of seven industrially developed nations.

There are no less data in terms of globalisation of our culture or lifestyles. This globalisation of life-style is mainly that product of the thriving world economy, telecommunications and commercial advertising. Naishbitt and Aburdene assert that, "In the urban centers of the

developing world signs of the international youth culture are almost everywhere. So enthusiastically are we swapping food, music and fashion that a new universal international lifestyles reigns" everywhere (1990:102).

We are experiencing the transformation of our lives because of the advancement of communication and information technology, which created a new civilisation, the information society. This transformation is, however, not without essentially ethical issues which calls for adequate answers. Toffler asserts,

> Today as industrial civilization passes into history, powerful voices demand to know whether the emergent civilization will find room in it for the millions, indeed billions on earth who today are discriminated against, harassed or oppressed because of their racial, ethnic, national or religious backgrounds. Are the poor and powerless of the past going to stay that way, viewing the future, as it were, through bullet proof glass - or will they be welcome in the new civilisation? (1983:148).

It can be argued that postmodernity is part of a larger thrust of commodification, marketization and individualism, processes tied to the withdrawal of the state from social service provision. In all aspects of the current era within which informational capitalism is triumphant the lot of the vast majority of the world's population, located mainly in the third world is sinking deeper into impoverishment (Rutherford 1990).

I am prompted to ask "Whose Globalisation?" Today, Third World countries are groaning under the heavy weight of international debt and the IMF's Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP). The latter is borne out of the desire to streamline the weak economics of developing countries in relation to the economics of Euro-America. Wherever the program has been launched, the immediate impact was massive suffering for the common people of these developing countries. The ultimate aim is not change or improvement, but to keep people where they belong; that is, the weak must continue being weak and the strong must remain strong. Both packages, the debt issue and ESAP, are controlled by Euro-American countries.

I am prompted to ask: For whose benefit is the developing world carrying debt and the burden of ESAP? How did the developing countries become poor borrowers in the first place? It is not through the exploitation of these countries by Euro-American countries? In the developing world where the poor and marginalized men and women work day and night to pay the IMF, what is the moral responsibility of critical readers and their readings to a

world heaving under globalisation? In this context, the only message of insight the postmodern reading has to offer is: all is text/discourse and all capacity to distinguish between the copy and the original is lost (West 1996:12-15).

Postmodernity is appealing to Africans when it shows that all reality is constructed reality and alternative constructions can be substituted as well. This view of reality strengthens postmodernity's hand when critiquing the status quo, but it weakens postmodernity's hand when it comes to the political reality of proposing an alternative construction. If both are merely arbitrary constructions, why bother replacing modernity with postmodernity? (Tolbert 1995:308-318). The so-called coincidence is certainly too reinforcing and convenient to be simply coincidental.

There is no doubt that the marketing potential and flexible productive capacities of capital has an enormous amount to benefit from theories which stress plurality, diversity, individualism and the valour of difference. Yet, this exploitative and opportunistic appropriation of crudified aspects of postmodern sensibilities is in fact part of the current systems and relations of dominations which need to be deconstructed and dismantled by resisting and constructing alternative visions.

5.3.4 Feminism

Another problem concerns feminist criticism. While feminism has continuously raised the critical issue of gender, it continues to struggle to transform itself into a politics and way of reading which is capable of engaging issues of race, class and cultural difference. Feminism has served in counterpoint to the universal and objective claims, attempting instead to assert forms of counter-knowledge.

However, I am really uncomfortable with the assumptions underlying much of the feminist discourse. Not only the abstraction "man", but also the abstraction "woman" ought to be challenged. Feminism has at various times been complicite with dominant ways of thought, merely inverting them rather than transforming them. Feminism is also a white or Euro-American middle-class movement. The traditional feminist view of the basically unequal power relation between men and women, is questionable. Not all men have access to the same kinds of power nor have all women, then and now, embraced each other as sisters, but instead some have been responsible for the oppression of other women and men. It could be arqued strongly that Euro-American women have been responsible for the oppression of

both African women and men. They have been responsible for oppressing other developing countries as well. For example: Who issued threats to Saddam Hussein in the 1998 UN-Iraq stand off? Was it not the American Secretary of State, Mrs. Madeleine Albright? Who was President George Bush's right-hand person in the 1990 Gulf War with Saddam Hussein? Was it not the British premier, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher? Why are the developing countries groaning under the heavy weight of international debt and the IMF's ESAP? Is it not to some extent because of the evil policies of Euro-American countries of which women like Albright, Thatcher and other women form a part? Where are the feminists when African women and women from other developing countries are groaning under these oppressive policies.

One thing is clear from feminism. The issues involved here are quite different from those of African women seeking to understand how (why) the Bible has been used to justify gender oppression and ways of subverting it, African women seeking to understand "how can cultural practices which do not give women a possibility to experience new life as Christian Church women be used as a ground for theology" (Uduyoye 1992, 1995). African women are concerned with something different from Euro-American feminism.

African women read the Bible through their cultural lenses in the context of famine, refugee status, ethnic loyalties, livirate marriages, poverty and polygamy – all of which are African realities. For thousands of years, African women have adhered to cultural prescriptions. For example, childless women have been despised and marginalized by society; widows have been obliged to yield to relatives of the dead husband to determine their status and future. Instances where all the deceased's wealth have been taken away from a bereaved family by greedy relatives, are some of the ugly faces in the Shona societies. Violence against women shows that no society is free from it. Other issues exhibit women's powerlessness and vulnerability in face of cultural prescriptions as well (Kanyoro 1997:368).

At the present moment, neither Euro-American feminism nor Euro-American womanism offers a liberative theology for African women. African women should come up with their own version of feminism/womanism that incorporates cultural hermeneutics as a key to reading the Bible in the African context. No theology could be sufficient if it fails to speak to and from the experiences of its participants, doers and hearers. Women's experiences includes biological and cultural experiences, as well as feminist and political experiences of those advocating for a transformation of society which include both women and men as

human beings (Russel 1987). While gender is important, it is not the preoccupation of African women.

The issue of gender, when applied to African women, may reflect an uncritical application of Euro-American thought patterns imposed on the Africans. To simply adopt Euro-American feminism will be a hegemonic reading of world history, with Euro-America as the epistemological center, where hermeneutical theories, interpretive constructs and exegetical discourses are constructed and exported to other cultures and contexts as having universal validity.

Traditionally, African societies defined separate spheres of authority based on sexual identity. Each sex managed its affairs, ensuring that each sex and its interests were represented at all levels. By mandating social structures with certain high-status positions slated for both sexes, these systems assured that both sexes were included among the ranks of monarchs, councilors, title holders, religious dignitaries, political advisors and lineage heads (Mazrui 1986:136-137).

Women leaders took part in running public affairs, acting as political pressure groups, interceding with the supernatural on the community's behalf and shouldering significant responsibilities for the general welfare (Daneel 1989:160).

The decreased status of women in contemporary Africa is attributable to numerous factors, but a great deal of the blame lies with the anti-feminist bias of Euro-American institutions. During colonialism, traditional chiefs who were incorporated into the local administrative structures reaped material rewards in form of salaries and other benefits. Because colonial government only recognized male chiefs, female authority figures fell behind in the new money economy. Even with the advent of independence, Euro-American donors have continued to slight women by directing the most lucrative development assistance mainly toward men. Therefore the realm of women's authority is less strategic at present than in the past. I would like to advocate for a home grown feminism/womanism for African women rather than the Euro-American feminism/womanism. Euro-American feminism relates to the Euro-American context and not necessarily to the African context. I am calling on our African women to come up with their own feminism which is relevant to the African context. Euro-American feminism/womanism should not be allowed to be an overarching framework or single meta-narrative by which all people can judge competing claims of alternative paradigms or worldviews.

5.3.5 Text-centricism

Another problem of postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* concerns its failure to deal adequately with the issue of the oral critical theory which is the heart of black African identities. In general Africa is mainly illiterate. In most countries less than half of the population above 15 years of age know how to read and write and in about all African countries literacy among the female population is far below that among the male (Britannica Book of the Year 1987:914-919). This fact is of great importance, because women constitute the larger percentage of the more active and practising members in most African churches. It is legitimate, therefore, to assume that African life is, in general, less literate and more oral and visual.

The Postmodern Bible assumes a printed text and readers who have internalized textuality and whose consciousness has been reconstructed by textuality, whereas the majority of the African people are living in a context of primal orality or residual orality. I am less acquainted with African Churches where literacy is preponderant and where, therefore, the use of the Bible, as a written word, presents no special problem. My experience is mainly of African churches for whom reading and writing are peripheral in daily life. Among these churches are people who had been to school and could read and write. Still their ordinary way of life do not depend on literacy. Therefore, orality does not imply that all Africans do not read or write, although it is true of the greater percentage. This has nothing to do with intellectual ability (Ong 1982:55). Rather, they function in an oral culture in which the written text plays a marginal role. This is the case for people in the rural places but even in urban and semi-urban places the percentage of people who live in a illiterate culture is greater than one might be led to imagine (Barrett 1968).

Though literacy could structure consciousness and even a little literacy could make a difference, those with only a passing exposure to literacy remain strongly within an oral culture. Though the interrelationship between literacy and orality is complex, efforts to blur the distinction between primary and secondary oral and literate communities would be less helpful. There are different perceptions of reality which would be ethnocentric to deny. The kind of orality in which the majority of Africans live is not an issue of illiteracy, but of a worldview. The issue of orality is significant. *The Postmodern Bible* assumes a textually constructed universe.

One might ask whether the "text" is the same text for those whose thought processes are shaped by literacy as for those still living in residual orality? Moreover, if they read the text of the Bible, do they read or interpret in the same manner? How do those still living in primary orality appropriate the Bible? Since ritualization is a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations, what is the power dynamic at work in the use of a sacred text in residually oral societies of Africa.

The printed sacred text confronting a primary oral society has the effect of privileging literacy over orality. In the process, the missionaries of textuality destroyed the primary oral traditions and skills of the indigenous African people. New Testament academics are paid to induct students in the mysteries of textuality.

The grassroots culture of Africans has remained a residually oral culture. This is one of the immediate clashes faced by African scholars. There is a sense of uneaseness and betrayal among Africans at what they are taught, a disquiet which they find hard to put into words. At the heart of this problem lies the overwhelming textuality of the Euro-American approach. The Bible is no longer Word in any sense but only a text, an object which can be dissected, analyzed and projected on the screen. Acknowledging Gutenberg's liberation of the Bible and the benefits of the historical and literary study of Biblical texts, one should also face the limiting factors of printing and what could be defined as the Gutenberg captivity of the Bible (Weber 1983:10).

Given the fact that the biblical texts were first transmitted orally and that the oral critical theory work without the subject-object dichotomy, one might have expected *The Postmodern Bible* authors to devote more space to it than the twenty-five lines they devoted to it in their book. It could be argued strongly that this is Euro-American centricism, ignoring and nullifying theorisations from African shores while generalising theorisations from Euro-America. What the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* have dispatched to the margins, I find to be central and energising to Africans. This leaves *The Postmodern Bible* to the specialists, rather than the illiterate Africans. A printed book remains among Africans a foreign and ineffective medium (PMB:10).

5.4 Concluding remarks

It should by now be clear that, at a political-cultural level, Africans are concerned with making a case for a radical activism with a postmodern sensibility. This entails that the

African churches have to practically resist the urge of returning to an inwardly focused posture, especially now that the Euro-American domination is being deconstructed. Being in Africa calls Africans to roll up their sleeves and venture into the thick of everyday politics and development. To pilot such an enterprise, it is enlightening to appropriate that which is useful from postmodernity, which for Africans entails a holistic view of reality, communitarianism and politics of difference. This includes an anti-essentialist understanding of subjectivity and the plurality of subjectivities as well as the potential of interdeterminacy between different subjectivities, public space and discursive context. It provides for insistence on novel ways of politics and tools to deconstruct and unmask the intrinsic oppressive nature of dominant discourses in society which serve to entrench current relations of inequality between different classes and groups. It insists on the confidence to embrace ambiguity, differences, contradictions, uncertainty and an opened future, a political activism which is always relative to and contingent upon the context from which it comes (i.e. more provisional, being able to continuously and deliberately subject one's practice, both individually and collectively). It challenges us to scrutiny and critique as a mode of learning and acting political. Hybridity and creolization as non-purity and cross-articulation of identities are welcomed and affirmed (Pieterse 1996:60-61).

Postmodernity in fact shows every sign of healthy young growth, needing pruning sooner or later, no doubt, but at the moment to be encouraged. Much of postmodern criticism could be accepted by many Africans except some few stubborn African adherents of the old historical-critical theory - those famous for their support of a long series of lost causes. Postmodernity contains the most vitriolic attack on modernity to be found anywhere in New Testament scholarship. The reaction to *The Postmodern Bible* has been largely unsympathetic. But the fact that it could be written at all by senior and widely read scholars, shows how much times have changed.

Chapter 6

SIGNIFICANCE OF POSTMODERNITY AS EXPRESSED IN *THE POSTMODERN BIBLE* FOR AFRICAN CHURCHES AND AFRICAN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

What does a postmodern sensibility mean for African churches in concrete terms? How can a postmodern critique of modernity assist African churches to be authentic, contextually-appropriate hermeneutical communities of the gospel? (Newbigin 1989:222-223). African churches need to examine themselves in terms of the impact which modernity has had on them. If Africans discover how modernity has contaminated their embodiment of the gospel, could postmodernity offer a better way for African churches? African churches were deformed not only in terms of the sinfulness of individuals, but also in terms of the churches themselves as organic unities. The deformation of churches summons African Christians themselves to test their churches against what God intends for them to become. Such testing involves a re-thinking and a re-orientation of what it means for them to be African churches.

Thus, besides looking outward at the increasingly non-christian Euro-American culture of modernity, African Christians should also be willing to look inward and ask questions regarding their own authenticity and faithfulness to Jesus and God. Maybe African Christians could permit the postmodern critique of modernity to assist them in discovering clearly where African churches have syncretized the gospel in an acceptance of the content and method of modernity, a syncretism that may distort both the messenger and the message of the gospel of Christ which was supposed to be presented.

The best lesson a postmodern perspective has for African churches is the importance of humility and modesty. Being deeply ensconced in highly complex, heterogenous, broken, damaged, alienated, fearful, violent and fluid societies, African churches need to learn to appreciate the power of difference, the tenacity of common people to eke out human lives out of virtually nothing, and incessant everyday efforts to build justice, love and communities, even in ambiguous ways. Before African churches put on their proselytising cloaks, they have to rediscover their religious legacy to listen, learn and love unconditionally (Pieterse 1996:61).

It has been pointed out that truth is not totally present in the postmodern era. Because other cultures or religions are understood to be equal to one's own, spirituality is on the increase and religion (all religions) has a voice in the world of public discourse. This entails that, while African churches might have the truth of God's revelation and salvation in Christ, it is not the totality of truth. They should always be open for more glimpses of the truth from wherever they may come. Humility and modesty exist precisely because truth is never totally present in any one culture or religious tradition. From a position of modesty, appreciating the various energies and efforts in societies, African churches can begin to establish relations with other groups and communities, whether secular or religious.

In this way African Christians will understand their identities as one among a number of others, as one which is inescapably contaminated by the features of others and as the result of various and distinct identities that cross-sect and interweave with others. Rutherford (1990:26) asserts that cultures and identities are inseparable and the interrelations of difference are marked by translation and negotiation. In such an understanding and cultural-political context, how does a postmodern sensibility or how does postmodernity itself assist African Christians and African churches to become genuine African?

The postmodern critique of modernity can assist African churches to come to grips with a new paradigmatic understanding of Jesus' Church as being one, holy, catholic and apostolic community of faith in Africa. In turn, this could assist African churches to search for a new plausibility structure which, while not grounded on modernity's assumptions, might offer them an alternative to nihilism, meaninglessness, valuelessness and fragmentation, which was advanced by the distorted view of postmodernity (Van Engen 1997:438).

A postmodern critique could also assist African churches to align themselves to the importance of a discursive framework within which distinct groups could assert their interests and struggle for it. African churches should be constantly engaged in a process of negotiation between their faith commitments and various other pluralities which exist - be they religious, political, economic or social. The connection between religious beliefs and activities in other realms should be negotiated at every turn (Adams 1996:101).

African churches need to think about their relationship with other social actors which are also working towards a more just and equitable future. They must grow via interactive experiences of joint action and sharing of resources and ideas and they must seek out other platforms for joint learning and action rather than turning inward and growing in isolation (Pieterse 1996:62).

In the years ahead there will be numerous occasions when various religious traditions of the world will be required to negotiate, not only for their own self-interest, but also for the common good of humankind. Küng asserts the following: "No survival without a world ethic. No world peace without peace between religions. No world peace without dialogue between religions" (1993:xv). The advent of postmodernity could provide African churches with an opportunity which is open and inviting. Let African churches hope that they can successfully negotiate their way through the perils of their time and thus make these possibilities become a reality.

A postmodern critique can also assist African churches to fulfil an interlocutory role in creating spaces for different groups to share and express subjective understandings with a view of nurturing critical links. The fact is that even an average congregation in Zimbabwe or Africa today is a micro-ecumenical movement, composed of various individuals who come from different contexts and no longer expect to have to drop their individuality at the church door. Local churches will need to become practised in new forms of dialogue, to transform the tension between the variety of individual (perhaps even opposing) contexts and the catholicity of the congregation as a whole, into a creative tension.

The postmodern critique can assist African churches to offer a caring and supportive environment for their members struggling with the complexity and tiring consequences of political activism at the margin (Pieterse 1996:61).

The postmodern critique can also assist African churches to renew theology and spirituality in ways that is cross-sectoral and cross-identity cultural experiences can be signs of religious activism (Pieterse 1996:62).

Postmodernism can assist African churches in identifying and unmasking the complex forms of powerful interests in communities, who sophisticate and interweave distorted and prejudiced views about the other into the very fabric of daily reality. The manner in which news narratives are constructed and manipulated to define the "truth" about an event and induce "spectacles" which are performed precisely because it will be on the news, is the point in case here.

The postmodern critique can also assist African churches in pointing out oppressive and destructive consequences of Euro-American defined universals, the various common-sense assumptions concerning normalcy and behaviour imbued in Euro-American modernist philosophy, law and science. Moreover, people from various traditions and cultures are

usually indiscriminately funnelled to comply with harsh (state-driven) modernization plans in pursuit of the glorious (Euro-American) consumer society. A prophetic responsibility exists to voice a critique of the modernization doctrine which has been disguised as the only road to civility, modernity and social dignity (Pieterse 1996:62).

A significant attainment by the postmodern critique of the modernist identity politics relevant to African churches, is that it opens up new and challenging strategic possibilities for radical agendas. In concrete terms, in the wake of dislodging essentialism and the privileging of other subjects, endless combinations of networks and connections could flexibly be gathered and disassembled to challenge the adaptive aspect of exploitative and oppressive institutions, societies and discourses (Pieterse 1996:62).

6.1 One holy, catholic and apostolic community of faith

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that a postmodern critique of modernity could assist African churches to come to grips with a new paradigmatic understanding of the Church of Christ as being one, holy, catholic and apostolic community of faith. Let me attempt an evaluation of the postmodern critique of individualism, rationalism, scientific/materialistic positivism and technology as they relate to these four classical credal marks of the church of Jesus Christ, exploring their implications for an African paradigmatic understanding of being one, holy, catholic and apostolic community of faith (Van Engen 1997:438).

6.1.1 Post-individualist: One global communion of Jesus' disciples

African churches need to reject Euro-American individualism. Euro-Americans have failed to speak against modernity's widespread individualism. Instead, they have nurtured a strong sense of individual salvation, particularly in relation to their perspective on conversion. Euro-Americans have multiplied their denominations as they contest for converts. They have created large shopping-centre churches which cater to the tastes of each individual convert who joins them. Their emphasis on individual evangelism and conversion may have encouraged greater individualization of faith than they ever intended. Woodbridge et al asserts that,

> In the nineteenth century ... people adopted a new working definition of the church. Whereas Christians previously had seen the Church as God's primary agent of

activity in human history, the new view saw it as a voluntary association functioning to aid the individual Christian in practical goals such as spiritual growth and the gaining of converts. In the new perspective no institution had an inherited or traditional authority; instead, all human organizations found their basic in the uncoerced consent of the individual. The will of the individual was the primary foundation for human organization and the church was no exception (1979:175).

The direction toward individualization and atomization of Euro-American religion has continued uninterruptedly. Far from adopting a missionary posture toward their culture, they may have instead nurtured that which assisted in entrenching modernity even further.

African churches need to recapture the Biblical idea of the church as a communion of saints (Bonhoeffer 1963), a corporate body of believers involved in a conspiracy of goodness (Messer 1992). A rediscovery of their corporateness as one church might open the road for them to affirm one another as human beings, yet hold tightly to each other as integral parts of a mysterious holy nation, royal priesthood, God's temple and family of God (Minear 1960). Such a corporate perspective would provide room for African churches to define evangelism as the primary initiation into God's Kingdom (Abraham 1989:13).

McGarran made a case of people-group or multi-individual conversion. Through resisted in Euro-America, this more corporate and Biblical viewpoint was accepted in developing countries. Could it be that postmodernity's challenge of modernity's penchant for individualism might stimulate African churches to discover anew what they have always known; that "There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-5).

Note that this is not a facile visible unity of the type, proposed in past days by the easy optimism of the earliest ecumenical movement, but rather an organic cohesion which involves a spiritual, covenantal and relational corporateness that creates a congregation where the Pauline image of body is given concrete, public reality. This is the congregation which becomes the focal point of the reign of God (Van Engen 1991:59-71).

This renewed corporate nature of the church is refered to as "The Congregation as Hermeneutic of the Gospel" by Newbigin (1989). The idea of a congregation needs to be a corporate reality, the whole which is larger than the sum of the individuals who constitute it. African churches may need non-Euro-American perspectives and non-Euro-American modes of being, of organic corporateness, for African churches to be able to learn how to be this

kind of church. African churches need to rekindle a vibrant, living, corporate, joyful congregational life. African churches need a recovery in actual, visible life of what is means to live out the *koinonia, kerygma, diakonia* and *marturia* of the gospel of Jesus together as the Body of Christ (John 13:35). Therefore, a dynamic, energized, transformed and transforming fellowship.

Jesus' new presence in the loving fellowship (*koinonia*) of the disciples constitutes the church. Without this presence of Christ, there will be no church of Jesus. How do people forget that it is only in the context of love which the disciples have for Jesus as Lord and disciple for disciple that the church has life at all (Van Engen 1991:91).

6.1.2 Post-rationalist: A holy community of faith

African churches need also to reject Euro-American nationalism. Euro-American theology has depended heavily on the Enlightenment-style rationality, principles of logic and reason to gain acceptance and respectability in philosophical, theological and social science circles. Euro-American theology was strongly dependent on the Enlightenment-style of reason to articulate and defend their positions. Theology has depended on certain individuals doing their most careful work of deductive logic to support the Euro-American perspective on the gospel. This could be viewed as essentially a Euro-American version of the manner in which almost all modern theology has performed its work (Thiel 1991:ix).

When one looks into the Bible one finds that holiness and faith include rationality and proposition, but offer a Biblical perspective of truth which is broader and deeper. It is covenantal, rational and corporate. Euro-Americans have brought into the church of Jesus Christ the Greek assumption that ignorance is evil, and the antidote is knowledge. Yet they have always had difficulty being able to explicate how to move from knowledge to commitment (Kraft 1989:26-35).

Postmodernity's critique of the bankruptcy of modernity's myth of the rational could stimulate African churches to self-examination in relation to the holiness of Jesus' Church. Myth takes itself to be a secret witness to the genesis of a meaning in *illo tempore* and pretends to make present that original meaning. Modernity's reliance on human reason ignores sin. If African churches realize that human reason is not reliable to give them indubitable and indisputable truths concerning God, where do they find certainty and objectivity?

They could find certainty in an encounter with the living God, through Jesus Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit who comes as presence to them and as love and wisdom of God (Newbigin 1991). This certainty coming from an intimate faith relationship with Christ is linked with being part of the Body of Christ (John 13:35), where they could experience the presence of the Holy. In Luke-Acts the Holy Spirit often comes when the disciples are gathered together. The experience is corporate and, although it affects their minds, it transforms their whole person. The corporate experience creates a wide range of ways by which this type of knowing occurs. African churches should consider other ways of experiencing and knowing the truth concerning God – ways which would be complementary to rational propositions. Maybe African churches could learn more from postmodernity in relation to images, stories, praises, music, metaphor and right-brain reflection as well as left-brain logical propositions. Maybe African churches need to be called back to a sense of holiness which is relational, covenantal and celebrative. Maybe African churches need to create more space for a hermeneutical spiral that offers them ways of knowing Jesus Christ through narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy and parable (Osborne 1991:153-251).

Biblical faith is grounded on more than logical affirmations. It consists of more than giving assent to a set of propositions. It profoundly involves a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is a covenantal holiness which involves a knowing, a grasping of the love of Christ in the deeply intimate Biblical sense, far wider, deeper, higher and broader that the acknowledgement of a set of propositions. They are called to love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love their neighbours as themselves (Mark 12:29-31). The Old Testament background of this idea is clearly holistic and relational, a love which is total, involving one's whole being (1 John 4:19-21).

Thus a postmodern critique assists African churches to recall the injunction that Enlightenment-style reason is not sufficient. Instead of purely philosophical justifications of faith, maybe African churches need to focus more on relationships with Jesus in the midst of the community of faith whose very public existence is itself part of the data of faith, a bridge between the individual and the social, the private and the public (Newbigin 1989). Instead of depending on purely rational propositions to justify the truth which they affirm, maybe African churches need to emphasize the word-deed praxis, the lived-out holiness of a community of faith which publically displays in word-and-deed the fruits of their relationships with Jesus Christ (Costas 1987). This mode of preaching will not be purely

propositional or verbal, nor purely emotional, nor purely existential, nor predominantly liturgical, nor mostly futurist, but all these combined, not in logical argumentation, but in a life of faith as God's people demonstrate in word-and-deed that Jesus is Lord. In such a situation the message and the essential being of the messenger community of faith may be used by the Holy Spirit to bring about a new holiness, a new encounter with God, a new transformation and a new call to participate in God's mission (Isa. 6) (Van Engen 1997:445).

6.1.3 Post-materialist: A Catholic fellowship of Jesus' followers

A postmodern critique could assist African churches to the reject Euro-American valuation of the scientific and visible. African Christians need to give themselves the freedom of self-examination. They need to look at how science has affected their own values. For do African Christians not seem just as charmed by highly visible, scientific and pragmatic theories as the Euro-American Christians? In the past, Euro-American Christians worked to create large denominations, highly visible institutions and economically-powerful organizations. Their penchant for largeness and visibility has moved them to use the benefits of science with little questioning of its presuppositions. Euro-American Christians have created evangelical television channels and programmes, multiplied tele-evangelists and they have created large visible institutions (West & Dube 1996:13).

The growing political influence of Evangelicals brought about a kind of nostalgia for a new kind of Christendom where society would be ruled by their principles which were to be accepted as public truth. All this nurtured the emerging of very visible important people who easily accepted all of the presuppositions of science's materialistic and naturalistic perspectives.

In the mission field Euro-American Christians found it easy to use anthropology, statistical analysis, sociology, agronomy, developmental economics and mass media as pragmatic means which are justified by their goals of world evangelization. They have stressed visible proofs of the social validity of their churches and organizations along with their mission enterprises. Euro-American Christians have accepted and used the advantages of science and in so doing accepted the plausibility structures of modern scientific positivism. Euro-American Christians used secular management principles whose bottom line was measurable production, not faith, to attain their goals in their churches and mission organizations. They liked results and attached great value to that which could be seen. They have accepted the

materialist/scientific reduction of life to the visible, be it in church growth, evangelism and in relief and development, and then justify their mission efforts based on those assumptions (Van Engen 1997:447).

In relation to the scientific positivism of the Enlightenment, the postmodern critique could assist African churches to return again to listen to Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus and the woman of Sychar (John 3:5, 23-24)   The mystery of the catholicity of the church is manifested here. The catholic church of Christ Jesus is invisibly visible in nature. What is seen of the Church is only partially what the Church of Jesus is.   Its ligaments and relationships, its Head, the Spirit that creates and sustains it, the mind of Christ (Phil. 2) that binds it all, are of the essential nature of the Body of Christ and are invisible. They exist but cannot be verified through empirical material or visible, scientific processes.   Truly the church exists only as it is embodied, shaped and mobilized in visible forms.   Nonetheless, the excessive emphasis on the visible calls African churches to re-examine the invisible, spiritual, organic and communion-based reality of the church. Postmodernity could assist African churches to be an amorphous movement which is mostly organismic and visible in nature, a loose fellowship of churches of those who believe in Jesus Christ and affirm the catholicity of the church's calling for the evangelization of the world. The conference on World Mission and Evangelism held in Brazil in 1996 asserts,

> Any authentic understanding of the gospel is both contextual and catholic. The gospel is contextual in that it is inevitably embodied in a particular culture; it is catholic in that it expresses the apostolic faith handed down from generation to generation within the communion of churches in all places and all ages (Gunther 1997:428).

Indeed the Bible speaks of the saving action of God, not as the same in every situation, but rather in different ways according to context. If one takes the gospel writers and the apostles for example, for Mark the coming of the Kingdom of God is the primary issue, Luke has a particular love for the poor, Matthew knows about the blessing of the law, John about the blessing of recognition of the Truth. Paul pins everything on the justification of sinners by faith, James wants to see that faith is not separated from works. Therefore the Bible itself speaks from different contexts and is received differently in different contexts. The gospel takes every context seriously and is intended for a plurality or a polycentricity of contexts. The affirmation of the contextualization of the gospel is a major development in Africa. It is

only logical that, in uniting the churches, the goal is no longer unity as such, but rather reconciled diversity or unity in diversity (Gunther 1997:429).

The world church is constituted by over two billion Christians, with incredible diversity of geography, culture, language and worldviews. The catholicity of this church is something African Christians accept by faith, because they are incapable of being able to see it or verify it on empirical, scientific terms (Van Engen 1991:54-57). It is the mystery of which Paul spoke of (Eph. 3:9-12).

The recapturing of this organic understanding of the Church of Jesus Christ will enable African churches to think of it as a huge, global, relational and spiritual network – mostly invisible, where unseen relationships, friendships, mutual support and prayer are primary. The Church of Jesus Christ will be understood ultimately to be a fellowship of Jesus' followers. This will be a church were the members are primary thus discovering the deep wisdom of the priesthood of all believers. This would entail that African Christians would be much more concerned about renewal, revival and transformation rather than about restructuring. They would devote their efforts at least as much to the communion of relationships within their churches as to their attaining of visible and measurable results related to their stated goals. Thus their corporate culture, their organizational dynamics, their missional administration and their forms of evaluation might change greatly. African Christians would celebrate the fact that this fellowship of Jesus' followers is invisible because it has been dispersed as salt and light throughout the world. Moreover, its presence in the world is transformational only to the extent that it is different from the world (Matthew 5).

This is what Newbigin meant when he referred to the congregation as "the hermeneutic of the Gospel" – a church which is essentially a community of praise, a community of truth, a community that is profoundly engaged in the concerns of the neighbourhood, a community that actively exercises a priesthood in the world, a community of mutual responsibility and a community of hope (1989:222-233).

This community is neither purely objective nor subjective. Rather, it is something of both. This community lives in what Volf calls "provisional absoluteness".

> I believe that provisional absoluteness not only transcends the false alternatives "indubitable-unreliable" but is also an authentically Christian way of talking about the ultimate reality rooted in the very nature of Christian existence. To be a Christian

means to experience God and live in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit of the new creation. Yet, this very real experience of God and this concrete new life are provisional; they are what the apostle Paul calls a "first installment" (2 Cor. 1:22) given under the conditions of the old world that is passing away. Within that old world there is no "sacred space" in which Christians can have an absolutely pure encounter with God or live absolutely true lives. The only "sacred space" is in the future new creation of God toward which they, the pilgrim people of God, are travelling. The peregrine nature of Christian existence implies the provisional nature of Christian knowledge. Because Christians are a people on the way to their final destiny, their knowledge cannot be a knowledge of those who have already arrived … until we come to see the triune God face to face, we will have to carry our religious treasure in earthen vessels – in provisional beliefs no less than in transient bodies (2 Cor. 4:7). Our certitude is not that of seeing but of hoping; "in hope we are saved" (Rom. 8:24) and it is therefore in hope that we know. Our unsuppressable urge for the final truth must be tempered with the same patience as our eager longing for the final liberation (Rom. 8:25) – patience to accept the provisional nature of our own knowledge and patience to be open toe the truth claims of others (1992:15-16).

African churches should be profoundly concerned with becoming a vibrant, alive, energized, transformed organism of the life of the Spirit (Allen 1962). This reality occurs when Jesus' followers live out a hoinonia fellowship of love, in Christ's name (Van Engen 1991:87-100). A stress on the organismic life of the communion of saints enable African churches to re-evaluate their health, not so much in relation to what they do or do not produce, but rather on the ground of their nearness or distance from their Lord, through the life of the Holy Spirit (Kraft 1992:215-230).

Catholicity should be set alongside contextualization. This demands that distinct contexts be in communion with each other and respect and question each other in the freedom of the Spirit (Gunther 1997:429). This call to question each other is not an effort to re-establish binding, authoritative doctrinal and ethical statements. There is no referee to judge among the different interpretations of the Bible. However, African Christians need to find those that bind them together. These should be characterized by life-affirming, inclusive, liberating and community-building attitudes and should be applied sensitively within a particular local context.

In their uncertainty, one is reminded of Heisenberg's name for his theory of quantum mechanics. These essential characteristics of the gospel are named and recognizable, but they are still only approximate values which only become certain and precise in a local situation. Herein is the difference between binding in the authoritative sense and being bound together. The former means that one solution is being dictated for everyone everywhere. The latter means that different ways of putting these guidelines in concrete terms - and yet as different members of the Body of Christ, with different viewpoints and different tasks to do - are tolerated and affirmed and they even complement each other. The claims of a theology that sees itself as absolute, independent of time and space, is contrasted here with the dialogic character of conversation and sharing, which is clear about its own method of observation i.e. it names the context out of which it responds with this voice to the call of Christ.

I believe it is time for African Christians to become conscious of the liberating side of the postmodern gospel, which always implies plurality and ceased being scared of the spectre of relativity. Salvation in Christ is not a relative, but a plural reality. Postmodernity is in the interest of better mission. What matters is to follow God, who translate His Word and let it be heard anew in every context, and then to rejoice in the plurality of inculturations, to learn from them and perhaps also to dispute with them. It is my impression that postmodernity could assist African Christians to learn this in and for their local churches. The fact that a hermeneutic practice of this kind has been and continues to be subjected to abuses, cannot constitute a motive for its abandonment. On the contrary, it constitutes an invitation and a challenge. This hermeneutic practice must become the subject of greater theoretical interest, with the object of furnishing it with tools that will enable it to overcome these abuses.

The Christian faith never was objective. The confessions of faith by churches do not state: "This is the way it is." Instead, they begin with the congregation saying together, "We believe ..." They begin inter-subjectively. This agreement to a common confession makes visible in the face of all individual subjectivity that mission beckons everyone to make a decision among the various life and faith possibilities that postmodernity has to offer.

6.1.4 Post-technologist: An apostolic, public, convenantal agent of transformation

African Christians need to reject Euro-American Christians' ruthless use of technology. In the past, Euro-Americans Christians have not been reticent concerning the use of technology

to attain their particular goals. They have been intentional about using mass media, global communications and the social sciences for world evangelism. No attention has been given to the effect that this use may have had on their own faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus.

Various ways were sought to use technology while performing missionary activities. Euro-American Christians used the best in technology for the furthering of the gospel. Their love of strategy, their strong focus in their missiology on how to go about doing missionary work and their stress of producing results have not asked the impact of that technology upon themselves, their churches and their mission agencies. No one stopped to ask questions as to the assumptions behind the technology itself. Euro-American Christians wanted so much to know how to let churches grow, but rarely knew what they were growing or whether the way in which they were doing it, was theologically and Biblically appropriate.

Postmodernity's strong critique of the myth of technology could stimulate African Christians to self-examination in relation to the apostolicity of Jesus' Church. Maybe African Christians need to re-think their apostolicity and associate them closer with the Lord who send them. Second Corinthians 5 could be a good starting place to develop a new understanding of African churches as Christ's apostolic agents of reconciliation. African churches could begin to understand that their nature as part of Christ's Church does not derive from their traditions, history or cultures. Christ's love compels them (5:14). Thus the nature of African churches and their calling derive from Jesus Christ who is the Head of the Church and who has sent them as his ambassadors in Africa.

African churches could also recognize that their primary role is to be involved in the transformation of the world by working towards reconciliation. Their reconciliation in Christ is of one piece with their apostolic nature. Their senses entails a "ministry of reconciliaton" (5:18). Thus their mission involves direct participation in God's mission, for it is God reconciling the world to God himself in Christ (5:19). Thus, their nature as Christ's church involves the activity of imploring to the world on Christ's behalf: "Be reconciled to God" (5:20).

African churches could begin to understand that this reconciliation is holistic, involving such a radical transformation of reality that when anyone is in Christ, one is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come (5:17). This is a total transformation of each person-in-community, as together people are reconciled to themselves, to each other, to their world and to their God. For even creation waits in eager expectation for God's children to be revealed

… in the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children (Rom. 8:18-21).

In other words, African churches might begin to re-think the way they evaluate their use of technology. Their being and doing should reflect their Lord as much as the goals they pursue. They would examine whatever violates their mission of reconciliation. They would not unquestioningly make use of technology as if it were a value-free tool. Instead, they would subject it the examination of the Bible, to the operation of the Spirit and to their apostolic call to be the ambassadors of Christ (Bosch 1991:369-510).

Moreover, African churches might also begin to understand their mission as mission-on-the-way, an ambassadoral, apostolic pilgrimage that is at once profoundly personal, private and relational and communal, public and transformational. These would be the congregations that bridge the personal faith of African disciples of Jesus with the public values their continent desperately needs. Here is an apostolicity of "sentness" into the world, a world for whom and in which Christ died, a world which is called to total and holistic reconciliation. Here would be churches that understand that their essential life and task involve not strategy or the management of technological power, but faithfulness to the commission received from Jesus Christ their Lord. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, not technological expertise *per se*, these churches become public agents of transformation, apostolic communities which offer a return of the future of the purpose for which God has created humanity.

Truly, this mandate would involve African churches in the preservation of human life, in a growing covenantal relationship with God, in calling governments to stand in favour of the welfare of the people and in reminding the world that there is only one Lord and Saviour, one King of Kings, before whom one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord.

6.2 African Biblical Scholarship

Let me discus the significance of postmodernity for African Biblical scholarship. Postmodernity is shaking things up in Euro-American Biblical studies and the guild is beginning to take seriously the place of the flesh-and-blood reader when reading the Bible. This is significant for African Biblical scholars because it provides an opportunity for them to speak and be heard. The postmodern critique enables African Biblical scholars to formulate their own theories for reading that which are more appropriate for their context.

Postmodernity could help African Biblical scholars to be more alert to what is taking place in the community and in society than to the past meaning of the pages in the Bible. It could help them theorize what the Spirit is saying in the African churches rather than to apprehend what the Spirit had said once upon a time. The theoretical solution sought by African Biblical scholars for a determinate context, is in some sort already given in the actual practice of Christians, who, like other people, attempt to bring a possible solution to the problem with which they find themselves confronted.

African Biblical scholars need only take into account the element of theory of the solutions already in process in the element of practice. The questions have been solved by an analysis of the *de facto* practices of African Christians who do not wait upon the verdict of the theologians in order to set to work. The Spirit comes from the direction of Christian practices and not from that of theological research, however serious this research may be. Even if such practices are contradictory, their real object, God's salvation, continues to operate in history because it is not tied to theology.

The priority of practice is a practical, not a theoretical, priority. It is not and cannot be a principle of theory, governing the theological process. When theologians undertake to theologize the consciousness and practice of the community, they obey only the norms of theological practice - norms which, after all, exist in virtue of a breach with those of the spontaneous language of the same community. Theologians must work in close relationship with their own local communities. They need to live within the community's concrete life context in concrete political terms. It is their office to fashion its theory. It is part of the task for African Biblical scholars to facilitate the creation of a language which speaks to the people.

African Biblical scholars need to be organic intellectuals who can learn with African Christians while at the same time, helping them foster ways of self-education and struggle against various forms of oppression. In this regard, scholars are organic because they are not foreigners bringing theories to the African continent. They are, instead, African theorists who are fused organically with the culture and practical activities of Africans. Instead of casually dispensing knowledge to the grateful Africa continent, these scholars fuse with the Africans in order to make and remake the conditions necessary for a radical social enterprise. Because they are directly tied to a particular community of struggle, they could combine theory and action and relate popular culture and religion to structural social change. Postmodernity could assist African Biblical scholarship to produce practical and relevant

results. Africans are not concerned with what took place once upon a time but with what is taking place today.

For too long African scholarship has been answering questions asked by Euro-Americans and not by Africans themselves. Now, with the assistance of postmodernity, the time has come for a concentrated effort to rewrite the history of the African Biblical interpretation, to understand what it is really all about and to try and answer questions asked by Africans themselves. Heresy and orthodoxy alike are variants on a single theme.

The written text will remain open to future readings, and it is illusory to think that one has direct access to the original sense of a text. The Word of God is a historical concept. Its objective can never be decisively determined, whether it be faith, Christ, the Father or anything else. Scientific work on the texts is not enough. The Bible is to its interpretations as a language is to its various possible discourses. The hermeneutical paradigm grows richer as such through the interpretations which it permits.

The Bible is thus made to be taken up and given currency and this is a principle woven into the very writing of the Bible itself. This circularity lays waste with one fell stoke the myth of a return to the beginnings as a resumption of the original sense of the Bible in all its morning freshness.

Postmodernity confronts African Biblical scholars with a challenge to search for more possible modes of hermeneutics by which the Bible could be demonstrated as relevant to African Christians, even as it stands locked into the socio-religious framework of the ancient Mediterranean World. Of all the mandates confronting African Biblical scholarship, the mandate of African community predicated on a renewed commitment to pluralism and the attendant acknowledgement of the integrity of all racial groups, constitute an urgent agenda for African Biblical scholarship.

Postmodernity could necessitate a shifting of epistemological centers so that Biblical scholarship for African Christians be done by Africans themselves, taking into account two realities of Africa, namely religious pluralism and economic poverty. In a context of economic poverty, there is no greater priority than articulating the reading according to this situation. Postmodernity could enable a shift in method from Euro-American centricism and its attendant text-centricism to a people-centered and context-centered Biblical scholarship.

African Biblical scholarship needs not be answerable only to scholarly guilds, but more so to the hopes, dreams and fears of the societies in which it is practised. African Biblical

scholarship needs to participate in a socially engaged Biblical scholarship. African Biblical scholarship needs to address the cultural and socio-political context of Africa.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

In the introduction the purpose of this thesis was formulated as an attempt to determine the relevance of postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* for Africans and to evaluate its significance for African churches. The thesis argued strongly that the advent of postmodernity has heralded more benefits and opportunities for Africans that it has inflicted collateral damage. It was demonstrated in this thesis that the development of postmodernity has created greater opportunities for Africans to resist Euro-American domination than modernity.

In conclusion I want to reiterate ways in which my religious perspective as an African has been broadened by postmodernity. It is easier for me to understand and appreciate the pervasiveness, dispersion and complexity of power in all relations, be it inter-personal, intra-personal, inter- or intra-group, inter- or intra-gender, etc. I can, at the same time name and speak of power asymmetries in society and personal relationships as well as remain highly conscious of my own complicity in different forms of domination and oppression. In my pursuit of justice and the advancement thereof, I can describe and analyse power relations and dynamics.

Postmodernity enables a courage and clarity to cerebrate group difference with a clear purpose of disrupting dominant identities which charade as "normality". As a result, Euro-American supremacist and patriarchal regimes of truths can be targeted to disrupt and subvert. I can now safely go to the unfamiliar edge and expose the church's complicity with dominant ideologies and begin the difficult process of repentance and reconciliation and reconstruction.

Postmodernity permits me, as part of a community of believers, to be less fearful and evasive of the internal differences and inconsistencies simply because I can now contextualize them in a dynamic dialogical reflection/action/framework. For example, in the Baptist Church where I belong, people can be less nervous and fearful about the agonizing difficulty of forging a sense of unity between groups which hold different fears, prejudices and misconceptions concerning each other.

Postmodernity also enables a critical edge within my theological and daily religious practice in a world and society which is increasingly interdetermined and intertwined, where economic disparity at various levels is increasing, environmental degradation is intensifying and power is more and more centralised within smaller groups of individuals.

In Africa various cleavages with regard to gender, racial affairs, ethnic affairs, sexual orientation, religion and class will continue to pull and tear at the badly swen garment of national unity in any African country. What Africans need is to collectively and individually weave a durable tapestry of communities of difference, which authentically capture multiple dimensions and diversities without any guarantee that the overall pattern may be aesthetic on the senses. Such weaving requires bold action, honesty and a sincere acknowledgement of difference. This implies a fight with those identities and subjects who are usually silenced or trampled upon in nationhood narratives.

Postmodernity enables African churches, as parts of the Body of Christ, to re-examine themselves. As African-churches-in-mission, they need to ask again how the Lord wants to renew and reshape them so that they may more faithfully embody a new missiological ecclesiology which will be appropriate for the African continent.

If African churches and societies are not satisfied with modernity, maybe postmodernity will assist them to re-examine their churches, mission agencies, societies and Christian organizations in order to see how the Holy Spirit may transform and renew them. This renewed understanding of Jesus Christ calls them to be the whole church (the one, holy, catholic and apostolic congregation) taking the whole gospel to the whole world. Is it possible that postmodernity could offer the African continent a new plausibility structure, a renewed hermeneutic of the gospel (Newbigin 1989:222-233) which could offer a degree of provisional absoluteness through a reshaped pilgrimage of faith, in the hope of the coming of Christ's Kingdom (Acts 17:28).

The postmodern critique could call African churches to become authentic, contextually-appropriate hermeneutical communities of the gospel in Africa. This re-examination has challenged Africa churches to become post-individualist: one global communion of Jesus' disciples; post-rationalist: a holy community of faith; post-materialist: a catholic fellowship of Jesus' followers and post-technologist: an apostolic public covenantal agent of transformation.

This thesis has been stimulated and charged by the insightful analysis of *The Postmodern Bible*, which seeks to capture the liberatory power of uncertainty, being in motion and experiencing contradictions. This thesis concerns Africans finding their road back home. Not that Africans have strayed away from the road and have no magic pebbles as markers. Instead, Africans have not left the road, but feel uneasy to the point that they are wondering whether they could stay at all, unless they can inscribe themselves authentic experience and identity. This process entails careful discernment of other similar marginal voices and confrontation with the dominant, dogmatic and homogenising diction. Postmodernity could be part of the process of making African voices audible and warming the totalizing and oppressive features in their abodes and the wider society within which they are located. In doing so, Africans could feel more at home in a postmodern paradigm than in a modern paradigm.

Whereas Botha and others (1998) have found postmodernity as expressed in *The Postmodern Bible* to be of little assistance to the South African context at this time of building, I have found postmodernity as expressed in this book to be of much assistance in the Zimbabwean context. Though highly technical and specialist in nature, the content of the book could be relevant to Zimbabweans. Most Zimbabweans, be it in rural or urban settings, reflect many of the postmodern elements. With all honesty, postmodernity and the Shona culture share common ground on many issues and disagree on few issues. The fact that a postmodern hermeneutical paradigm has been and continues to be subjected to abuses cannot constitute a motive for its abandonment. Instead it constitutes an invitation and a challenge. This postmodern hermeneutic practice must become the subject of greater theoretical interest with the objective of furnishing it with the tools that will enable it to overcome these abuses. Postmodernity shows every sign of healthy growth, needing, of course, prunning sooner or later, but at the moment it needs to be encouraged.

In my opinion, postmodernity wants to throw off the shackles of authoritarian Christianity and other Euro-American domination and developed postmodern tools for the purpose, but the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* have taken up those tools and used them, despite the fact that they were not exactly designed for the task in the service of their theology and proclamation. A tribute is due to the resilience of these authors who have actually made constant and not always unsuccessful attempts to turn the postmodern weapons to their own use.

To suppose that religious truth can be communicated directly, as though it were mathematical truth or logical method, is a shallow blasphemy. Historically conditioned thought-forms need not be absolutized. The essence of the issue needs to be distilled and reworked. Interpretation is not a solid unchanging reality like marbles; woe betide us, if we imagine that they are. People need to recast the Biblical material into forms appropriate for their own age. The notion that the historical critical theory carried automatic evaluative judgements should now be regarded as decidedly outdated. To treat a possibility as though it were a probability and then a little later to treat it as though it were a certainty, is an offence against the basic canons of critical and scientific work.

The reaction to *The Postmodern Bible* has been largely unsympathetic. But the fact that it could be written at all by senior and widely read scholars shows how much times have changed. *The Postmodern Bible* is a document of great or cardinal importance. Every African theologian who wants to have clarity about the present situation in theology should be familiar with its content or arguments. This is one of the indispensable companions of theological training and education. *The Postmodern Bible* is one of the few epoc-making books in contemporary studies. Postmodernity contains the most vitriolic attack on modernity to be found anywhere in Biblical scholarship. The postmodern insights are a powerful instrument to free interpretation from its idealist captivity.

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