Reformed Theology in Africa Series

Volume 8

CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Edited by

Hendrik Goede & Nico Vorster

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EDITORS
Hendrik Goede
Nico Vorster

Peer review declaration

The publisher (AOSIS) endorses the South African 'National Scholarly Book Publishers Forum Best Practice for Peer Review of Scholarly Books'. The manuscript underwent an evaluation to compare the level of originality with other published works and was subjected to rigorous two-step peer review before publication, with the identities of the reviewers not revealed to the editor(s) or author(s). The reviewers were independent of the publisher, editor(s), and author(s). The publisher shared feedback on the similarity report and the reviewers' inputs with the manuscript's editor(s) or author(s) to improve the manuscript. Where the reviewers recommended revision and improvements, the editor(s) or author(s) responded adequately to such recommendations. The reviewers commented positively on the scholarly merits of the manuscript and recommended that the manuscript be published.

Research justification

The South African theological landscape is characterised by a gradual and ever-increasing number of hermeneutical approaches, methods and traditions designed to address complex religious, theological and societal issues. Within the span of a few years, South Africa has seen the rise of decolonial hermeneutics, ecofeminism and various African hermeneutical approaches. Moreover, hermeneutics remains a divisive and polarising topic both within scholarly and ecclesiastical communities in South Africa. These tensions are not limited to theoretical differences but often crystallise at a grassroots level when local churches and church assemblies have to make important decisions on controversial ethical topics such as ordaining individuals who identify as female in the church offices, assessing the ethics of same-sex marriages and taking a stance on the land debate in South Africa.

This book addresses the rapidly changing environment of biblical hermeneutics through a collection of essays written by experts in the fields and, in some cases, representatives of the traditions. The authors provide outlines of the premises, nuances, methodological considerations and ideological motives at play within the various traditions. Practical examples are provided of how these traditions go about with texts and how they approach ethical questions. Strengths, constructive impulses and possible weaknesses are identified.

A single book cannot do justice to all of the hermeneutical traditions existing in South Africa. Instead of providing an exhaustive genealogical account of traditions, the editors have decided to include hermeneutical traditions on the basis of their influence, discursive power or novelty within the South African context. The Reformed and Pentecostal hermeneutical traditions continue to wield considerable influence within ecclesiastical structures in South Africa. Liberation theology and the hermeneutics of suspicion gave rise to a wide range of postcolonial and contextual hermeneutical approaches, while ecofeminism, decolonial hermeneutics and African hermeneutics represent some new and powerful discursive trends.

The target audience of this book is theologians, who on an almost daily basis engage with biblical interpretation. Scholars in philosophy and language studies will also find the book informative.

This book contains original research. No part of the book has been plagiarised or published elsewhere.

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Abbreviations and table appearing in the text and notes

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4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AgriSA	Agri-South Africa
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIC	African Indigenous Churches
ANC	African National Congress
ATR	African Traditional Religions
BASA	Banking Association of South Africa
BC	Belgic Confession
COPE	Congress of the People
DA	Democratic Alliance
DGR	Dark Green Religion
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
GBM	Green Belt Movement
IRR	Institute for Race Relations
LEWC	Land Expropriation Without Compensation
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Other
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PLAAS	Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies
WCC	World Council of Churches

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Introduction

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Christian hermeneutics in South Africa is characterised by a plethora of approaches to Scripture. This should come as no surprise as Christianity itself is highly diverse. Churches, faith movements, theologians, pastors and grassroot-believers are embedded in and influenced by constellations of sundry traditions, cultures and social, economic and political contexts. These differing experiences bring all kinds of questions, outlooks, angles and methods to the interpretation process. Moreover, Christian hermeneutics has always been attuned to developments in the disciplines of philosophy, archaeology, linguistics and text analysis. The science of interpretation has evolved considerably in the last century in response to the malaises of modernism, especially racism, colonialism and ecological degradation. Biblical scholars followed suit by devising new reading strategies concerned with answering elusive questions, addressing changing contexts and preventing Scripture from being used as a tool of oppression.

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Grassroots church folk often find the reality of interpretative diversity most confusing and disturbing. How can we as Christians proclaim the gospel if we cannot agree on the basic message of Scripture? Others welcome diverse approaches to biblical scholarship as a means to be more inclusive. Whatever the inclination, fair assessments of methods are impossible without understanding the various nuances that underlie the different hermeneutical approaches. This book provides a survey of the main hermeneutical approaches at work in the South African theological landscape. The aim is to empower readers to understand these approaches from the inside out. The book offers explications of the general premises of the different methods, as well as its strengths and possible weaknesses.

Chapter 1 introduces classical Reformed hermeneutics. Reformed theology generally entertains a high view of Scripture. It considers the Protestant canon as the authoritative Word of God, and it emphasises the unity and consistency of the biblical message. Hennie Goede and Albert Coetsee present an overview of the basic presuppositions, tenets, principles and nuances of Reformed hermeneutics. It also assesses the relevance of Reformed hermeneutics for Christian hermeneutics.

Reformed communities generally consider Chapters 1–7 of the Belgic Confession as the basic expression of the faith presuppositions that govern Reformed hermeneutics. In the section 'The basic presuppositions of Reformed hermeneutics', the authors proceed to discuss each of the Belgic Confession's propositions with regard to what Scripture is and how it should be approached. They specifically point out the theocentric approach of the Belgic Confession. The confession starts off with a statement on who God is, whereafter it moves to the ways in which God reveals himself. According to the authors, the Belgic Confession asserts that God reveals himself to humankind; that Scripture is organically inspired by God; that only the 66 books in the Protestant canon are authoritative; that only Scripture can bind the conscience of the believer and that Scripture is sufficient in the sense that it reveals to us everything we must know to have communion with God.

Next Goede and Coetsee move to the main principles of exposition that govern Reformed hermeneutics. According to them, our understanding of Scripture is rooted in a relationship with the Triune God, viewed through the lenses of the Father's salvific plan for humankind, the Son's incarnation and works of salvation, and the spirit's enlightenment and renewal. In the text, we search for the original intent of the biblical author(s) taking into account the historical and literary context of passages, grammatical analysis and the genre of the specific text. More broadly speaking, we search for themes from the text echoing in the rest of Scripture in light of the central progressive line of revelation in Scripture. In the process of interpretation, we distinguish between 'time-bound' and 'time-directed' biblical principles and descriptive

and prescriptive passages of Scripture. Interpretations are tested against the tradition's understanding of the particular texts.

In the section 'Reformed principles for the exposition of Scripture', the authors discuss the nuanced differences between the Reformed tradition and some other hermeneutical traditions, specifically the Pentecostal tradition, African hermeneutics, genitive hermeneutics, fundamentalist hermeneutics and postmodern hermeneutics. According to the authors, Reformed hermeneutics generally does not share Pentecostalism's pneumatic approach to Scripture because it is suspicious of subjective claims that are not verifiable from Scripture. Yet Goede and Coetsee concede that Reformed hermeneutics might have underplayed 'the role of the Spirit in biblical interpretation'. According to the authors, Reformed hermeneutics share some basic premises with African hermeneutics, but it generally does not accept reader-oriented approaches to Scripture that employ modern forms of social analysis as interpretative keys. Reformed hermeneutics prefer a text-oriented approach that allows Scripture to act as a critical tool to assess modern-day experiences. The same difference in nuance is at stake when it comes to the genitive hermeneutics employed by advocacy groups and postmodern hermeneutics. The authors are of the opinion that these groups neglect author-oriented approaches and that they often replace the original meaning of biblical texts with contextual readings that serve their own interests. Conversely, Reformed hermeneutics depart from fundamentalist hermeneutics in that it rejects literalist readings of Scripture that ignore the social and literary contexts.

The authors conclude their discussion by arguing that a text-oriented approach that takes seriously the original intent of Scripture will always remain valid. However, they urge Reformed theologians to continue seeking an appropriate balance between the contexts of the text and the reader.

In Chapter 2, Marius Nel discusses the main characteristics of African Pentecostal hermeneutics. He draws attention to the diverse nature of Pentecostalism but nevertheless opines that Pentecostalism is held together by a pneumatic theology of orthopraxis. Pentecostals reject cessationism and embrace the repeated recurrence of the Pentecost. Whenever they worship or read the Bible, they expect to meet God in the Spirit. Biblical interpretation is thus not seen as an academic exercise but as an opportunity for believers to be empowered and equipped by the Spirit to fulfil their calling in the world.

According to Nel, Pentecostalism entertains a high view of Scripture. Authentic biblical interpretation is seen as Spirit-guided. Not only does the Spirit participate in the reading process, but he also enables believers to understand the text and to act on the message they receive. Pentecostals expect the Spirit to 'bridge the historical and cultural gulf between text and reader'. The reliability of biblical interpretation is thus not measured against the objective accuracy of the exegesis but against its transformative power.

The presence of the Spirit in the Christian community and the authenticity of preaching is confirmed by signs such as glossolalia, prophecy, healings and miracles.

Nel then turns to special features of *African* Pentecostalism. He observes that African Pentecostals prefer to interpret Scripture pre-critically and literally. In contrast with the rational-systematic nature of Western theology, African Pentecostals emphasise the personal encounter with God in the Spirit in the here and now. While Scripture contains the Word of God, the Spirit personalises and animates the Word of God in the heart of the believer. The African Pentecostal hermeneutical approach is therefore driven by a phenomenological orientation, rather than an analytical historical-based method. Nel notes that some Pentecostals ascribe a magical ritualist power to Scripture. The divinely inspired words of the Bible are seen as 'weapons' that can be used to avert the threatening powers of evil spiritual forces. African Pentecostals, moreover, emphasise the need to transmit the biblical text in oral mode. Text verses are sung, chanted, memorised and cited. All the senses are activated in the encounter with God's Spirit through the Word. Citing Yong, Nel concludes that African Pentecostal hermeneutics is, in essence, a reader-response hermeneutics concerned about the 'world before us, rather than the world behind the text'.

The question that follows is: How do Pentecostals, given their hermeneutics, deal with difficult ethical issues that resist simplistic answers? Nel confronts this question by narrowing in on the LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Other) debate. He contends that different strands of thought are found in Pentecostal circles. Conservative Pentecostals strive for timeless sexual ethics based on hetero-normativity and thus reject any form of sexual behaviour that deviates from heterosexuality. Conversely, other Pentecostals focus on the inclusivity of Jesus's ministry and the early church and argue in light of a reader-response approach to Scripture for compassion for individuals with a homosexual orientation.

In contrast with the Reformed and Pentecostal hermeneutic traditions, the hermeneutics of suspicion does not entertain a high view of Scripture. Jaco Kruger discusses in Chapter 3 the outlines of the hermeneutics of suspicion. He starts off by stating that traditional Protestant and Reformed hermeneutics had its origins in the nascent epistemological spirit of modernism, which strived for objective observation and exposition. From the 19th century onwards, questions arose about the facades and motives underlying human rationality, a development that had profound implications for biblical hermeneutics. Kruger traces the term 'hermeneutics of suspicion' back to the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who made an extensive study of the structure of symbols. According to Ricoeur, the function of symbols consists in them filling sensuous phenomena with meaning. What differentiates symbols from general signifiers is that they have multiple layers of meanings.

He distinguishes between first intentions, which function on the surface, and hidden intentions or depth structures that operate below the surface. The depth structures are only discoverable through the first intentionality. Symbols thus invoke interpretation and thinking; they reveal but also conceal. Ricoeur held that we can approach symbols in one of two ways. The first is a hermeneutics of naïveté or trust, which bears that there is an 'unfailing' or contingent relationship between the surface and depth meanings and that a clear understanding of the surface meanings leads one to comprehend the deeper levels. Another option would be a hermeneutics of suspicion, which holds that the deeper levels of meaning are not always aligned with the surface meaning. Symbols can be used for sinister motives, as facades designed to deceive.

In the section 'The school of suspicion', Kruger discusses Ricoeur's study of the 'three masters of suspicion': Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. Marx provided an extensive critique of capitalism; he claimed that underneath capitalism's supply and demand logic lies a disguised deeper intent namely to serve self-interest and exploit. The surface meanings of capitalism consequently must be 'bypassed' to understand the real rational forces behind it. In his genealogy on morals, Nietzsche posited that social constructions of good and evil are undergirded by the depth structure of the will to power. Sigmund Freud approached the conscious from the perspective of the unconscious. He claimed that the human person experiences an intra-psychic conflict between the instinctual desires of the Id, which strives after pleasure, the pragmatic considerations of the ego, which is governed by the reality principle, and the moral impositions of the superego, which keeps the drives of the Id at bay. All three of the 'masters of suspicion' thus hold that depth structures have a 'misleading' function and that surface-meanings cannot be acknowledged out of context.

Kruger contends that at the heart of a hermeneutics of suspicion lies the tension between truth and power. Pointing to the work of postmodern philosophers such as Lyotard and Foucault, he argues that the pendulum has swung from an emphasis on finding truth toward suspicion of the powers that lie behind truth claims. In a certain sense, a hermeneutics of suspicion has become part of everyday life. Kruger then moves to biblical scholarship and how feminist theologians, liberation theologians and eco-theologians have questioned the ways in which Scripture was used in the past to support patriarchy, oppression and ecological degradation. He concludes by making a salient point: Hermeneutical activity always involves a measure of suspicion, but suspicion alone can lead us into nihilism. Such suspicion should be balanced with expectation, that is, an openness to embrace new horizons of understanding.

Chapter 4 examines the hermeneutics of liberation theology with special reference to the ethic that underlies this particular approach. While affirming

some strengths in the method and highlighting some of the positive contributions that liberation theology has made, J.M. Vorster expresses concern about certain key features of the method. He contends that liberation theology presents a valid social diagnosis of the roots of systemic violence and oppression, but it does not provide direction when it comes to effecting social change. Vorster begins his discussion by explicating the historical connection between liberation theology and the neo-Marxist social analysis, of which Herbert Marcuse is the main exponent. Neo-Marxism holds that oppressive social structures are inherently violent and that change, especially in colonial societies, can only be brought about by revolutionary violence. Vorster indicates how the thoughts of neo-Marxism entered the theological world through the sin doctrines espoused by Richard Shaull. Shaull's ideas exerted great influence in the 1970s on the decision making of the World Council of Churches. Key to his theology is the idea that sin embeds itself in structures and that redemption is only possible when such structures are overthrown. Shaull identifies the Exodus theme as a key heuristic lens in analysing social structures and effecting social change. He also regards Jesus' message as in essence a call to liberation from oppression and marginalisation. In fact, Jesus envisaged a new society that he called the kingdom of God. Liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutierrez, build on these ideas by referring to creation, history and salvation as God's constant movement of humanity from bondage to salvation. At the core of liberation hermeneutics lies a contextual reading of Scripture that approaches the text from the viewpoint of the poor and oppressed.

Vorster argues that liberation theology has made an important contribution to theology by focusing the attention of theologians on suffering, modern forms of 'enslavement' and public issues in general. It gave rise to questions about patriarchy, the dignity of women and sexuality in all its forms and has inspired feminist theology, ecofeminism and other contextual theologies. However, he expresses concern about a number of issues. Firstly, he questions the idea that sin solely resides in social structures. The scriptural message locates sin first of all in the human heart. If sin is purely a structural issue, this would imply that redemption is also essentially a political phenomenon. Secondly, while acknowledging the importance of reader-context, and the inescapability of a reader-oriented approach, he is concerned about the tendency of liberation theologians to consider the 'option for the poor' as the only legitimate entry point to biblical interpretation. Such a one-sided approach, he argues, leads into the creation of 'partisan theologies'. Lastly, he asserts that liberation theology must portray willingness to revisit its own premises, specifically regarding its affirmation of neo-Marxist social analysis. The neo-Marxist position on violence contradicts the basic message of the gospel. It relies on a problematic consequentialist ethical premise that considers the end as a justification for the means. Such an approach cannot be 'clothed in a Christian garment'. Vorster concludes that liberation theology

does not provide a viable position on social change. He calls for an approach that uses central biblical and theological themes as a lens to interpreting Scripture, applies self-critique regarding ideological presuppositions, tests interpretations ecumenically by entering into dialogue with the broader Christian community and traditions, probes the text from different angles and maintains a balance between text-oriented and reader-oriented approaches.

Postcolonial hermeneutics has close ties with the hermeneutics of suspicion and liberation theology. In Chapter 5, Philip La Grange du Toit discusses the main features of this strand of hermeneutics, which is gaining significant ground in the South African theological landscape. Du Toit links the rise of postcolonial hermeneutics to the general shift in theological hermeneutics from text-oriented original-meaning approaches to reader-oriented understandings of the text. Sharing the hermeneutics of suspicion's interest in detailed structures of texts, postcolonial hermeneutics inquire about the imperial, colonial and oppressive motifs that underlie the biblical text. To what degree and in which manner was the biblical text shaped by political motifs and power interests? Exactly how did generations of interpreters impose meanings on the text to serve their own interests? In contrast with traditional text-oriented approaches that strived for the most objectively possible interpretations of the text, postcolonial hermeneutics explicitly embrace ideological bias by interpreting the text from the vantage point of the colonised and oppressed. In so doing, it hopes to effect social change. What binds postcolonial hermeneutics together is not so much a specific or single method but rather an ideological approach that addresses 'the silencing of the Other'. Postcolonial biblical criticism is especially critical of hegemonic Western narratives that claim to espouse universal truths. In response, it attempts to embrace liminality and hybridity, which break through the essentialist dichotomies of colonial thought. Also on its radar is the quest to revisit and correct the history of interpretation. Citing Jeremy Punt, Du Toit considers that postcolonial criticism questions the notion of Scripture as a divinely inspired authoritative text as it perceives the configuration of the biblical canon as an 'imperialist construct'. Moving to New Testament postcolonial criticism in particular, Du Toit identifies two strands of thought. The one considers the New Testament as an exemplary text of anti-imperialism and anti-oppression, while the other regards the New Testament as 'complicit' in promoting imperialist agendas.

In the section 'Evaluating postcolonial biblical criticism' of the chapter, Du Toit evaluates the merits of postcolonial biblical criticism. He contends that postcolonial hermeneutics has opened the eyes of scholars to the influence that 'empire' exerted on the social institutions, politics and ethics of the ancient Graeco-Roman world. Moreover, it has brought attention to the many ways in which the biblical text has been employed throughout history to condone colonial practices. Postcolonial criticism's embrace of liminality and

hybridity is commendable as long as it does not fall into the trap of 'totalising' these principles. Also noteworthy is its emphasis on translating the biblical text in 'understandable' and 'relatable' language. However, Du Toit expresses concern about the tendency of postcolonial biblical criticism to read the whole of the Bible through the prism of oppression. Many texts in Scripture fall 'outside the concerns of postcolonialism'. He contends that we should guard against a new kind of reductive, stereotypical reasoning. Du Toit is also concerned about the strand's intentional subjective approach to the text, which may lead to a proliferation of highly creative, peculiar interpretations of the text that exhibit little reverence for the original meaning of the text. If one acknowledges the existence of the divine and supernatural, there 'comes a point where the cultural, the natural and the anthropological have to be differentiated from the divine, the spiritual and the supernatural'. Du Toit contends that the employment of postcolonial criticism does not have to undermine the authority of Scripture. It can help us understand the imperial context within which the New Testament was written and assist us in contextualising Scripture within a postcolonial context without absolutising the 'postcolonial optic'. At the heart of such an approach would lie the principle of flexibility employed by Paul himself to address the diversity of the early Christian community. This principle combines a sensitivity for cultural specificity with an awareness that certain biblical principles supersede cultural markers.

In Chapter 6, Hulisani Ramantswana outlines the basic premises and reading strategies of decolonial hermeneutics, along with a practical illustration of how the method can be employed. His explication provides a good example of how a particular lens is chosen as an entry point to the text, how various ideological interests underlying the text are probed and how ethical applications flow from the viewpoint of the 'colonised'. Ramantswana begins by espousing the decolonial hermeneutical position. The decolonial option reads Scripture from the perspective of what Fanon called the *damnés*, that is, the viewpoint of the colonised, marginalised and oppressed. It deliberately negates Euro-Western readings in an attempt to 'delink' African scholarship from Western paradigms and to relink knowledge to African knowledge systems. A distinction is also made between colonialism and coloniality. The former refers to the original invasion of lands and the setting up of colonial administrations, while the latter is concerned with the maintenance and continued perpetuation of colonial structures in formerly colonised societies. Lastly, decolonial hermeneutics opt to interpret the Bible from a definite social location. For instance, a South African reading would consider the inequalities of South African society, past patterns of oppression and enduring forms of marginalisation.

After having explicated the main premises of decolonial hermeneutics, Ramantswana turns to decolonial reading strategies. These strategies involve

examining the power interests and ideologies that undergird a text. This includes an analysis of the colonial/imperial impulses and anti-colonial/anti-imperialist of the text. Attempts are also made to read the text from an 'African heritage' lens using African proverbs, sayings, wisdom literature and praxis as a point of orientation. Specific attention is given to representation in the text. How does the coloniser present himself in the text? How is the colonised or the Other presented by the author? Who represents the silent voices in the text? Ramantswana concludes his discussion by presenting an analysis of the Joshua narrative. Using decolonial reading strategies, he focuses on how stereotyping is used in the text as a representation strategy to justify the conquest of Canaan and the suppression of its inhabitants. He also enquires into the ways in which Rahab and the Gibeonites outwitted the Israelite conquerors. Interpreting the text from the perspective of Rahab and the Gibeonites, he applies the lessons learned to the South African land debate.

Ecofeminist theology represents a strand within postcolonial hermeneutics. It specifically interrogates the ways in which androcentric and patriarchal readings of Scripture and other religious texts have contributed to distorted power relations, especially when it comes to gender and ecological relationships. Chapter 7 familiarises readers with the basic premises, principles and methodological frameworks of ecofeminism. Susara J. Nortjé-Meyer locates ecofeminism within the rise of third-wave feminism in the 1970s. This strand of feminism connects both gender discrimination and ecological degradation to patriarchy. At the heart of patriarchy lies dualistic and hierarchical views of reality, some of which consider both females and the environment as 'possessions' that must be subjected and dominated. Ecofeminism, in contrast, espouses a worldview based on 'connection and relationship, reciprocity and mutuality, equality and solidarity rather than a worldview of contrast and separation'. It strives for a world where both women and the environment enjoy dignity and respect. Despite its diversity and resistance to homogeneity, ecofeminists share some basic presuppositions. Leaning on Howell (1997), Nortjé-Meyer identifies them as the quest for the transformation of society, epistemology and human relationships with nature. These presuppositions are situated in different frameworks ranging from liberal, cultural, social and spiritual ecofeminism to materialist ecofeminism. When it comes to theology, various ecofeminist approaches have been employed. Rosemary Ruether has attempted to develop a theocosmology of Gaia, while Sallie McFague has explored new images, models and metaphors for God. Carol J. Adams has drawn attention to animal rights, specifically the question of whether animals should not also be located in the divine relationship? Delores Williams has developed an African American ecofeminist approach that resists the defilement of earth and the bodies of black women, while Madipoane Masenya has developed ecofeminism in an African feminist context.

In this chapter, Nortjé-Meyer provides an overview of ecofeminist critiques of the Christian concept of stewardship, an outline of the Gaian Earth hypothesis, a discussion of the Green Belt Movement and the principles they developed for the practice of 'dark green' religion and the Earth Bible Project. Turning to the issue of biblical hermeneutical methodology, Nortjé-Meyer indicates that ecofeminism generally does not apply a single method of biblical interpretation. However, one finds certain general trends such as a preoccupation with the power relations underlying texts, the rejection of a closed canon and the use of a reader-oriented approach that understands meaning as emanating from the interaction between reader and text. According to the latter approach, the reader does not 'take meaning' from the text but 'makes' meaning in light of the text. The chapter ends off with some critical questions: Does ecofeminism with its strong emphasis on female wellbeing not reinforce anthropocentrism at the expense of ecological restoration? Does it not promote a type of essentialism by making a sharp distinction between male and female, and by equating female experiences with ecological destruction? How does ecofeminism situate itself in respect of women occupying empowering roles in structures that cause ecological degradation?

Chapter 8 concludes the book with a discussion of African hermeneutics. Using the concept of *ubuntu* and the existentialist philosophy of Gabriel Marcel as heuristic lenses, Zorodzai Dube proposes an 'embodied hermeneutics'. According to Dube, African hermeneutics is generally characterised by efforts to enculturate and liberate. Enculturation strategies attempt to appropriate the biblical message through the lens of African cultural perspectives. In other words, meaning is made from an African perspective considering the African context, rather than being extracted from the biblical text to change or address the African worldview. Liberation strategies, on the other hand, have their origins in liberation theology. They ask how the dignity of black people can be restored in light of the legacies of imperialism, colonialism and oppression. Womanist theologians go a step further by probing oppressive gender relations and asking how black women can be empowered to fulfil their rightful place in a patriarchal society. The two mentioned approaches share the basic assumption that black experiences should be used as 'raw material' or vantage points when interpreting Scripture. Absent from the debate, however, are efforts to use the African philosophical concept of *ubuntu* as a possible angle. According to Dube, the principle of *ubuntu* upholds the irreducible essence and inherent value of life, it emphasises the relational aspect of being and advances an ethics of hospitality and communal sharing. Dube considers *ubuntu* as a plausible hermeneutical premise because it empowers us to construct an embodied biblical hermeneutics that avoids conceiving of God as an abstract being or as a designer who is deistically involved in reality. Instead, God is seen as the 'creator that shares his being with people'. Such an embodied hermeneutics

assists us in developing a relational theology of solidarity between human beings as it holds that the 'I is reflected in the being of other'. Dube posits that the existentialist philosophy of Gabriel Marcel can complement the *ubuntu* notion of interconnectedness. Marcel held that the whole of humanity is united in essence. This interconnectedness can be articulated as 'image of God' or 'common creation'. Dube also contends that an embodied hermeneutics with *ubuntu* as orientation point affirms life and life-giving practices in public space. It may also serve as a critique of anthropologies that fuel binary and oppressive ideologies. The chapter concludes with an illustration of how *ubuntu,* specifically the notion of human interconnectedness, can be used as a heuristic tool in interpreting Mark 5:21–42 and as a means to subvert exclusionary practices.

An attentive reading of the various chapters reveals some recurring tensions between the traditions but also overlaps and cross-fertilisation. The main point of contention pertains to the clash between text-oriented and reader-oriented approaches. Text-oriented scholars are of the view that reader-oriented approaches impose meaning onto the text, forcing the text to mimic the social and political motives of the interpreter. Reader-oriented scholars feel that text-oriented approaches are based on outdated positivistic premises and the naïve idea that contingency exists between surface structures and depth structures in the biblical text. They claim that text-oriented approaches are prone to an uncritical appropriation of the distorted power motifs that underlie many biblical texts. Both arguments seem to contain contradictions. If it is not possible to attain a clear understanding of the original intent of biblical authors, as reader-oriented scholars argue, it would surely also not be feasible for liberation theologians and postcolonial scholars to ascertain the supposed power dynamics and ideological motifs underlying the text? In contrast, if hermeneutics was an objective methodological enterprise as some text-oriented scholars claim, we would not have found as great a variety of interpretations among Christian traditions, neither would so-called objective interpretations of biblical text have led to justifications of slavery and racial oppression. A third group of scholars seems to seek a middle ground. They advocate for an approach that contains both text-oriented and reader-oriented reading strategies. On the one hand, they suggest that the interpreter takes his or her own pre-understandings and suppositions seriously, but conversely that he or she also allows the text to speak without imposing a specific pre-understanding or 'option' on the text. For these middle-ground scholars, interpretation involves a fusion of horizons between biblical texts and contemporary outlooks. Pentecostalism, for its part, adds a further element by advocating a reader-response approach that leads to transformative praxis. According to some Pentecostal scholars, what the text exactly says is not as important as what it brings about in you.

The various viewpoints are obviously influenced by the audience interpreters want to reach and the communities to which they belong. Church theologians

who are concerned about the status of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, doctrinal purity and cohesive theology may experience reader-oriented approaches as unpalatable. Conversely, activists striving after particular social causes would probably consider a reader-oriented approach more empowering than a text-oriented approach. Going forward, we need to ask whether distinctions between surface structures and depth structures of meaning fully encapsulate the complexities involved in sense-making. Does the dynamics of meaning not involve much more? Meaning seems to function within multi-layered and continuously shifting social ecosystems where changes in one part of the system inevitably affect other parts.

Besides these tensions, we also find overlaps and signs of cross-fertilisation between the various traditions. Liberation theology, contextual theology and postcolonial hermeneutics have certainly shifted the attention of classical Christianity to discriminatory social structures, oppressive gender relations and harms done to the environment. Classical theology, on the other hand, has forced contextual theologies to refine their hermeneutical methods and to apply ideological self-critique. In contrast with the natural sciences where paradigms replace each other abruptly, hermeneutical traditions tend to exist for considerable periods alongside each other. They interact with one another, cross-fertilise and question each other. As time goes by, new horizons and radically altered traditions emerge. This trend is clearly visible in the discussion that follows.

Chapter 1

Reformed hermeneutics in South Africa: Its presuppositions, principles, nuances and value

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Introduction

One of the oldest and most widely accepted hermeneutical paradigms utilised in Christian theology in South Africa is Reformed hermeneutics.[1]

1. One could even argue that it is the oldest, since the Dutch settlers who arrived in 1652 and brought the Christian faith to South Africa were Reformed protestants. This is evidenced in Jan van Riebeeck's (prescribed Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie formulary) prayer on 30 December 1651, where he prays for the establishment and spread of the 'true Reformed Christian doctrine' [*ware gereformeerde Christelijke Leer*] (Leibbrandt 1898:1; cf. Venter 1983:31). Also compare the frequent references to God and his providence in Van Riebeeck's journal (cf. Thom 1952–1958).

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As the name implies, Reformed hermeneutics is utilised by, but not limited to, various Reformed churches in South Africa. Although there are a number of nuance differences, a form of Reformed hermeneutics is utilised by members of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (*Gereformeerde Kerke van Suid-Afrika* [GKSA]), the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* [NGK]), the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (*Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika* [NHK]), various Presbyterian churches and many others.

Despite its rich heritage, very few recent studies have been published on Reformed hermeneutics in South Africa.[2] Moreover, over the last century, other hermeneutical paradigms have gradually gained ground in South Africa, including African Pentecostal hermeneutics (cf. Anderson 2000:133–137; Nel 2018), liberation hermeneutics (cf. Mosala 1989; West 2009:13–38), African hermeneutics (cf. Mburu 2019), African womanist (feminist) hermeneutics (cf. Masenya 1995:149–155),[3] postcolonial hermeneutics (cf. Punt 2004:139–160) and various others.[4] For continued and productive discussion within ecclesial and academic circles, it is necessary to clearly indicate how these hermeneutical paradigms overlap and especially how and why they differ.

This chapter aims to address this issue by providing an overview of the presuppositions, principles, nuances and value of Reformed hermeneutics. Because of a number of nuance differences within Reformed theology today, this chapter focusses on classical Reformed hermeneutics as practiced by the Reformed Churches in South Africa. This is the nuance with which the phrases 'Reformed hermeneutics' and 'Reformed theology' are used in the rest of the chapter.

The chapter starts by investigating the basic presuppositions within Reformed hermeneutics. Next, keeping Reformed hermeneutical presuppositions in mind, the chapter deduces Reformed principles for the exposition of Scripture. Having done this, the chapter indicates the nuances of Reformed hermeneutics in the light of other South African hermeneutical paradigms. Finally, the chapter concludes by reflecting on the continuing value of Reformed hermeneutics in and for South Africa.

2. The works of Van Wyk (2010:189–215) and Vorster (2020:1–14) are notable exceptions. Vorster (2020:2) labels the Reformation's hermeneutic as a 'hermeneutic of congruent biblical theology'.

3. For the view of Scripture according to feminist theologians evaluated in the light of Reformed theology, see Swart and Coetzee (2013:1–9).

4. For an overview of a number of hermeneutical paradigms in a volume born and bred in Africa, see Maimela and König (1998). For an advanced, comprehensive and philosophical description and evaluation of major hermeneutical paradigms throughout the centuries, see Thiselton (1992, 2009).

The basic presuppositions of Reformed hermeneutics

Scholarly consensus agrees that presuppositions in any endeavour – including hermeneutics – are unavoidable (cf. Beale 2011:2; Goldsworthy 2006:39–44; Klein, Blomberg & Hubbard 2017:226–243; Vorster 2020:8). The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the basic presuppositions of Reformed hermeneutics. Belgic Confession (BC) Articles 1–7 is used as the backbone of this section, since it not only provides a succinct overview of the Reformed view of Scripture, but because it is one of the oldest Reformed confessions,[5] accepted by many Reformed churches around the world, and one of the first Reformed confessions adopted on South African soil.

Although a number of Reformed hermeneutical presuppositions are intertwined in BC Articles 1–7, the gist of each subsequent article is summarised using a descriptive title for the sake of discussion. At each article, the content of the Reformed confession is discussed,[6] followed by an indication of its hermeneutical implications.

God exists (BC art. 1)

It almost goes without saying, but the most basic starting point of Reformed hermeneutics is the existence of God. This confession forms the basis and foundation of the Reformed view of Scripture, namely that God exists and makes himself known to man in Scripture. Consequently, it is not strange that the BC first starts with an article on the existence and attributes on God (art. 1), before it continues in subsequent articles with an overview of the Reformed view of Scripture (art. 2–art. 7).[7]

The implications of this foundational Reformed confession for hermeneutics are profound. This confession distinguishes Reformed hermeneutics from any branch of hermeneutics that is intrinsically atheistic or agnostic. Moreover, this confession already suggests something of the way in which all human endeavours – including the interpretation of Scripture – should be done.

5. The Belgic Confession originated in Belgium in 1561, with Guido de Brès as the chief author. See Gootjes (2007) for an overview of the history, author, authority and revision of the Belgic Confession. Together with Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession is known as the Forms of Unity. For the roots of Reformed hermeneutics in the 16th century reformation, see Brashler (2009:154–166).

6. The chapter makes use of the English translation of the BC used by the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA n.d.).

7. The confession of the existence and attributes of God is, of course, based on Scripture. Something of the so-called hermeneutical spiral is already evident here (cf. Klein et al. 2017:240–241; for the use of 'hermeneutical spiral' rather than 'hermeneutical circle' in reference to moving from a text's original meaning to its contextualisation today, see Osborne 2006:22 and Lategan 2009:81–82). This confirms the close relationship between God and Scripture in the Reformed tradition (cf. Van Genderen & Velema 2008:20).

Since God exists, and since he is *sui generis* (see the description of his attributes in BC art. 1; cf. Heyns 1988:45–54; Van Genderen & Velema 2008:164–192), his revelation in Scripture should be handled with reverence and awe and meticulously expounded and applied.

God makes himself known to man (BC art. 2)

According to Reformed theology, not only does God exist, but he makes himself known to man. This he does by two means (BC art. 2), namely by his creation, preservation and government of the universe and by his holy and divine Word. These two modes of revelation are popularly referred to as God's 'general revelation' and his 'special revelation' (cf. Bavinck 2011:68–81; Beeke & Smalley 2019:185–189; Van Genderen & Velema 2008:42–56). The former, metaphorically described in BC Article 2 as 'a most beautiful book', reveals to man God's eternal power and divine nature. While God's general revelation is enough to 'convict men and leave them without excuse' (alluding to Rm 1:20), it is inferior to his revelation in 'his holy and divine Word', with which God 'makes himself more clearly and fully known to us'.

The implications of this confession for Reformed hermeneutics are:

- God is a revealing God; he makes himself known. Accordingly, man can know who God is, what he does and how man fits into the bigger scheme of things.[8] This man can know from God's revelation in both nature and Scripture.
- Scripture, according to the Reformed view, does not contain human reflection about God or excerpts from ancient history, but God's self-revelation (cf. Vorster 2020:1).
- God's revelation in Scripture is 'clearer', 'fuller' and 'more complete' than his revelation in nature (Coetsee 2020:2). Accordingly, while a number of matters related to God's existence and attributes are revealed in nature, who God is and what he does are revealed in much more detail in Scripture. Of the two modes of revelation, Scripture enjoys the position of primacy.
- God's revelation in his Scripture is 'holy' and 'divine', suggesting that it is authoritative and should be reverently obeyed.

Scripture is inspired (BC art. 3)

A natural extension of the Reformed confession that God reveals himself in Scripture is the confession that Scripture is divinely inspired. Explicitly alluding to 2 Peter 1:21, BC Article 3 states that the 'Word of God did not come by the

8. This is also indirectly implied in the confession of God's preservation and government of the universe. The confession suggests that God is actively at work in history, and consequently that man can expect God to be working towards a specific point or goal, and that goal will be communicated in Scripture.

impulse of man, but that men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit'.[9]

Fittingly, BC Article 3 makes a distinction between the spoken and written Word of God (cf. Heyns 1988:79; Van Bruggen 1980:24). While the vast majority of God's revelation did not come in written format,[10] 'God commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed Word to writing'. This he did 'in his special care for us and our salvation', with the church consequently calling these writings 'holy and divine Scriptures'.

Accordingly, both the act of speaking God's Word and writing it down is the result of God's initiative (cf. Coetsee 2020:4). Focusing on the written Word of God, Reformed theology has what is referred to as an 'organic' view of the inspiration of Scripture (cf. Bavinck 2011:101–110; Berkhof 1968:18; Breed, Van Rensburg & Jordaan 2008:42; Frame 2010:142; Van Genderen & Velema 2008:80–83; Vorster 2020:1, 4–6), namely that while the human authors of the various biblical books wrote within their own time and culture and from their own spiritual experiences with their own nuances, everything in Scripture was written under the divine guidance of God's Spirit. Scripture, while being inspired from beginning to end, has both a divine and human nature.

This view on the inspiration of Scripture distinguishes Reformed hermeneutics from hermeneutical paradigms that view Scripture as a human reflection about God, as well as hermeneutical paradigms that have a mechanical view of the inspiration of Scripture. The implication of the organic inspiration of Scripture is that cognisance should be taken of both the divine and human nature of Scripture when Scripture is interpreted.

Divinely inspired Scripture is unique, consisting of 66 biblical books (BC art. 4 and art. 6)

Reformed theology is very clear on what it views as divinely inspired Scripture. Unlike the Roman Catholic canon, the Protestant canon consists of 66 biblical books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. A list of these books is found in BC Article 4,[11] while BC Article 6 states which (Old Testament)

9. 2 Peter 1:21 states that the Holy Spirit is the origin of prophecy; he 'guided, prompted or moved' ([φέρω]; cf. Bauer et al. 2000:1051–1052) the prophets to speak from God (cf. Bauckham 1983:233–235). The locus classicus for the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:16, which states that all of Scripture is 'breathed out by God' or 'inspired by God' ([θεόπνευστος]; Bauer et al. 2000:449–450).

10. BC Article 3 refers to God writing the two tables of the law 'with his own finger', alluding to Exodus 31:18.

11. This list confirms another Reformed presupposition, namely that the New Testament is the continuation of the Old Testament. For an overview of contested matters concerning the authorship and designation of biblical books in the original wording of BC Article 4, see Coetsee (2020:5), who argues that these 'critical observations [...] should be read in the light of the time in which the BC was composed'.

books included in the Roman Catholic canon are viewed as apocryphal in the Reformed tradition.[12]

The BC clearly places the canonical and apocryphal books on different levels, as is evident in the description that 'nothing can be alleged' against the former (BC art. 4), which are referred to as 'holy books' (BC art. 6), while the church 'may read' the latter and 'take instruction from' them 'so far as they agree with the canonical books', but that they cannot 'confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion', and may in no way 'be used to detract from the authority of the holy books' (BC art. 6).

The implication of this for Reformed hermeneutics is that only the 66 books of the Protestant canon are viewed as 'holy and canonical' (BC art. 5). All other writings, including writings from the Old and New Testament times that may be viewed as canonical in other hermeneutical paradigms, are not considered to be on the same level as the 66 books of the Protestant canon. Being on a completely different level than any other writings, the 66 books of divinely inspired Scripture are unique and should be treated as such when Scripture is interpreted and applied.

The uniqueness of divinely inspired Scripture, however, does not mean that the Reformed tradition prohibits the use of extra-biblical sources in the process of interpreting Scripture. It does, however, indicate the primacy of Scripture for the doctrine and life of the church.

Divinely inspired Scripture is authoritative (BC art. 5)

Closely linked to the previous, in the Reformed tradition, the 66 books of divinely inspired Scripture alone are 'for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith' (BC art. 5). They alone have authority when it comes to matters of the faith, and they alone can bind the conscience of man. The logic is as follows: Since these books and they alone are inspired (BC art. 5 states that the church 'receives' these books, implying that they come from God), they alone are viewed as authoritative. In and through them, God speaks to his church.

BC Article 5 continues by stating that the church 'believe[s] without any doubt all things contained' in Scripture, which once more confirms the doctrine of the authority of Scripture. The article continues why the church believes this, stating that 'the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God', and that these books 'contain the evidence of' being from God 'in themselves' ([*autopistia*]; cf. Vorster 2020:6) – both once more echoing the Reformed confession of the inspiration of Scripture. In Reformed theology,

12. The Roman Catholic canon follows the Septuagint by including the so-called Old Testament apocrypha. The inspiration of these books were doubted during the Reformation, and the reformers pleaded for a return to the Jewish canon of the Old Testament (cf. Coetsee 2020:7).

therefore, there is a direct correlation between the inspiration and authority of Scripture (cf. Beeke & Smalley 2019:335–343; Greijdanus 1946:44; Van Genderen & Velema 2008:84–96).

The hermeneutical implication of this is that all of Scripture should be treated as the authoritative Word of God and interpreted as such. Scripture remains the always applicable Word of God (Breed et al. 2008:38). Consequently, the church should submit itself and obey Scripture in its totality.

This confession, however, does not encourage a blind or naïve faith. Reformed theology acknowledges that various hermeneutical rules come into play when Scripture is interpreted (as will be seen in the section 'Divinely inspired Scripture is sufficient [BC art. 7]'). Rather, this confession once more indicates the church's high view of Scripture as God's divine and authoritative word, which man should heed and obey.

Divinely inspired Scripture is sufficient (BC art. 7)

The confession of the inspiration, uniqueness and authority of Scripture leads in a natural way to the Reformed confession of the sufficiency of Scripture. In the Reformed view, Scripture 'fully contains the will of God', 'that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein' and that 'the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length' (BC art. 7). Scripture is sufficient for knowledge of the will and worship of God and the salvation of man (cf. Beeke & Smalley 2019:395–406; Van Genderen & Velema 2008:102–105).

This confession safeguards Reformed theology from the false perception that Scripture teaches everything in every existing field of research (cf. Coetsee 2020:8; Heyns 1988:107). The scope of God's revelation in Scripture first and foremost has to do with God's will and man's salvation.

Since Scripture is sufficient for the will and worship of God and the salvation of man, no additional revelation is necessary. Moreover, additional revelations in Reformed theology are either considered as not from God or redundant. The latter is implied in the opening words of BC Article 7 ('Scripture fully contains the will of God'), while the former is supported by allusions to Galatians 1:8 and Deuteronomy 12:32, and the explicit reference to the church 'reject[ing] with all our heart whatever does not agree with this infallible rule'.[13] This distinguishes Reformed hermeneutics from any other hermeneutical paradigm that is open for extra-biblical revelation or confirmation.

BC Article 7 ends by once more confirming the uniqueness and sufficiency of divinely inspired Scripture by stating that the church 'may not consider any

13. This once more links on to the uniqueness of divinely inspired Scripture, confirming the Reformed confession of a 'closed' canon (cf. Dt 4:2; Rv 22:18–19).

writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with the divine Scriptures'. The same goes for 'custom', 'the great multitude', 'antiquity', 'succession of times and persons', 'councils, decrees or statutes', all of which are not considered 'of equal value with the truth of God'.

Summative reflection

This section provided an overview of the basic presuppositions of classical Reformed hermeneutics. These are the presuppositions based on and refined by Scripture with which Reformed theologians approach Scripture.[14]

The starting point of Reformed hermeneutics is plain and unwaveringly simple: God exists. He makes himself known to man in Scripture. Scripture is God's unique, organically inspired, authoritative and sufficient word and not mere human reflection. Through his word, God continues to speak to the church. Consequently, Scripture should be approached, read, interpreted and applied with reverence and awe.[15]

These presuppositions are shared by other hermeneutical paradigms, but not by all, and not in its totality. Even within Reformed theology, these presuppositions are contested by some.[16] Some suspect the classical Reformed hermeneutical paradigm 'of entertaining a "naïve realistic" approach to Scripture and of being "fundamentalist" and "Biblicist"', arguing that the paradigm is 'no longer plausible and intelligible for doing responsible theology' (Vorster 2020:2—3). While some strands within Reformed hermeneutics are indeed in danger of being 'fundamentalist' and 'Biblicist', this is by no means true of Reformed hermeneutics in its totality. Classical Reformed hermeneutics, practised in humility and true to its presuppositions and principles for the exposition of Scripture, is not only viable and useful for the church and society, but in our view, it is true to the essence and nature of Scripture as God's unique revelation.

Taking the view of Scripture as departure point, three of the biggest differences between Reformed hermeneutics and other hermeneutical paradigms are:

- Reformed hermeneutics can be distinguished from hermeneutical paradigms that wilfully read Scripture against its grain. While Reformed

14. Virkler and Ayayo (2009:320) confirm this by stating that '[t]he view of inspiration that a biblical interpreter holds has direct implications for hermeneutics'.

15. This is what makes Reformed theology unique according to Klooster (1979:39–44): its great emphasis on the centrality of Scripture alone [*sola Scriptura*] and the totality of Scripture [*tota Scriptura*] for life and theology. He calls this Reformed theology's 'Scriptural principle'. Similar presuppositions about the nature of Scripture can be found in the popular evangelical text book on hermeneutics by Klein et al. (2017:211–222).

16. Vorster (2020:2) fittingly summarises that 'many theologians in the Reformed tradition have set aside classic Reformed principles and endeavoured to design new theories on how the ancient biblical text should function in the current post-secular and post-modern paradigm'.

hermeneutics continually tests its presuppositions and principles (*semper reformanda*), it reads and interprets Scripture as God's divine word. In this way, it stays true to and builds on its rich heritage.

- Linking on to the previous, Reformed hermeneutics can be distinguished from hermeneutical paradigms that view the purpose of Scripture as anything else that reveals to man the will and worship of God and the salvation of man. A number of modern hermeneutical paradigms view the purpose of Scripture as justifying some form of socio-economical, cultural, ethnic, colonial or sexual liberation. While Scripture touches on these matters, they are always intrinsically linked to communion with God and his plan of salvation; it is never a purpose on its own. Various of these hermeneutical paradigms are ideologically driven, abusing Scripture for the justification of their views. In our view, the view of the purpose of Scripture constitutes the most profound difference between Reformed hermeneutics and some modern readings of Scripture.
- Reformed hermeneutics can be distinguished from hermeneutical paradigms that apart from Scripture appeal to tradition (e.g. Roman Catholic hermeneutics), experience or extra-biblical revelation (e.g. some Pentecostal hermeneutical traditions) for the regulation, foundation and confirmation of the Christian faith.

Reformed principles for the exposition of Scripture

The basic presuppositions of Reformed hermeneutics stated above may unwillingly create the idea that the interpretation of Scripture according to the Reformed tradition is an easy matter. This is not the case. The Reformed tradition acknowledges that Scripture needs to be interpreted for various general and specific reasons,[17] and that it is sometimes difficult to do so. Even the foundational Reformed presupposition of the perspicuity [*perspicuitas*] of Scripture does not suggest that all parts of Scripture are equally easy to understand. Rather, it indicates that the main message of Scripture is clear and simple (cf. Beeke & Smalley 2019:343–349; Van Genderen & Velema 2008:96–101). In order to correctly interpret Scripture according to the Reformed tradition, various principles should be kept in mind. It is these principles that we turn to in this section.

The principles discussed below are by no means exhaustive. They do, however, give an overview of some of the most basic principles of

17. General reasons include the ambiguity of written communication and the great gap in terms of language and culture between the first and modern readers. Specific reasons include the depravity of man because of sin which negatively influences his ability to understand Scripture (i.a. Jn 8:43–45; Rm 1:21; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 4:18), and the fact that Scripture reveals matters that are far greater than what man can comprehend (i.a. Rm 11:33; 2 Pt 3:15–6).

Reformed exposition. Many of these principles are also employed by other hermeneutical paradigms.

Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit

According to the Reformed tradition, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for the correct interpretation of Scripture. Because of various limitations (including man's fallen nature and sin), man is unable to automatically understand Scripture correctly without divine aid. Consequently, a Reformed interpreter starts the interpretation process with a prayer of illumination. The interpreter prays that the Holy Spirit, who inspired Scripture, will make the meaning of Scripture clear to him or her.

A number of remarks are in order:

- The suggestion that the interpreter starts with a prayer of illumination does not suggest that this prayer is limited to the commencement of interpretation only. Rather, such a prayer is prayed throughout the interpretation process.
- While the prayer of illumination forms the foundation of interpretation, the interpreter should also embody other characteristics in order to interpret Scripture correctly, such as humbly submitting to Scripture's authority and a willingness to listen carefully to its content (cf. Klein et al. 2017:202—210; Köstenberger & Patterson 2011:62—65). Waltke (2013:302) aptly states: 'spiritual commitment, or lack of it, influences the ability to perceive spiritual truth'.
- The principle of a prayer of illumination does not suggest that an unbeliever cannot interpret Scripture. With an adequate reading of the text, an unbeliever should be able to correctly interpret various elements of Scripture. He or she, however, will not be able to understand the deeper meaning of Scripture. As Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:65) puts it: 'While a given interpreter may indeed be devoid of faith and the Holy Spirit and still understand some of the words in Scripture, he will lack the spiritual framework, motivation, and understanding to grasp a given passage in its whole-Bible context' (cf. Klein et al. 2017:635; Maier 1994:53—55). 'Only the interpreter who depends on the Holy Spirit in his interpretive quest will likely be successful in discerning God's special, Spirit-appraised revelation' (Köstenberger & Patterson 2011:65).

Strive to determine the authorial intent

In hermeneutical circles, the second half of the 20th century was characterised by a debate over where meaning resides. Simplifying a number of complex arguments, scholars argued for one of the following three positions: meaning resides with the sender or author, the sent item or text or the recipient or reader (cf. Kaiser & Silva 2007:30–32; Kwakkel 2014:215).[18]

18. For the challenges of each approach, see Lategan (2009:91–103).

Reformed hermeneutics argues that the meaning of Scripture is always to be found in the authorial intent. Being divinely and organically inspired, Scripture demands that it should 'be understood in terms of its original intended meaning' (Osborne 2006:521; cf. Klein et al. 2017:263–264).[19] The text of Scripture is not 'malleable to a great variety of interpretations that lay equal claim to represent valid readings of a given passage' (Köstenberger & Patterson 2011:76). The reader does not create meaning but rather seeks 'to find the meaning that has already been placed into the text by the author (both divine and human)' (Duvall & Hays 2012:201). Consequently, the interpreter must always aim to recover the authorial intention by means of 'careful and respectful interpretation' (Köstenberger & Patterson 2011:58). While a number of obstacles make it difficult to always be sure of what the author meant, the departure points of Reformed theology are that the authorial intentions are 'accessible to the contemporary reader' (Beale 2011:5), and that it is the task of the interpreter to try to determine this as far as possible (cf. Yu 2007:450).

This approach safeguards the interpretation of Scripture from eisegesis. The dangers of overemphasising the role of the reader in the process of interpretation are that it can easily become 'a license of meaning-manipulation' (Yu 2007:441), or Scripture can easily be read 'through the spectacles of' our 'own time' (Breed et al. 2008:41). While the 'reader's background and ideas are important in the study of biblical truth', it should 'be used to study meaning rather than to create meaning that is not there' (Osborne 2006:29). The text of Scripture should always be interpreted responsibly, 'displaying respect for the text and its author', without 'interpretive arrogance that elevates the reader above text and author' (Köstenberger & Patterson 2011:58).

While Reformed hermeneutics acknowledges the role of the reader in the interpretation process and acknowledges the positive contributions of reader-response criticism and reception history (cf. Kwakkel 2014:216), it is not on the foreground like in other hermeneutical paradigms.

Read Scripture within its historical and literary context

One of the most basic principles of Reformed exposition is that Scripture should always be read and interpreted within its context. Moreover, the importance of reading a passage of Scripture within its bigger context cannot be overemphasised. Since a passage of Scripture did not originate in a vacuum, its context is key to understanding its meaning. '[C]ontext determines meaning', as Duvall and Hays (2012:149) fittingly argue. Someone once aptly captured this by saying: 'There is only one text, and that is the context'.

19. The classical exponent of the position that meaning resides with the author is Hirsch (1967).

The context of a passage usually refers to both its historical and literary context. Being a historical religion, 'all texts' of Scripture 'are historically and culturally embedded'; being a text of literature, 'the various literary and linguistic aspects' of Scripture should be taken into account when it is interpreted (Köstenberger & Patterson 2011:66).

Determining the historical context of a passage usually entails reading the passage in the light of the historical events recorded in the passages prior and subsequent to the passage under investigation. While such a reading is not possible for all passages of Scripture (e.g. various psalms), it should be determined as far as possible. Such an investigation also includes taking the cultural context into account (cf. Klein et al. 2017:312–324). Since modern readers are far removed from Scripture in terms of language and culture, determining the socio-historical context of the passage is crucial for its correct interpretation. That said, in the Reformed tradition, socio-historic considerations are not elevated to the primary hermeneutical key for unlocking a passage. Rather, it is part and parcel of a wide variety of factors that need to be taken into account when interpreting Scripture (Goede 2017:15–24).[20]

To determine the literary context of a passage, its specific place and function within Scripture are investigated (cf. Duvall & Hays 2012:149–162; Klein et al. 2017:295–312). This includes investigating its place within the biblical book it is contained in, the place of the passage within the corpus of books it forms part of, its place in the Old or New Testament as well as its place in Scripture. Like the historical context, convincing deductions cannot always be made from the literary context. Nonetheless, it is one of the avenues of investigation for a legitimate exposition of Scripture.

Carefully investigate the grammar of the passage

To determine the authorial meaning, not only the historical and literary context of the passage should be investigated but also what is written in the passage itself. Focusing on the grammar of the passage, namely its syntax, morphology and semantics, the interpreter scrupulously investigates the meaning of words, sentences and paragraphs, and their relationship with one another (cf. Klein et al. 2017:344–360). While '[w]ords provide the building blocks of meaning' (Osborne 2006:82), 'meaning is not conveyed as much by single words as by groups of words, such as phrases or sentences' (Maimela & König 1998:2).

The study of the grammar of a passage includes in-depth investigation of certain keywords by means of word study (cf. Duvall & Hays 2012:163–187;

20. Goede (2017:16) correctly argues 'that the socio-historical context is indispensable yet not determinative in understanding the text'. For an excellent overviews of the importance of investigating the historical-cultural background of a passage, sources on interpreting the historical-cultural setting, as well as suggestions on how to do it, see Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:93–143) and Duvall and Hays (2012:115–136).

Klein et al. 2017:324–344). Investigating the meaning of words, however, can be a tricky business. To do it in a sound and convincing manner, common semantic fallacies should be avoided (Kaiser & Silva 2007:49–65; Osborne 2006:83–93), which includes assigning meaning to words on invalid etymological or historical (anachronistic) grounds.

Although not limited to one specific exegetical model, focusing on the historical and literary context of a passage as well as its grammar, it comes as no surprise that Reformed hermeneutics usually makes use of a form of grammatical-historical exegesis.[21]

Take the genre of the passage into consideration

Scripture contains a variety of literary genres. While the overarching hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of a passage remain the same no matter its genre, a number of unique or distinct hermeneutical rules come into play with each of its genres. A portion of biblical poetry, for example, cannot be interpreted in exactly the same way as a historical narrative, nor a portion of biblical law as prophecy. Consequently, to interpret Scripture in a valid and convincing manner, the genre of the passage should be taken into account (cf. Vorster 2020:9). 'Meaning is genre-dependent' (Osborne 2006:26).

To aid with the interpretation of the various genres of Scripture, various textbooks on hermeneutics helpfully give an overview of the most important literary features of the major genres, and suggestions on how they can be interpreted (cf. Duvall & Hays 2012:251–442; Kaiser & Silva 2007:123–209; Klein et al. 2017:417–567; Köstenberger & Patterson 2011:237–570; Osborne 2006:181–322).

Compare Scripture with Scripture

One of the most foundational principles of Reformed exposition of Scripture is that holy Scripture is for itself its own (best) interpreter [*sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*]. The safest and soundest aid in interpreting Scripture is not tradition, commentary or ecclesiastical authority (Köstenberger & Patterson 2011:74), but Scripture itself. Scripture should be read in the light of the whole of Scripture [*tota Scriptura*]; we understand one part of Scripture in the light of its other parts.

21. For a discussion of the grammatical-historical method of exegesis, see Tolar (2002:21–38). Kaiser prefers to refer to the 'syntactical-theological' method of exegesis, referring to 'the traditional grammatico-historical study of the text, followed by a study of its meaning that shows its theological relevance' (Kaiser & Silva 2007:35). Van Deventer (2011:294–302) correctly indicates that in some circles, grammatical-historical exegesis can be a too narrow interpretation model and argues that grammatical-historical exegesis should be developed into a more comprehensive interpretation model. This chapter has a comprehensive grammatical-historical interpretation model in view.

This principle implies that when Scripture is interpreted, it should be compared with other passages of Scripture related to the topic or theme in the passage under investigation. Such a comparison not only indicates what Scripture as a whole reveals about the topic or theme, but the unique emphasis or contribution of the topic or theme in the passage under investigation is brought to the fore. Comparing Scripture with Scripture can be done since God is the divine author of all 66 inspired biblical books (*Auctor Primarius*). Despite different biblical writers with different circumstances in different eras writing in different languages, Scripture forms a unity. Scripture is a connected, canonical, theological whole (House 2002:269). The same Holy Spirit inspired all of it. There is unity in Scripture's message within its diversity (Goldsworthy 2012:28; cf. Van Genderen & Velema 2008:68).

Comparing Scripture with Scripture leads the interpreter to the 'deeper meaning of passages' (Vorster 2020:11). Such a comparison, however, should always be done with sensitivity for each biblical book, corpus or Testament's unique emphases.

Read a passage within the progressive line of God's revelation

Scripture is made up of a collection of divinely inspired biblical books written by different human authors over a long period (cf. Van Genderen & Velema 2008:25–26). Consequently, God did not give his revelation on a specific subject all at once, and Scripture does not contain a neat and systematic overview of various doctrines and its implications (like a textbook on systematic theology). In his wisdom, it pleased God to reveal himself gradually throughout Scripture. Hebrews 1:1–2a implies that God's 'revelation progressed from his Old Testament revelation to his revelation in his Son', with 'God's Old Testament revelation' being 'incomplete in relation to the revelation he now gave in his Son' (Coetsee 2016:7; cf. Beeke & Smalley 2019:113). Consequently, his revelation of a specific subject becomes clearer as his revelation in Scripture unfolds. Scripture should be read 'as a historically developing collection of documents' (Carson 1995:27). An earlier revelation may be expanded by a later revelation or even superseded.

One of the implications of this manner of revelation is that a passage should be read within the bigger, progressive line of God's revelation. In practice, this means that a passage should be read in the light of earlier and later utterances on the same topic in Scripture, with the revelation of the passage under review formulated in such a way that it takes cognisance of where and how it fits into the bigger scheme or revelation. Everything contained in Scripture related to the topic should be taken into account. Such a reading of Scripture prevents the interpreter from reaching invalid or partially true conclusions.

Interpret Scripture in the light of Christ

Linking on to the previous two principles, in the Reformed tradition, everything in Scripture should be interpreted in the light of Christ (Greijdanus 1946: 121–123). This principle flows from the convictions that God's revelation in the Old Testament is incomplete on its own, and that Christ is the climax of God's revelation (cf. Heb 1:1–2a; Coetsee 2016:7–8). Consequently, everything in Scripture should be interpreted within the divine timeline of the promise of the coming of Christ, his coming and the promise of his return.

While this manner of interpretation is by no means a license to read 'revelation' into a text or to make a text say what it does not, it avoids an interpretation of Scripture that does not take into account God's whole revelation, especially his plan of salvation.

Explain a more difficult part of Scripture in the light of easier parts

A wonderfully practical principle employed in Reformed hermeneutics is that a more difficult part of Scripture should be interpreted in the light of easier parts. The interpretation of Scripture should move 'from the clear to the less clear', with 'the shorter pronouncement' understood 'in the light of the more comprehensive, as well as the more practically directed in the light of the pronouncements which are more in the nature of principles' (Coetzee 1997:13).

This principle is based on a number of the abovementioned presuppositions and principles, especially the presuppositions of the divine inspiration and perspicuity of Scripture, and the principles of comparing Scripture with Scripture, reading a passage within the progressive line of God's revelation and interpreting Scripture in the light of Christ. This principle safeguards Reformed theology from building dogmatic constructs on obscure and unclear passages.

Differentiate whether a passage is time-directed or time-bound

Another very practical principle employed by Reformed hermeneutics is the principle that an interpreter should determine whether the practices referred to in a passage of Scripture are time-directed or time-bound. Reformed theology views the *message* of all of Scripture as time directed and not time-bound (cf. Coetzee 1997:14; Van Genderen & Velema 2008:94–96), but not the *practices*.

This principle has as a starting point the presupposition of the organic inspiration of Scripture, namely that God guided the biblical writers to write down his revelation within their own time and culture and from their own

spiritual experiences with their own nuances. This implies that 'the books of the Bible came into existence in a temporally oriented way' (Breed et al. 2008:42), and the biblical writers and the original recipients of God's revelation in Scripture lived within a time and culture different from our own. Some of the cultural practices referred to in a passage may not be meant for all ages, or at least not in its current form (cf. Kaiser & Silva 2007:223–239).

To distinguish between practices that are applicable to all times and those that are not, Reformed hermeneutics distinguishes between whether a passage is time-directed or time-bound. A passage that is time-directed originated in a specific context in terms of space, time and purpose, but the application of the practices it refers to is meant for all ages. A passage that is time-bound, on the other hand, originates in a specific context in terms of space, time and purpose, but the practices referred to are only applicable to that time.

Determining whether the practices referred to in a passage of Scripture are still applicable today is one of the most important tasks of an interpreter. Most of the time, distinguishing between the two is relatively easy. There are, of course, a number of cases where the distinction is extremely difficult.[22] While by no means a fool-proof answer, in the Reformed tradition passages that are time-directed are often linked to creation ordinances, God's character and God's covenants (Kruger 2019:23–24).

Differentiate whether a passage is prescriptive or descriptive

Closely related to the previous principle, a Reformed interpreter should determine whether a passage is prescriptive or descriptive. A descriptive passage is one that merely describes what happened without prescribing what the reader should or should not do. A prescriptive passage, on the other hand, contains prescriptions, namely things that should or should not be emulated by the original recipients and the modern reader.

This distinction is crucial for interpreting and applying Scripture, as it safeguards the reader from emulating certain practices that are either unnecessary or sinful (cf. Vorster 2020:9).

Stand on the shoulders of others

A final practical principle employed by Reformed hermeneutics is the principle that the interpretative endeavours of others should be consulted when

22. To give but two examples: For some, Paul's commands regarding head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 are viewed as time-directed, while others view it as time-bound. An even stronger lack of consensus is evident when it comes to the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:33–35 and 1 Timothy 2:8–15.

interpreting Scripture. This principle acknowledges that the current interpreter is not the first person to read and interpret a specific passage from Scripture. At least two millennia of biblical interpretation have been recorded that can aid the interpreter in his or her interpretation by checking his or her findings, sharpening his or her understanding of the passage and preventing misinterpretations (cf. Breed et al. 2008:40). Moreover, this principle acknowledges that the same Holy Spirit who is asked to illuminate the current interpreter also illuminated interpreters of the past. Consulting sources in the interpretation process is therefore not a sign of a lack of faith but an implicit acknowledgement of the Spirit's guidance throughout the centuries.

The nuances of Reformed hermeneutics in the light of other South African hermeneutical paradigms

The purpose of this section is not to compare Reformed hermeneutics with every possible hermeneutical paradigm on South African soil. Rather, the aim is to distinguish the nuances of Reformed hermeneutics from other major hermeneutical paradigms in South Africa in broad terms. Considering this point of departure, the following paradigms will be briefly described and compared to Reformed hermeneutics: Pentecostal hermeneutics, Africa hermeneutics, the hermeneutics of advocacy groups (also known as hermeneutics of interests or genitive hermeneutics), fundamentalist hermeneutics and postmodern hermeneutics.

Pentecostal hermeneutics

Pentecostal theologians published extensively about hermeneutical issues since the 1990s, creating the impression that there exists a unique Pentecostal hermeneutic (Nel 2017:86). This unique Pentecostal hermeneutic is distinguished from other hermeneutics based on its identification by Ervin (1981:11) as being 'pneumatic exegesis', defined as scriptural exegesis in that it articulates the Spirit's witness to revelation in the Bible. According to Ervin, this source of knowledge stands opposed to the two ways of knowledge axiomatic to the Western world, namely sensory experience and reason. This basis of Pentecostal hermeneutics is pneumatic in the sense that the Spirit of God mediates human understanding of his word, which is rooted epistemologically in biblical faith (Ervin 1987:101, 116). Ervin's hermeneutics leaves room within Pentecostal hermeneutics for non-verbal communication between God and humans mediated by phenomena such as glossolalia, dreams, visions, theophanies and healings (Nel 2017:88). This element of a direct encounter between God and a believer or group of believers, is essential in Pentecostal hermeneutics. In its absence, the knowledge revealed in

Scripture remains cognitive data of a historical or dogmatic nature rather than demonstrating God's Spirit and power. The result is that Pentecostal hermeneutics focusses on encounters between believers and the Spirit, and specifically those recounted in the gospels and Acts (Nel 2017:90).

Pentecostal believers stand firm on the witness of the Bible, yet also experience it through the Spirit as being enacted in their own lives. Nel (2017:91) cautions that such an approach may lead to the subjective interpretation of the text oriented towards the interpreter's interests, ignoring the socio-historical context of the text. The antidote to this danger is sound grammatical-historical and critical-contextual exegesis although it does not negate the Pentecostal precondition that an experience and life in the Spirit is essential for human understanding of Scripture. Furthermore, Pentecostal hermeneutics is underpinned by the priesthood and prophethood of all believers contributing in a democratic manner to the interpretation of the Bible and the Spirit-led community of faith exercising a corrective influence in the case of heresy (Nel 2017:94). The Spirit then guides the community in terms of the relevance of biblical passages to contemporary life. In postmodern Pentecostal circles, the significant role of the modern-day reader in determining meaning is recognised (Nel 2017:97).

It is important to note that Pentecostal hermeneutics does not reference one fixed pattern of biblical interpretation but rather consists of (Nel 2017):

> [*D*]ifferent aspects and its combination determined by the specific text one is reading, such as historical-grammatical exegesis; the significance of the community of faith; the importance of the Holy Spirit with respect to inspiring, enlightening and illuminating authors as well as modern-day readers, and elements of new (postmodern) hermeneutical approaches, with their emphasis on the important role of the reader in the process of interpretation. (p. 98)

Despite the diversity in Pentecostal hermeneutics due to different backgrounds and theological training of Pentecostal readers, Nel (2018:12) contends that it is possible to distinguish a Pentecostal hermeneutics characterised by a primary distinctive, namely the present activity of the Holy Spirit. The role and work of the Holy Spirit are placed above any search for scientific knowledge through scientific investigation of Scripture (Kgatle & Mofokeng 2019:2). This distinctive characteristic resonates especially among Pentecostals in Africa and may lead to the reconsideration of contemporary issues facing the Pentecostal believers (see, for example, the work of Nel [2019] in respect of LGBTIQ+ people).

Möller (1998:185–186) identifies characteristics of a Pentecostal paradigm for biblical understanding:

- Christ-centred in as much as all revelation comes from and leads back to him.
- A personal and living relationship between God in Christ and through the Spirit and the individual believer since the revelation of God in Christ is by necessity existential in the life of the believer.

Reformed hermeneutics have been accused of underplaying the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation and its application in the lives of contemporary believers. From a Reformed perspective, the work of the Holy Spirit and scientific endeavour are complementary rather than in contradiction to one another. Pentecostal hermeneutics provides a correction in this respect. One must guard, however, against a biblical hermeneutic that underplays the role of God the Father and God the Son in our understanding of Scripture. Both hermeneutic paradigms emphasise the importance of the biblical text as a counter to subjectivist interpretations.

Africa hermeneutics

Mburu (2019:65ff.) uses the delightful image of a four-legged stool to describe the central tenets of African hermeneutics, referencing the stability of such a stool in terms of a reader's reliance on a stable hermeneutic to provide a stable and accurate interpretation of the biblical text. The four legs of the stool are parallels to the African context, the theological context, the literary context, and the historical and cultural context:

- The first leg (parallels to the African context) refers to the theological and cultural contexts primarily contributing to the reader's worldview, as well as any relevant socio-political and geographical features of the reader's context. This first leg empowers the interpreter to move from a familiar position to the unfamiliarity of the biblical text identifying points of contact and forces the interpreter to interrogate their own worldview and context as to whether it fits within the text (Mburu 2019:67–68). In the words of West (2020:2): 'An African hermeneutic of reception requires a hermeneutic of production'.
- The second leg (theological context) seeks to understand the theological focus of a text as expressed in relation to the section and book where it resides, and ultimately the whole Bible (Mburu 2019:68). Investigation of the theological context precedes that of the historical and cultural context because of the religious-spiritual orientation of African readers, first seeking matters relating to God and faith and how these affect the readers' daily lives. This inclination, coupled with the points of contact identified in the first leg, leads to a fusion of two horizons, namely the context of the reader and the context of the Bible.
- The third leg (literary context) encompasses the identification and analysis of the literary context guided by the genre, literary techniques, language and literary flow of the text with a view to confirm the meaning of the text arrived at thus far (Mburu 2019:80). African perspectives on these components may be helpful in the reader's analysis of the literary context.
- The fourth leg (historical and cultural context) presupposes that the Bible cannot be understood in isolation from its historical and cultural context,

and to do so the reader must enter the world of the author (Mburu 2019:84). The aim is to uncover what the author was saying, and what his message would have meant to his original audience.

The seat of the stool supported by its legs represents the application as the final stage of interpretation. As Mburu (2019:85) asserts, '[a]pplication refers to the significance of the text for the modern reader'. While the meaning is understood to be determined by authorial intent, and thus singular, a text can have multiple applications. This corresponds to meaning in African storytelling. The appropriate manner to achieve this transfer of the meaning to a modern context is separating the message from its cultural setting in the biblical world, and applying it to modern African contexts (Mburu 2019:86). In this regard, the distinction between culture-bound and trans-contextual truths is important: the former is only applicable in a specific biblical context while the latter is applicable in all contexts although the manner of expression may differ.

According to Du Toit (1998:380–385), African hermeneutics:

- Seeks understanding in a wider context than merely the biblical text, including the African world as text.
- Constitutes a hermeneutics of protest against factors oppressing and crippling Africa's people.
- Seeks to penetrate beneath the surface of texts 'to expose their role as instruments of power, domination and social manipulation' (Du Toit 1998:382).
- Recognises the Bible as the Word of God, but not to the exclusion of ideas, customs and rites from African culture and traditional religion.

While there are some points of similarity between Reformed and African hermeneutics (in terms of the acknowledgement of oral traditions predating the written text, the role of community in interpretation), Reformed hermeneutics focuses on the biblical text to the exclusion of contemporary aspects of human culture and tradition. The message of the biblical text is applied in contemporary contexts without using such contexts as the hermeneutic key to interpretation. This being said, Reformed hermeneutics recognises the power of Scripture to bring about change where oppression and poverty and other social ills occur.

The hermeneutics of advocacy groups (hermeneutics of interest)

Klein et al. (2017:144) categorise this group of hermeneutics under the umbrella of socio-scientific interest in the Bible. These hermeneutics are advanced by advocacy groups promoting the interests of a particular group of people. Biblical interpretation has a tradition of academic detachment, but these groups

read the Bible with very clearly articulated attachments to those interests and their accompanying ideologies. Such advocacy groups (or interest groups) include liberation and feminist hermeneutics, postcolonialism and other forms of cultural criticism, LGBTIQ+ hermeneutics, ecological hermeneutics and others. All these groups share the common goal of serving the interests of the disenfranchised and their liberation. Hermeneutically speaking, they also reject an author-oriented approach to interpreting the Bible while preferring a reader-oriented interpretation (Klein et al. 2017:266–267). Taking hermeneutics of suspicion as a point of departure, such approaches are critical of traditional interpretations which to their mind contradict their interests or do not sufficiently serve them. While these forms of advocacy hermeneutics quite rightly point towards the application of the biblical text's meaning in the lives of contemporary believers, they may – and often do – replace the meaning of the biblical text within its original context with a contextual meaning gleaned from their interests (i.e. contemporary context). What follows aims to provide a succinct overview of some of these hermeneutics of interests.

Liberation hermeneutics

Liberation hermeneutics represents a response to the oppression of people or groups of people in a variety of contemporary contexts: political, social and economic (Klein et al. 2017:145ff.). Hermeneutically speaking, its root conviction is that experience takes precedence over theory. Consequently, generally speaking, liberation hermeneutics:

- takes people's experience of injustice and oppression as a point of departure
- attempts to determine the reasons for such injustice and oppression
- takes corrective measures since the action takes precedence over rhetoric.

This form of hermeneutics of interest reads the Bible in a socio-political manner, which focusses on the biblical narratives of liberation (Klein et al. 2017:145–146). In the Old Testament, these would include the exodus of Israel from Egypt, while in the New Testament, the kingdom of God would be framed in such a manner. Liberation hermeneutics are underpinned by a variety of ideologies such as socialism and communism although some liberation-hermeneuts labour within capitalism. From a Reformed perspective, one must be careful to read any of these ideologies into the biblical context while acknowledging that all of them may stand in contrast and even contradiction of biblical teaching. Christians are all called to stand up for the oppressed in any given contemporary context without negating biblical principles.

Feminist hermeneutics

Although feminist hermeneutics may be viewed as a hermeneutics of liberation or cultural hermeneutics, its influence in contemporary Bible interpretation warrants a separate discussion (Klein et al. 2017:155). This form of reader-oriented

interpretation may be viewed as one of the numerous viable interpretations of the text according to a postmodernist paradigm of interpretation, or the most important – and thus only viable – modernist interpretation of the text. These readings can be divided into three categories (Klein et al. 2017:155):

- Liberal readings campaigning for full equality with males and benefitting mainly middle-class females rather than low-income and minority females.
- Socialist and Marxist readings campaigning for full equality of females in terms of labour and ownership, deleting the restrictions of capitalism and patriarchy.
- Radical readings upholding the inherent supremacy of females and feminist values over males and patriarchal values.

Some proponents of feminist hermeneutics choose combinations of these three categories.

Recent studies have focused on the role of the Bible and Christianity in feminist hermeneutics, ranging from the viewpoint that Scripture teaches full equality between the sexes to the assertion that Scripture and thus Christianity promotes patriarchy and associated discrimination against females (Klein et al. 2017:156). Portions of Scripture read as supporting the latter are not viewed as authoritative or are interpreted in alternative and challenging ways (Klein et al. 2017:157ff.). Others have abandoned Scripture completely, viewing it as irredeemably chauvinist and oppressive towards females. As is the case with most hermeneutics of interest, feminist hermeneutics offer perspectives that Christians would do well to take seriously such as the plight of females in oppressive contexts and the menace of gender-based violence. Yet the central question remains: does the meaning of the text lie in the text itself and its context, or the context of the contemporary reader?

Cultural or postcolonial hermeneutics

After the demise of communism in the early 1990s, liberation theology underpinned by socialist economics waned only to make a comeback in recent years (Klein et al. 2017:148). In its recent form, it presents as cultural criticism of the biblical text, reading Scripture through the eyes of marginalised cultures (Klein et al. 2017:149). Sometimes this equates to simply an application of Scripture to previously neglected context, but it also manifests in postmodern forms and as a sub-set of reader-response criticism.

One important manifestation is postcolonialism that originated in former colonies in Asia and Africa where Western religious and economic influences hindered full decolonisation (Klein et al. 2017:150). It strives towards the emancipation of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised as opposed to systems that promote poverty, oppression and marginalisation. These are

goals previously advanced by liberation hermeneutics: goals inherent in biblical teaching. Postcolonial hermeneutics further entails the uncovering of the suppressed discourses of the marginalised behind the text and formulating new readings accordingly (Punt 2004:144), giving a voice to the marginalised then and now. In this sense, it represents a rewriting of history from the viewpoint of the marginalised (cf. Punt 2003:60), challenging traditional interpretations by placing the biblical text in the context of empire and imperial interests (Punt 2003:64–65).

Cultural hermeneutics draws attention to contemporary contexts that are closer to the biblical world than Western contexts (Klein et al. 2017:152). Yet postcolonialism also at times veers towards the relativism of postmodernism (especially in relation to religions) as well as advancing the contemporary context as the key to understanding the biblical text (Klein et al. 2017:151).

LGBTIQ+ hermeneutics

Many of the elements highlighted above in respect of feminist hermeneutics also apply to LGBTIQ+ hermeneutics. The categories identified in feminist hermeneutics are replicated within LGBTIQ+ hermeneutics on the spectrum from liberal to radical readings of relevant biblical texts (Klein et al. 2017:161). The same approaches in respect of the applicability of these biblical texts to contemporary contexts are also present, that is reinterpretation, non-applicability for present-day applications and outright rejection of these texts as being discriminatory against LGBTIQ+ persons. Over time, LGBTIQ+ hermeneutics have moved, however, from studying homosexuality as an object of biblical discourse to (homo)sexuality as a standpoint from which to read the Bible, steering LGBTIQ+ persons from interpreted objects to interpreting subjects (Stewart 2017:291–292).

LGBTIQ+ hermeneutics focuses attention on the complexity of human sexuality and the struggles of believers in this regard. This complexity must bring the church into action in terms of ministry to such believers. Yet, LGBTIQ+ hermeneutics presents the danger inherent to all hermeneutics of interest, namely, that the interest and its underlying ideology become the hermeneutical key to understanding Scripture (cf. Klein et al. 2017:162).

Fundamentalist hermeneutics

Vorster (2007) describes contemporary religious fundamentalism as:

> [*A*] a way of reasoning which breeds ideologies that are both religious and political in nature and mount themselves against a perceived threat or enemy in order to protect their identities. (p. 17)

Within these ideologies, certain fundamental beliefs or doctrines of a specific religion or worldview are elevated to absolute as a reactionary defence against such threat or enemy.

Christian fundamentalism exhibits a number of characteristics (Vorster 2008:45ff.):

- A literalist reading of Scripture, claiming inerrancy to the exclusion of any human involvement in the production thereof.
- Strong appeal to the tradition within a specific faith community translating into an ideology that acts as a comprehensive system of explanation, defence and agitation towards outsiders.
- Casuistic ethics are controlled by moral recipes rather than principles, leading to a legalistic lifestyle governed by outward conduct, symbols and social structures.
- A reactionary nature is driven by the perceived fear of a perceived enemy, leading to prejudice and intolerance towards such a perceived enemy and the emergence of conspiracy theories.
- Formation of the in-group and in-breeding.
- Reliance on strong leadership that manifests in charismatic leaders and blind loyalty towards them.
- An inclination towards violence.

Although not all these characteristics may be evident within a religious community, the first is pertinent for the purposes of this chapter, as it forms the basis of fundamentalist hermeneutics. A literalist (or Biblicist) reading of Scripture leads to the neglect of the cultural, social and historical context of Scripture, its genres and the progressive unveiling of revelation throughout Scripture (Vorster 2008:46). A feature of fundamentalist hermeneutics is thus the reading of biblical texts in isolation from its context, which in turn may lead to other characteristics as mentioned above.

From a Reformed hermeneutical perspective, no text can be understood outside its original context. Thus, as strange as it may sound, fundamentalist hermeneutics share a characteristic with the reader-oriented approaches described here, namely that the context of the text is replaced: in the former case by no context at all, and in the latter case by the reader's contemporary context.

Postmodern hermeneutics

Following the general outlines of postmodernism, postmodern hermeneutics present a number of characteristics (cf. Klein et al. 2017:126):

- The denial of any absolute truth in favour of ideological pluralism.
- The denial of objectivity in interpretation in favour of value-laden approaches.
- The importance of human communities in forming interpretive perspectives.
- A more positive evaluation of religion and spirituality in comparison to modernism.

- An emphasis on the aesthetic, symbolic and ancient tradition.
- The denial of any overarching metanarrative giving meaning to individual life narratives in favour of the formative role of narratives in the latter.
- Language is determinative of thought and meaning.

In summary, postmodern hermeneutics do not see meaning as fixed and residing in a text but rather find meaning as the product of individual readers or reading communities (Klein et al. 2017:127). From a Reformed perspective, some of the above characteristics are useful, but others leave the door open for interpretive subjectivism, as evidenced by two approaches based on these characteristics, namely reader-response criticism and deconstruction (Klein et al. 2017:128ff.).

Conclusion

The hermeneutic discourse in South Africa is robust and divergent, as indicated by the overview provided in this chapter. The question is whether Reformed hermeneutics can contribute in a meaningful way to this discourse, given that most of the hermeneutic frameworks discussed disagree with it and contradict it, leaving room for much critical debate.

To our minds, Reformed hermeneutics as outlined earlier are true to the essence and nature of Scripture as God's unique revelation. It shares the basic presupposition of the church through the ages that Scripture alone is God's organically-inspired authoritative and sufficient word, through which he continues to speak to his church. As such, Reformed hermeneutics reads and interprets Scripture as God's divine word, in which he reveals to humanity what his will is and how he should be worshipped, and how humanity can be saved. Staying true to this traditional departure point, Reformed hermeneutics cannot but remain a valid approach to Scripture.

But we can and should go even further. Endeavouring to interpret Scripture from this departure point and according to the principles outlined above, Reformed hermeneutics contributes to the hermeneutic discourse by providing an appropriate balance in interpretation between contexts of text and reader to do justice to both. This rather ambitious goal implies a clear distinction between interpretation and application, with the former more geared towards the text's original context, and the latter more geared towards the reader's context. It also implies finding the sweet spot of hermeneutic endeavour where these contexts meet and bring the biblical message in a relevant manner into the lives of contemporary believers.

In our opinion, this is the continuing value of Reformed hermeneutics in and for South Africa.

Chapter 2

Pentecostal hermeneutics for Africa: Definition and application

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Introduction

Different theological traditions read and interpret the Bible in distinctive ways, using different hermeneutics, justifying the various traditions that the Christian church consists of. The diverse ways of reading and interpreting the Bible lead to differences in spiritual ranges of perception, theologies and practices because the interpretation of biblical texts leads to 'sense-making with existential consequences' (Lategan 2009:13). Hermeneutics attempts to discover meaning; what does the process of interpretation in uncovering indubitable meaning involve (Kennedy 2006:164). The Greek term, *hermeneuein*, is used in the sense of to express aloud, to explain and to translate. In the words of Palmer (1969:13), hermeneutics consists of making comprehensible that which is foreign, strange and separated in time and space.

What is distinctive about African Pentecostals' reading of the Bible? Why does it happen that Pentecostal people come to other conclusions when they

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interpret the Bible in some respects than believers of other denominations? Is a Pentecostal hermeneutic distinctive from the hermeneutics found in other theological traditions? And how does their hermeneutic inform their practice and spirituality and *vice versa*? When these questions are answered, it becomes possible to revisit the issue of LGBTIQ+ communities from an African Pentecostal perspective.

The task to define an African Pentecostal hermeneutic is complicated by the diversity of African Pentecostalism. In South Africa, there are at least 6 000 Pentecostal churches, comprising some 10 million people. These include classical Pentecostal denominations, independent neo-Pentecostal churches and 'Spirit-type churches' that function within African Indigenous Churches (AICs). Although they are diverse, all of them are distinguished by their emphasis on a pneumatologically-centred liturgy, Spirit-anointed proclamation and ministry. Their theology is not primarily concerned with defining orthodoxy but rather with explaining an orthopraxy: their goal is not to inform but to empower believers to 'live Christianity'. Its purpose is to make the gospel message and Christian doctrines more meaningful to believers' daily life situations. What they have in common is an emphasis on the involvement of the Holy Spirit in their lives, as demonstrated in their practices of divine healing, exorcism, prophecy, speaking in tongues [*glossolalia*], revelation through visions and dreams, and so forth. Pentecostals have enough in common to enable one to speak of an African Pentecostal hermeneutic in generalised terms.

Pentecostal hermeneutic is informed by its spirituality. African spirituality lives in a rather unique manner in its distinctive music and songs, ways of praying for divine interventions, healing and deliverance, liturgy and liturgical dress, etc. Explicit theology plays a subservient role to praxis and spirituality with a pneumatological basis that focuses exclusively on Jesus Christ. For them, the God of Scriptures is realised through the Holy Spirit. Their gospel of healing and deliverance through the power of the Spirit of Jesus connects to indigenous people's psyche who experience the oppression of illness and evil spirits that Spirit-type churches promise to solve. For the same reason, historical mission Christianity was rejected because it did not emphasise Jesus in pneumatological terms that Pentecostals perceived in the New Testament. They perceived the missionaries' gospel as reflecting their 'liberal' lifestyles that neglected the continuationist expectation of the experiences of Spirit baptism and the gifts of the Spirit [*charismata*].

Pentecostals hold that the most significant condition in their religious range of perception is continued encounters with God through the Spirit of Christ. Pentecostals expect to meet God through the Spirit, both when they worship and when they read the Bible individually and collectively. They expect to meet and hear from God because they reject the cessationism that marks many mainline churches, which view the *charismata* of inspired speech

(prophecy, *glossolalia,* interpretation of tongues) as limited to the apostolic era.[23] They interpret the Bible and proclaim the gospel message in the light of their experience of the repetition of the day of Pentecost (Cox 1995:15). They presuppose that the Word of God that provides relevant guidance for their specific situation is revealed in the Bible. They meet God and hear from God in experiences that match encounters that the Bible describes, explaining their preference for biblical narratives (Keener 2017:274).

Their stated purpose in reading the Bible is to be equipped for ministry and witness in culturally appropriate ways (Archer 2004; Rance 2008:8). Bible interpretation is not for them an academic exercise or to gain information about the Bible. In the next section, 'Spirit, Bible and faith community', three essential elements of such a hermeneutic are unpacked, of the Holy Spirit animating Scriptures and empowering the believing community, before Africa's contribution to Pentecostal hermeneutic is discussed in the section, 'Defining an African Pentecostal hermeneutics'. The purpose is to analyse the distinctive way Pentecostals interpret the Bible.

Spirit, Bible and faith community

Pentecostals hold a high view of Scriptures that are marked by respect for the witness of the Scriptures. A benchmark for a genuinely Spirit-led reading is that it will be consistent with the apostolic witness because the restorationist motif serves to establish Pentecostal self-identity (Gee 1932:8; Yong 2017:12–13). At the same time, they interpret the Bible within the faith community that continues the pneumatological tradition through all ages (Gräbe 1997:19), a tradition characterised by its Spirit-governed, Spirit-supported and Spirit-propagated essence (Pinnock 1993:241). They view the participation of the Spirit in the reading process as a precondition for understanding the text, which they equate with hearing from God. In reading the text, Pentecostals use their situation and experiences with the Spirit to interpret the text and then return to apply it to their situation.

In terms of their emphasis on the experiential hermeneutical act, it becomes important to ask: How do they validate their experience with the text? Ricoeur (cited in Jeanrond 1986:27) suggests a methodical and critically-accountable way of the relationship between interpreter and text. In verbal communication the speaker's intention and meaning overlap. However, in written communication, the author's intention and their message do not necessarily coincide anymore. Defining the author's intention is complicated because the meaning of the text

23. This is also valid for 'sermons', which they expect to hear from God. For that reason, they prefer not to refer to 'sermons' because it reminds them of the main line churches' practice; they rather refer to 'messages' and view it democratically as the responsibility of all believers to be available to deliver a message from God if the Spirit indicates it. 'In this sense, pentecostal preaching describes itself as prophetic, where "prophecy" is defined as the revelation of words that (allegedly) come from God [...]' (Nel 2017:2).

for contemporary readers might differ from the original intention (Kaiser & Silva 1994:279). However, although it is not possible that the meaning of a biblical passage can always and with certainty be identified with the author's intention, it is accepted that the meaning of the author may not be viewed as secondary or even dispensable. The act of reading should always remain focused on finding the authorial meaning and intention. In order not to read one's personal ideas and interpretation into the text, one should rather undertake the effort to fully listen to the text's message based on its merit. True understanding should always also include the act of application (Gadamer 1979:270), which consists of the personal involvement of the reader or listener with the text (Bartholomew 2015:539). Pentecostals emphasise an embodied and involved reading of the Bible as essential to the practice of and within the concept of worship, affecting the practical outcome of the Word, which is transformation and empowerment to carry out the mandates of Scripture and to live a godly life (Gallegos 2014:48). The text's truth is momentarily suspended to apply the text to the present situation of the interpreter and listener (Gadamer 1979:274).

The last question to be asked is, what does it mean that the interpreter should rely upon the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Scriptures? Arrington (1994:105) argues that reliance on the Spirit involves several aspects: the submission of one's mind to God, resulting in the Spirit working in and through the critical and analytical abilities. Another aspect implies that one remains open to the Spirit's voice which may sound at any time. The way someone experiences faith and responds to the transforming call of God's Word is also vital. Pentecostals expect that the Holy Spirit will bridge the historical and cultural gulf between the text and the reader(s). The Spirit reveals God and God's will to believers primarily through the Bible, mediating the experience of the Word through the preached, sung, danced and testified biblical text and human speech (Gallegos 2014:47).

However, the experiential-pneumatic (or spiritual) and the exegetical elements must stay balanced to ensure that the Bible remains the objective standard to which all interpretation submits, as Thomas (1994:49) emphasises. Pentecostals indeed expect God to still speak today, and what God says may be more than what is written in the Bible. However, it remains critical that Pentecostals be reminded that God's ongoing and extra-biblical revelation will never be in contradistinction to what Scripture teaches. The continuity in God's revelation is guaranteed by the same Spirit inspiring the biblical authors and revealing God to contemporary believers (Archer 2013:148).

In conclusion, while Pentecostals interpret biblical texts in ways that may be controlled, they also realise that their interpretation always contains the risk of a response that surpasses commentary, in Ricoeur's (1975:31) terms. Their faith experiences form the necessary and unique precondition from which they orient themselves in all their choices. Faith experiences are

transforming and empowering encounters with the divine, as described in the book of Acts. And it results in a similar faith community that exists, like the New Testament church, to manifest the power and love of God that they experienced (Schnackenburg 1974:81–82) because of their experiences of the presence of the Spirit (Ellington 1996:154). The Spirit's presence manifests through the explication of Scriptures as well as the *charismata* of *glossolalia*, prophecy, miracles of healing and other signs. The continuationist stance implies that Pentecostals expect the power of the Spirit described in New Testament events to continue to be displayed in their world. Signs of the Spirit's activities include that listeners' lives are transformed and miracles of healing and deliverance are manifested. These signs authenticate the preaching of the Word and build the faith of listeners to expect the miracles they need, leading to faith in the Word (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005b:35).

The relation between Spirit, Scripture and faith community has been deliberated as the essential characteristic of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. In the next section, 'Africa's contribution', African Pentecostalism's contribution to a Pentecostal hermeneutic is discussed in terms of its integration of biblical and African tradition worlds, intercultural hermeneutics and exegesis, inculturation theology, interpretation from socio-political perspectives and its emphasis of an encounter with Christ through the Spirit that facilitates a culture of orality.

Africa's contribution

Christianity in Africa

Africa's introduction to Christianity goes back to the day of Pentecost when people from Africa attended Peter's first sermon ('Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene'; Ac 2:10). Philip's ministry, as described in Acts 8, proleptically fulfilled two of the three geographical regions of Jesus' mission entrusted to the apostles according to Acts 1:8, to Samaria and the ends of the earth. He advanced the gospel north to the Samaritans and south[24] to the Africans (Keener 2012:1464). Philip, in obeying an angelic command and the Spirit's voice, encountered a God-fearing African official who was not yet a full proselyte.[25] The man seated on the chariot was reading a primary messianic text for the Jesus movement, and he invited Philip to interpret the passage for him. The unnamed official became the first non-Jewish convert

24. The term 'south' in Acts 8:26 can also be translated as 'midday', fitting the context of a road 'from Jerusalem to Gaza' better. Perhaps Nubia refers to a black African kingdom between Aswan and Khartoum. Its leading cities were Meroë and Napata. Some scholars believe that the intention of the reference should rather be interpreted as that the man comes from 'far away', from an exotic destination (Keener 2012:1552).

25. The man did not qualify to become a full proselyte if the man was a eunuch. The term 'eunuch' can refer to a castrated male but also to a high official. Keener (2012:1567) is of the opinion that the arguments in favour of the man's being a castrated male and hence merely a God-fearer are stronger than those favouring his being a full proselyte.

from Africa, and a forerunner of the gentile mission in general and the African mission in particular (Keener 2012:1545).

At the beginning of the 2nd century, there had been Christians across the northern coast of the African continent in countries that were part of the Roman Empire. The North African cities of Carthage, Hippo and Alexandria became known as centres of biblical interpretation during the 2nd and 3rd centuries (Kinyua 2011:12). In time, Christianity spread southward, reaching countries that were not part of the extensive Roman Empire. By the 4th century, Christianity was proclaimed the official state religion in Axum (Ethiopia). The gospel reached nearby Nubia (Sudan) in the 6th century. Since the mid-600s, however, Islam effectively evangelised Africa, and by the end of the millennium, Christianity was practically eliminated from North Africa, except for the Coptic church in Egypt and the Ethiopian church. By the 15th century, Africa was divided between Islam in the north and African traditional religions (ATRs) flourishing in the south, with Christian churches only found in some localised places. At the end of the 15th century, Portuguese missionaries started their attempts in central Africa to reach the local population. Until the beginning of the 19th century it was mostly Catholic missionaries who worked in Africa before Protestants joined their ranks, coinciding with the end of the African slave trade (Jacobsen 2015:44).

The industrial age saw the nations of Europe unilaterally subjecting and colonising Africa to exploit its resources and inhabitants for their gain. Between 1885 and 1915, Belgium, France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Portugal and Spain effectively divided Africa between them and only Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and Liberia were spared the same fate (Jacobsen 2015:48). Roughly 5% of Africa's population were Christians at the start of the colonial era. When colonialism ended in the 1960s, almost a third of Africa's population was Christian, of which 45 million were Catholics, 35 million Protestants, 20 million members of the AICs, and 20 million members of the old Orthodox churches of Egypt and Ethiopia (Jacobsen 2015:51).[26]

While some missionaries promoted the interests of colonising powers, others were highly critical of the behaviour of white people. LeMarquand (2007:8) states that his research found that most African Christians were grateful for the work of missionaries, although they were also critical of the cultural blindness and racial prejudice they displayed. Their experience was summed up by Mofokeng (1988:34), 'When the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, "Let us pray." After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible'.

26. Kinyua (2011:2) remarks on the way African identities were formed (and deformed) by various colonial systems to create and separate the Africans as 'other', in contradistinction to the 'civilised whites'.

The Bible played a significant role as an ideological instrument in the colonisation process that was marked by oppression and exploitation of Africans. From the start, the Bible was translated into various indigenous languages, giving the Bible for literate Africans some degree of independence from European missionaries' worldview. Africans now heard the Bible on its terms. This contributed to the establishment and growth of AICs that merged African culture and tradition with their interpretation of the Bible (Ngong 2014:78). A prominent part of AICs was the Spirit churches, characterised by their Pentecostal practice and theology.

Africans are 'notoriously religious': about 45% of Africans are Christians, of whom 31% are Pentecostals, leading Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:32) to call Africa a 'hotbed of Pentecostal/charismatic activity'. Barrett (2001:409) found that 84% of Africans participating in his research stated that religion is very important in their lives, contrasted to 21% of Europeans, 57% of North Americans and 66% of Latin Americans responding in the same manner. About 80% of African Christians attend worship at least once a week (40% of North American Christians do so), and more than half of African Christians say they have been born again. Most believe the Bible should be interpreted pre-critically (West 1999:38) or even non-critically, word for word (Jacobsen 2015:60), with a literal understanding of the literal words (Gallegos 2014:50).

Inculturation theology

The historical-critical approach to biblical exegesis, popular in the West during the 19th and 20th centuries, did not exert much influence on African Pentecostal scholarship. John Mbiti's works (1969, 1980), however, were very influential as he integrated the biblical and traditional African worlds in a distinctly African theology (Mbiti 1980:122). Mbiti argues (in line with other African theologians) that African theology should stay within the orbits of an African worldview to traditionalise Christianity within African culture in an inculturation process of intercultural exegesis or intercultural hermeneutics (Ukpong 2002:17–32). It led to 'inculturation theology' (Loba-Mkole 2007:7), developed by African theologians such as Zablon N'thamburi and Douglas Waruta. It subjected biblical texts to a socio-cultural analysis in terms of African socio-cultural perspectives. At the same time, it acknowledges the Bible as sacred and normative, holding to a high view of Scripture (Loba-Mkole 2007:11).

African Pentecostal hermeneutics connected to this trend, attempted to express faith in African terms within a theological framework (Ukpong 1984:501), with the distinctive Pentecostal emphasis on pneumatology. The biblical text is approached from a perspective that includes one's own Pentecostal experience but also one's exposure to African religions, culture and metaphors, forming the hermeneutical keys to engage the texts (Kinyua 2011:1). Ukpong (1984:524) states that it consciously and explicitly seeks to

interpret texts also from the socio-political perspective. The Bible is read considering the needs, hopes, cultural values, religious aspirations, political, social and economic realities of its readers or listeners (Ukpong 1984:524). These issues include *missio Dei*, colonialism and its oppression, suffering and poverty, ATR and culture (LeMarquand 2007:14).

A problem is that the inculturation process may sacrifice the historicity of biblical texts in the attempt to transfer contemporary meaning to the passage for its African readers. It does not value the meaning(s) of the biblical text *per se* (Anderson 1996:175). Its meaning is rather found in its personalisation and application to the specific location of the reader by the Spirit, which represents a phenomenological approach to Bible reading. The Bible is viewed as God's Word, but the activity of the Spirit is seen as conditional for turning it into God's Word to me at a specific time. In effect, this implies a selective reading that may neglect the Bible's metanarrative by utilising a 'canon within the canon'. In the process, some texts may become 'the most inspired part' of the Bible (Davies 2013:258).

At the same time, African Pentecostals, following in the footsteps of other AICs, reject, defy and interrupt the patronising and hegemonic Western biblical hermeneutics that have in colonialist fashion silenced the African voice for years. The warning of Mosala (1989:16–20) is timely that African hermeneutics should take care not to fall into ideological captivity to another hermeneutical principle of a theology of oppression. Another danger is that the 'inculturation' theology is overrepresented by a male-dominated and patriarchal group although women have always played a large role in African Pentecostal practice. Current African Pentecostal biblical interpretation practices may be defined as patronising to women by ignoring their voices (Kanyoro 2002:13; Mburu 2019:8). It should deliberately attempt to represent all voices, including women, children, the working class and the poor peasant culture, to be a valid voice in African theology. It may not concede to the temptation to read the Bible 'for' the poor and marginalised; their voice is needed to discover the liberating potential of biblical texts (LeMarquand 2007:13).

While Western theology is largely concerned with rational, systematic analyses of the 'contents of faith' to formulate propositional statements that are valid for all people and all times, African Pentecostals concentrate on what is most important to them, their encounter with Christ through the Spirit. Therefore, Asamoah-Gyadu (2005a:7) remarks that African Pentecostalism in the traditional oral African tradition emphasises beliefs and practices at the cost of developing a Pentecostal theology as a rational systematic reflection of what faith entails. Belief is based on one's experiences of and with the Spirit, constituting the dimension of spirituality (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005a:8).

African hermeneutics since the 1990s is on a new trajectory with the realisation that liberation and inculturation did not solve Africa's problems.

Now it attempts to refine a theology of reconstruction and renaissance that addresses in concrete ways Africa's scourge of poverty, corruption and political oppression. In the process, it also realised the importance that the community of ordinary readers (Green 2017:201; Kinyua 2011:330) should be included in the process of biblical interpretation if transformation is to be affected (Ngong 2010:149). 'Ordinary readers' are literate poor and marginalised readers (representing the profile of the average African Bible reader) and illiterate listeners who discuss the meaning of texts orally in terms of their existential needs and challenges (Kinyua 2011:1; see West & Zondi-Mabizela 2004 for application).

African worldview

Cox (1995:256) suggests that African Pentecostalism serves as an expression of primal spirituality and a measure of primal exegesis. For African Pentecostals, of more interest than any meaning, the biblical text might have had for others is the significance of a passage for its present-day readers. African Pentecostal spirituality emphasises features that most Western believers ignore, like the direct influence of Satan, demons and evil; libations, sacrificial objects and incantations; anointing oils, prophetic prayers and seed sowing of money or material things; a view that circumstances of life on earth are determined in the spiritual realm by unseen powers; miracles and divine interventions in response to prayer (Clarke 2014:59; Omenyo 2014:145–146) and maintaining a tension between the cognitive and affective (Grey 2011:14).

In African traditional life (and ATR), all important events, such as birth and death, drought and other challenges, were traditionally viewed as the work of good or evil spirits. To ensure safety and prosperity, it was necessary to appease the forefathers and other spirits. Evil was personified by witchcraft and *muti*, *sangoma's* herbal medicines (Frahm-Arp 2016:271; see also Quayesi-Amakye 2013:51–85). This way of thinking was appropriated by Pentecostals so that to change one's destiny, it was necessary to consult the prophets (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:301). Most Pentecostals reject ancestor veneration in all forms and view it as demonic, on the same level as witchcraft, hobgoblins and Satan. Christians are also encouraged to break ties with their extended families who practise ancestor veneration (Frahm-Arp 2016:271–272).

One way that African Pentecostals battle with evil spirits is in the way they view and treat the Bible. Most African Pentecostals use the Bible in ritualistic ways, as a book of supernatural power. It is holy because it is the vehicle through which the gospel of Christ is communicated. The words of Scripture are experienced in somewhat magical terms, as protection against evil forces and productive of success. In the encounter with demons, the Bible is used as an object of power (Collins 2011:84). Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:169) tells how a Pentecostal buried a copy of the Bible in the foundations of her new home, as

the Christian equivalent of traditional charms, amulets and medicines. Ngong (2010:121) asserts that the dynamism and growth of Pentecostalism can in part be ascribed to the way Pentecostals view the Bible and salvation that is considered as to include protection from spiritual powers that threaten people.

Pentecostal experience of the Spirit is grounded in the concept of the Bible as revelatory (Neumann 2012:198). Ngong (2010:122) correctly criticises African Pentecostals who buy uncritically into the dominant African worldview. He argues that to be theologically sound, it is imperative to remember that the Spirit not only operates in miraculous ways but also in the ordinary and rational business of life. He argues that Africa today needs a revitalisation of the Spirit of prophecy, qualified as the church's criticism of contemporary political, economic and social trends, and based on the Bible. Most African Pentecostals probably disagree with his viewpoint; they prefer to concentrate on the experience of the Spirit's guidance and illumination, also in interpreting the Bible. They study the Bible with the express purpose to meet the One who is the truth and hear what God's will is for their situation.

Oral modality

African Pentecostalism also emphasises an oral modality in interpreting the Bible. Orality, appealing to the senses of touch, sight and hearing, uses the existential situation as a key to unlock the meaning of the Bible for its listeners' situation (Gallegos 2014:46). The text is sounded, chanted, sung, danced, recited, retold, memorised and repeated in different contexts, claimed, ritualised, pronounced and declared for various ends.

Oral cultures depend on mnemonic devices to enable recitation and memory. The material Bible is ineffectual as the Word of God for them. The Spirit of God uses human voices as the proper channel through which God becomes present, with people singing or repeating biblical words while their prophets and pastors explicate its meaning. Many African Pentecostals believe that the Spirit endows the spoken words of God with a life-giving power that can heal the sick and deliver the oppressed. The implication is that the Bible becomes the life-giving words of God when spoken by a Spirit-filled person who believes the promises and injunctions contained in the words of the Bible. The words invite participation, performance, experience and interaction. The inspired Word of God inspires 'ongoing enactment of Scripture among believers in various reception contexts in every age' (Yong 2017:52).

African Pentecostal hermeneutics is a form of reader-response hermeneutics, emphasising the world in front of the text of listeners, rather than the world of (or behind) the text (Yong 2017:53). The Word of God is declared to realise and actualise its promises, with prosperity, healing, deliverance and judgement on perceived enemies at the stake. African culture's oral nature has a performative or declarative use (Gallegos 2014:50).

The truth of biblical accounts is not discounted in terms of the accurate recounting of what happened long ago but in believers' experience of the actualisation of God's power in life transformation. For a sermon to be perceived as Spirit-driven and effective, it must facilitate such transformation.

Defining an African Pentecostal hermeneutics

Amos Yong's (2017:57) description of Pentecostal hermeneutics in terms of three interrelated facets is valid for an African Pentecostal hermeneutics as well. Its acceptance of orthopathy implies that it rejects the sole rule of the intellect, by leaving room for the affections as an important part of the experience (Vondey 2013:120), and then leading to orthopraxy, right action and behaviour and orthodoxy, right beliefs and confessions. Although all three facets are important, their order indicates what Pentecostals value as most important, that is, an encounter with God and its accompanying emotional response, that determines actions and results in beliefs. Africa's orality embodies spirituality in the experiential rather than the cognitive, tying in with the reactualisation of biblical events in contemporary situations and with biblical textuality that is also based on orality. African Pentecostal hermeneutics does not concern itself only with how the Bible is interpreted but also with how it is received and used concerning the mission of God. It does not imply that traditional exegetical approaches cannot be utilised. However, it emphasises that the significance of the Bible is only accomplished when orthopathic and orthopraxic perspectives on the Bible result in encounters with the Spirit that transform listeners' lives, changing them into apostolic witnesses.

African Pentecostal hermeneutic reads the Bible textually (Gallegos 2014:40) and literally as far as possible, but at the same time views the Bible as a book with special value for believers.[27] The words are actualised by the Spirit as if it were specifically written for them (Kinyua 2011:293). They do not always leave enough room for consideration of the historical distance between the text and themselves. They read it at face value, focusing primarily on their context. Existential concerns determine what they read in the Bible and it is theologically coloured by their Christological pre-understanding and pneumatological emphasis. What they believe and experience produce stable and limited dimensions of meaning. The essence of the movement is its emphasis upon encounters with the supernatural, expecting God to intervene in their lives in miraculous ways as in biblical times.

Most African Pentecostals are ordinary and not scholarly readers of the Bible. They do not interpret it with the purpose to understand the text for its

27. See Omenyo and Arthur's (2013:53–54) fieldwork that illustrate the level of literalism found among Pentecostal readers of the Bible.

own sake; their reading is need driven and faith oriented (LeMarquand 2007:23). Their understanding of the Bible is limited to its ability to speak to their personal needs and to illumine their current situation. They expect to meet a transcendent reality and integrate the biblical message into their daily lives and appropriate it in terms of personal situations (Gallegos 2014:44). In many instances, they read it as a faith community, consistent with Africa's communal way of living. They share their interpretation of texts in Bible study groups and prayer meetings (Omenyo & Arthur 2013:61). Moreover, they view the Spirit's involvement in their reading of the Bible as conditional for the Bible to become the Word of God for their situation, implying that they expect Jesus Christ to be revealed to them by his Spirit in and through texts. They despise and look down on Bible reading practices that lead to 'book knowledge', believing that only the Spirit can reveal the 'real' meaning of biblical passages. They emphasise a relational knowledge of God, impelled by the fellowship with the Holy Spirit, who is known through direct and supernatural encounters (Grey 2011:15).

The next step is to revisit a Pentecostal stance towards LGBTIQ+ people from such a distinctive hermeneutical angle.

African Pentecostal hermeneutics applied to the LGBTIQ+ issue

In the section, 'Pentecostals and LGBTIQ+ people', this hermeneutic is used to think imaginatively about the challenges that LGBTIQ+ people pose to African Pentecostals, most of whom react in homophobic ways to the 'others' who are defined in terms of their same-sex orientation.[28]

Homosexuality is such a complex phenomenon that speaking sensibly about the subject and doing justice requires the combined efforts of several disciplines. The LGBTIQ+ issue is a diverse phenomenon concerned with at least lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex and queer people, and in each case, the group of people concerned should be described on their terms. It is problematic to reduce 'the expansive category of sexual minorities to the representation of one group of members on the list', in the words of Judith Butler (1994:5). For instance, LGBTIQ+ people, asexual people, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings include a variety and diversity of sexual identities (Butler 1994:5). Each of the phenomena of non-heterosexual people sets ethical questions that cannot be answered in a general sense for all 'homosexual' people because their issues and experiences are unique. For that reason, in a theological evaluation of the LGBTIQ+ issue, the discussion

28. It seems untenable to identify people solely in terms of their sexual orientation because each individual is so much more than their sexual identity that in any case may not be fixed at all.

must be limited to a consideration of biblical literature while keeping in mind the complexity of an issue that is related to a diversity of persons with diverse experiences. In thinking about the issue, it is important that Pentecostals should address each separate group on its terms and try to understand the unique features that characterise each differentiation of sexual orientation, as outlined by other human sciences. When they speak about the LGBTIQ+ issue, Pentecostals must be informed about its complexities and diversities.

Sexuality has traditionally been a very suitable means, whether by way of societal norms, the state or the church, to gain social control over people via the medium of the body (Pronk 1989:91). Social control is demonstrated by, *inter alia,* pedagogisation of the child's sexuality, hysterisation of the woman's body, socialisation of procreation through contraception and the psychiatrisation of 'perverse' pleasure, leading to the establishment of a range of new personality types such as 'sadistic husband', 'frigid wife', 'precocious child', 'perverse homosexual' and 'perverse person' who are grouped as victims of a derailed affinity and abnormal sexuality (Foucault 1978:110).

Traditionally most major Western religions judged all LGBTIQ+ behaviour as unnatural, sinful and reprehensible (Pronk 1989:12–14), with the exceptions of Zoroastrianism that actively designated, disputed and opposed homophobia (Norton 1977:39) and reform Judaism in contemporary times that actively promotes love between members of the same sex as important, beneficial and sacred (Dennis 2002:45). Traditional Christian morality accepted that homosexual behaviour is 'unnatural' because it is a perversion of what God created as the norm, which is the monogamous, heterosexual marriage. The traditional conservative church was set up for confrontation with LGBTIQ+ people and their behaviour (Hibbert 1977:92). This represents also the stance of most Pentecostals, as represented by the voice of retired Chief Justice of South Africa, Mogoeng Mogoeng (2011–2021), who believes that homosexuality should not be practised, or is a deviant behaviour, based on the biblical injunction that a man should only marry a woman. As pastor of the Winners' Chapel International in Johannesburg, a neo-Pentecostal group with Nigerian ties, he assists in driving out and curing 'deviations' such as 'homosexuality'.[29]

However, a part of the Christian church historically also showed some tolerance, and even acceptance, of some forms of homosexual behaviour (Boswell 1994), based on the observation that the Bible was displaying an ambivalent attitude towards homosexuality.

It is accepted that LGBTIQ+ behaviour cannot be denoted as morally wrong by virtue of it being a sexual act between two persons of the same sex in terms of psychological, biological, anthropological, sociological and cultural arguments. The question that should be asked is, then: is LGBTIQ+ sexual behaviour wrong

29. See https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/mogoeng-counsels-gays-to-find-cure-20110827.

in terms of theological arguments? And does a theological answer supersede psychological, biological, anthropological, sociological and cultural arguments because of its appeal to Scripture? It is, however, even more complicated because from the theological side a uniform answer cannot be and has never been provided, given the ambivalence of biblical evidence as demonstrated by the different opinions of theologians and churches.

In general, it is probably true that LGBTIQ+ people seldom attend worship services at African Pentecostal churches because they know that they would not be welcome and their presence and participation would be frowned upon (Gushee 2017:131). African Pentecostals in many cases act homophobically in terms of the challenge of LGBTIQ+ people, a sentiment they share with most conservative Christians. Unfair discrimination consists of the unequal treatment of people based on attributes and characteristics attached to them, that denies their inherent dignity and humanity by not treating them as having inherent worth (Van Aardt & Robinson 2008:192). In 38 African countries, including Algeria, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sudan and South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe, same-sex intimacy is still deemed a criminal offence. Only South Africa affirmatively permits same-sex marriages although conservative churches actively oppose the government policy of tolerance towards same-sex oriented people. While lesbians and gays have entered the cultural mainstream in Western countries, this is not the case in Africa. Most African Pentecostal groups denounce homosexuality as a sexual sin that is to be judged more severely than any other sin, based on 1 Corinthians 6:18–19 that states that other sins are committed outside the body but sexual sin occurs within the body that serves for the believer as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

It is submitted that only if Pentecostals deliberately expose themselves to LGBTIQ+ people to have pivotal personal experiences with them, it will make a difference in their attitude towards them. Young people are more exposed to the 'alternative' LGBTIQ+ sphere where many people practise their different sexual orientations openly and Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals can effectively accommodate the experiences of young people in their congregations to expose other members to LGBTIQ+ people in meaningful ways. Andrew Marin (2016:106–107) finds in his research that religious activities that produced the most meaningful connection for LGBTIQ+ people and that directly contributed to their desire to stay true to the faith community and the Christian faith were discussion groups and non-Bible study groups (33%), volunteering for the church's charitable outreaches (21%), volunteering in the church (18%, with two-thirds mentioning their participation in the church choir) and participation in the Sunday worship service (11%). Such experiences are also required to be integrated into their investigation into biblical data concerning the experiences of people with different sexual orientations

because Pentecostal hermeneutic moves in biblical interpretation from the revelation of the Spirit in everyday life to the biblical text and then back to life.

Theological starting point

There are in broad terms three reasons why most African Pentecostals reject the possibility that LGBTIQ+ persons may become fellow believers without allowing for any exceptions. In the first place, neo-Pentecostal churches characterised by prosperity theology argue that legalising homosexuality would put the prosperity of a whole nation in jeopardy because it opposes God's will for human sexuality. They accept that the Bible qualifies heterosexual relations as the sole mode of socially-approved sexual practices and desires (Lyonga 2016:34). 'Biblical' heteronormativity views male homosexuality as a sign of contempt for the female gender and lesbianism as wanton disrespect for the patriarchal African man (Lyonga 2016:34). Secondly, these churches use a societal stereotype that accepts that homosexually active persons are involved in occultism or spirit sacrifices, implying that they are victims of demonic bondage in desperate need of deliverance or exorcism. Thirdly, Pentecostals' eschatology frames 'devilish homosexuality' as a sign of the devil's expanding power in the end times and an indication that the second coming is imminent. Where governments decriminalise homosexuality to accommodate human rights, the churches see it as the devil's strategy to promote evil. Most African Pentecostal believers participate in the demonisation of homosexuality (Lyonga 2016:41–42).

In thinking about the LGBTIQ+ issue, theologians can begin at three possible starting points (Macourt 1977:32–34). A first starting point states that all people are made heterosexual, implying that any non-heterosexual desire or behaviour is sick or immature and betrays unnatural and non-conventional behaviour. Such compulsory heteronormativity characterises patriarchal–homophobic communities that exclude any choice of sexual orientation, necessitating the church to ask: how can the 'sin' and 'illness' of homosexuality be addressed and cured? It is based on the assumption that homosexuality is an utterly voluntary and uncoerced choice made in direct violation of the law of God and hence it is a sin and sign of demonic oppression/possession. Most African Pentecostals share this viewpoint of heterosexuality as the 'norm' (Söderblom 1997:158) while their influence on political procedures has been growing exponentially, in step with the movement's growth in Africa. One such example is Zambia where Pentecostalism was being nationalised as a public and political force with Pentecostal Frederick J.T. Chiluba's election as president. Chiluba's election reflected a distinctly Pentecostal political theology, or 'Pentecostal nationalism', in the parlance of Amos Yong (2012:9). Pentecostals' spiritual discourse contributed to the onset of multiparty democracy and a neoliberal economy in Zambia as well as other parts of Africa.

However, Pentecostal discourse also determined sexual politics (Van Klinken 2014:264). Pentecostals supported the acceptance of homosexuality in Zambia as incompatible with Christianity. Christianity (and Pentecostalism) is depicted as a monolithic faith, which is then used normatively to identify the character of a 'Christian nation' (Lyonga 2016:34). The politics of heteronationalism developed into a more explicit politics of anti-homonationalism when the nation as a whole was subjected to the discourse of 'being born again' and all citizens were co-opted to combat the influence of Satan. Homosexuality was demonised as the 'other' in the establishment of a collective identity in the political project of 'Christian nation' building (Van Klinken 2014:274).

Another example can be found in Uganda. Sexuality had remained a taboo topic and nobody referred in the Ugandan public to sexuality until HIV and AIDS and the dangers it posed placed the topic high on the agenda of public discussions. Ugandan newspapers preferred the voice of Pentecostals and charismatics who represented the hegemonic heteronormative discourse. Hence, the Ugandan print media conformed to this discourse, and LGBTIQ+ rights were further ignored and even trampled (Bompani & Brown 2015:113).

Yong (2012:134) justly criticises that Pentecostal spirituality was so easily hijacked by uncritical national aspirations in the service of dangerous political agendas, as happened in Zambia, Uganda and (to a lesser extent) other sub-Saharan countries in Africa. Pentecostal nationalism, defined as an intense and successful pentecostalisation of African public spheres (Alava 2016:34), is a *contradictio in terminis* because it is incompatible with the essence of Pentecostal faith, found in the inclusivity of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh. Spirit baptism transgresses boundaries of language, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality, creating new contra cultural communities that negate traditional borders between people and conform with the inclusivity of Jesus and the early church, as discussed later on.

A second theological starting point accepts that most people are made heterosexual while a smaller group is made homosexual. It confronts the church with the issue of sexual minorities and their right to variant behaviour. A related argument is that some Christians are predisposed towards alcoholism and their faith in God implies that they will fight against their predisposition to remain sober. It may be probable that a certain gene may be related to an alcoholic predisposition (Reilly 2014:130). In the same way, some people may be predisposed towards homosexuality; faith in God requires them to withstand the predisposition by committing themselves to a celibate life. Some argue that all people who might be same-sex oriented should fight the predisposition while others think that it applies only to 'perverts', while the others should be left to realise their 'natural' condition. The presupposition in both cases is that some people are 'true' homosexuals, defined as those who are incapable of heterosexual intercourse without severe, unwarranted

damage to their psyches (Gudorf 2000:130). It assumes that same-sex orientation is an aberration that a small group of people cannot alter their same-sex orientation by their free will, and they must 'prove' to themselves and others that they have failed in all attempts at opposite-sex relationships before their existence is acknowledged.

A last theological starting point views all human sexual behaviour on a continuum and an individual's position on the continuum is determined by both biological factors and the way these factors are interpreted socially and psychologically ('nature' and 'nurture'). One may even deliberately change one's position on the continuum.

It is suggested here that African Pentecostals who accepted the first starting point should revisit their stance towards LGBTIQ+ people, based on a hermeneutical reconsideration. Pentecostalism is traditionally a conservative movement based on what it perceives the Bible teaches and it deliberately attempts to restore the New Testament church. As is typical of conservative movements, it is slow to accept any changes and then only in a piecemeal fashion. However, Pentecostals proved their ability to change in terms of allowing women to minister, clothing, including the compulsory headgear that women used for many years when attending worship services, liturgy and musical tastes. In the process of change, they accommodated diverse cultures successfully. While, for example, in Presbyterian systems members vote for change, requiring a longer time for changes to occur, among Pentecostals the process of change is simpler and more direct. It is argued that it has become critically necessary that Pentecostals navigate the indissoluble tension between the Scylla of the conservative position (the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin) and the Charybdis of liberalism (homosexuality should be accommodated within God's grace) to follow the drumbeat of the Spirit.

Neale Secor (1969:78–81) suggests three useful tentative working hypotheses helpful in such a revisitation, as a means to define an ethical stance. Firstly, it should accept the assumption that human sexual identifications and behavioural patterns are neutral and normal. The implication is that the church should avoid making ethical judgements regarding sexual behaviour based on the object of sexual drive alone. In the second place, no matter whether the particular sexual behaviour is heterosexual, homosexual or monosexual, for a believer, it should be measured against the Christian standards for all human relational behaviour. Loyalty and love in faithful relationships are more important to them than a mere concentration on the object of sexuality. Christian ethical judgements should rather appreciate the quality of relationships rather than concentrate on sexual behaviour alone. Finally, Christian ethical concern for LGBTIQ+ people should be based on the unqualified acceptance of the dignity of all persons involved without judging them on their sexual proclivity and stereotyping them as, *inter alia,* immoral,

profligate and degenerate people who abuse children sexually, etc. (Edwards 1984:19, 21).

In this section, three theological starting points in terms of same-sex orientation were discussed, and it was argued that conservative Pentecostalism needs to reconsider its ethical stance. In the section 'Homosexuality, Jesus and the early church', biblical data will be compared to formulate a responsible hermeneutic response to the LGBTIQ+ issue in the section, 'Pentecostals and LGBTIQ+ people'.

Homosexuality, Jesus and the early church

Pentecostal hermeneutic results in the formulation of theological and ethical perspectives and statements based on the faith community's Pentecostal experience of and with Christ. Pentecostalism as an alternative way to read biblical texts that are concerned with LGBTIQ+ people shifts the direction of reading from the church's experience with the Spirit to the biblical text (and not *vice versa*, as in fundamentalist circles). Their experience is based on and subordinate to the Bible. Their restorationist urge requires their emphasis, especially on the early Christian church's experience. For them, it is important what can be learned from the ministry and life of Jesus, and the early church. Concerning what the church should learn from Christ, the remark of Desmond Tutu (1997) is relevant:

> One would have expected that the church of Jesus Christ would reflect those attractive characteristics of its Lord and Master. Alas, this has not always been the case, for the church of Jesus Christ has caused him to weep yet again, as it has been riddled with racism, sexism, and heterosexism. (p. xi)

While on the one hand, the gospels attribute compassion as the central virtue that Jesus exercised, on the other hand, Jesus by including sinners in his fellowship and association did not overlook or condone their sin. Christian compassion may never prevent the recognition of, and opposition to sin. True compassion for sinners requires that they are encouraged to repent (Gudorf 2000:137). If homosexual acts are sinful, then believers with a homosexual orientation must dedicate themselves to lifelong celibacy as a condition of church membership, as African Pentecostals have been teaching. Christian morality may never be defined by majoritarian votes. The important question is: is homosexual behaviour sinful? A related question is, how can sinful acts be identified? Pentecostals compare God's revelation in Scripture, observe the consequences of the acts that need to be evaluated, and look for God's revelation through God's Spirit in the conscience of the individual believer (Jr 31:31–34) to decide about the sinfulness of acts.

When the Bible is consulted to think about an ethical issue, it is important to distinguish between central and peripheral truth. Pentecostals accept that God's revelation in the incarnation of Christ forms the centre (or scopus) of

the Bible; the rest of the Bible should be understood in terms thereof. The implication is that some issues in the Bible are time bound and near the periphery and cannot be treated in the same way as central truths.

What themes do the ministry and teaching of Jesus reveal? These two questions are now discussed in hermeneutical terms without falling into exegetical detail.[30] The discussion about Jesus is limited to two issues for the sake of space, his distinction between clean and unclean, and his inclusiveness *contra* the exclusiveness that marked Judaism in his day.

Clean and unclean

The way Jesus challenged distinctions between clean and unclean, it is proposed, can serve as a template for challenging the dualistic thinking that undergirds contemporary inequality and oppression (Robinson 2014:651). The Jewish religious world was devoted to creating a place and a people on earth among whom God could dwell, a holy people reflecting its holy God. Holiness was defined in terms of purity and limited access to the temple (Germond 1997:204). As discussed, Jesus provocatively challenged ritual laws of purity; he touched the untouchables (lepers, prostitutes, menstruating women, ill people who make one unclean and unqualified to enter YHWH's presence) and ate with sinners and tax collectors. He offered forgiveness of sins independently of temple sacrifices. With his death, the curtain that separated the most sacred place on earth from all that was impure and defiling was torn from top to bottom (Mk 15:38). In touching and healing the ritually unclean, even on the Sabbath day, Jesus disregarded the strict purity system upheld by the church of his day. A prostitute and unclean woman touched him and he touched several lepers. This rendered him unclean in terms of the regulations that determined the cult of his day. Jesus' deliberate boundary-breaking practices set him up for a direct conflict with the power structures of religious authorities.

While Pentecostals argue that they are not bound by the Mosaic Law because the law has been replaced by grace, Jesus' stance towards the regulations contained in the *Torah*, however, is not so clear. He visited the Jerusalem temple and supported its service but clearly violated the regulations established in Judaism concerning the Sabbath and purity. It is suggested that his ministry served as a transitional stage in salvation history, while he was preparing his disciples for a new era when the law of God would be written on their hearts.

Exclusion and inclusion

A dominant image of Jesus in the gospels closely linked to his touching of the unclean is his deliberate and sustained challenge of exclusion in the religious

30. For exegesis of the passages, see Nel (2020:53–128).

categories of his day. Jesus' inclusiveness is illustrated by aspects of his ministry. A few examples will need to suffice. In Matthew 8:11–12, he states that many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom, evidently Judaism and its exponents, will be thrown into the outer darkness (see Mt 20:32). According to Mark 2:15–17 (Mt 9:11–13; Lk 5:29–32), Jesus explains why he chooses the company of tax collectors and sinners: they know how sick they are and how great their need for a physician, while representatives of the official religion argue that they do not require a doctor. When the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain of Jesus' company that consisted of sinful people, Jesus tells the parable in Luke 15 of a man with a hundred sheep. When one of the sheep gets lost, the man leaves the 99 others in the wilderness to search for it. When he finds it, he calls his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him. In the same way, Jesus declares, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over 99 others who are righteous and have not strayed away (Lk 15:2–7). In verse 36, the narrator continues with the analogy by referring to the crowds of people who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. When Jesus sees them, he has compassion for them (see also Lk 14:14).

The question it poses is, if Jesus' ministry was defined by inclusiveness, should not Pentecostals also be inclusive in their love of fellow-sinners? (Wire 1990). If Pentecostals' treatment of LGBTIQ+ people are informed by aspects of Jesus' teaching and ministry, their perception that the practices of 'homosexuality' represent a sin, that serves as the motivation for their homophobia, is challenged by Jesus' teaching not to judge others so that believers may not be judged. Because they will be judged with the judgement they use, they should take care that their own lives are in order before they look for the speck in others' eyes (Mt 7:1–5). Jesus' theology of inclusion was perpetuated in the decision of the Jerusalem synod (Ac 15) to nullify the binary opposition of clean and unclean, expanded in Galatians 3:23–29, defining the inclusive character of the church of Christ.

The ministry and teaching of the early church as an example

Most of the references in the New Testament concerning the LGBTIQ+ issue are found in writings ascribed to Paul (Rm 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9–11; 1 Tm 1:3–11; see Jud 6–7). The small number of condemnations of 'homosexual practices' suggests that the New Testament considers the issue as marginal. Nowhere is any answer provided to questions the modern church asks about homosexuals, such as whether they should be admitted to membership, permitted to assume church offices, help with youth or children's work, act as members of the team of musicians or be ordained to ministry (Edwards 1984:73). It seems that Paul

countered 'homosexual practice' rather as a gentile vice linked to pagan idolatry, a deliberate choice rooted in a gross sexual appetite.[31] However, this does not apply to contemporary homosexual behaviour that is not linked to idolatry and that does not necessarily involve sexual aberrations or exploitation of another person. It should be remembered that Paul also found women serving in ministry as non-acceptable and long hair for men as unnatural and degrading to men while regulating that women should wear long hair (1 Cor 11:14–15), placing these issues in the same category as 'homosexual behaviour'.

In discussing injunctions ascribed to Paul, what should be asked in terms of hermeneutical considerations is: are these texts culturally and temporary determined ethical pronouncements that are valid only for the original readers of (or listeners to) the texts (temporary) or are they permanent, everlasting and perpetual (temporal) principles valid for believers of all ages, including our day? It is difficult to answer the question because of the lack of decisive external evidence that supports any of the two suggestions. However, Pentecostal hermeneutics leaves room for engaging the third avenue to address this issue. In the traditional Protestant hermeneutical practice of moving from the Bible to experience, it becomes difficult to justify the notion of accepting LGBTIQ+ people for theological reasons. When Pentecostals move from their experience with God's Spirit to the Bible, their experience of the Spirit revealing the love of God for all people (Jn 3:16), the God who is love (1 Jn 4:7–8), leads to their realisation of the importance of a 'hermeneutical ecology' (as Rollefson 2002:440 designates it). Here the presence of and fellowship with fellow Christians who happen to be gay and lesbian support the charismatic community's acuity of listening for God's liberating word that challenges all forms of powers and potential enslavement to these powers. It shapes Pentecostals' theological anthropology in a 'Spirit-ed' (or en-'Spirit'-ed) conversation with God's living Word. Then the homophobic elements are exchanged in the realisation that it is not the task of the church to convict or judge sinners but of the Spirit (Jn 16:8–12) *if* the practice of same-sex orientation is a sin.

Pentecostals and LGBTIQ+ people

In thinking about homosexuality and the Bible, it is suggested that a Pentecostal hermeneutic begins with the experience believers have of Christ through the Spirit. The Spirit as the author of individual religious encounters and experiences with God serves as an initiator of the revelation of God when believers consult the biblical text. According to Grey (2011:154), the biblical text is the symbol that connects the experience of the reader and makes that experience intelligible. It happens when the specific historical event or

31. The direct link between Paul's description of men committing shameless acts with men and contemporary LGBTIQ+ practices cannot be maintained as no evidence exists for what Paul was referring to.

experience in the text points to universal truth or worldview through the inspiration of the Spirit working in the hearts of Pentecostal readers who identify with the truth or worldview. The Spirit of truth teaches believers everything and reminds them of all that Jesus told his disciples (Jn 14:26). As Paraclete the Spirit testifies on Jesus' behalf (Jn 15:26).

In a quest to end the deadlock of hermeneutics about the LGBTIQ+ issue, the church should avoid what Louw (2008:121) refers to as a 'flirting with biblical texts' that is in itself so biased that the gospel becomes illegitimate and irrelevant. What is rather needed is what Hite (2013:53) describes in terms of the Mormons' preference of the utility of what is being done with beliefs, theologies and interpretation of biblical texts over the substance or textual 'truth' of what is being read and taught. In other words, it is not *what* is read in the Bible that matters the most, it is what believers *do* with what they read that matters. When churches' reading of the Bible gives rise to the homophobic treatment of people characterised by hate acts and hate speech, the question that needs to be asked is whether its reading of the Bible is not annulling its testimony as to the body through which Christ loves the world.

Andri du Toit (cited in Bartlett 2017:82) explains that one of the basic problems in the theological and ecclesiastical discussion about homosexuality is the mixing of exegesis and hermeneutics. Such a mixing occurs when a problem that confronts the contemporary church is carried directly into the biblical text without considering that such a current issue may not have occurred in biblical times at all, 'compelling' biblical authors 'to make statements' and 'provide solutions' to problems that did not fall within their frame of reference and did not even exist in their day. It is suggested that Paul's references do not align with contemporary LGBTIQ+ practices for this reason.

To illustrate, reference can be made to an extremely complicated issue that confronts the contemporary church, that of intersex. For as long as it has been existing, the Christian church accepted that marriage may only occur between a man and a woman. Now the question is asked, what happens when an intersex woman with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (a syndrome that refers to a condition where an XY-foetus which would normally develop into a male cannot respond to androgens or male hormones, causing the foetus to develop internal male features such as testes but with external genitalia of a female, including a vaginal opening, clitoris and labia) marries a non-intersex XY man? This implies that two XY people marry in what can be classed as same-sex marriage in terms of chromosomes. The problem is only solved when it is accepted that the significant factor does not lie in the chromosomes but the individual's gender identity. Then it becomes possible to argue that even though both partners have XY chromosomes, one may have a masculine and the other a feminine gender identity (Cornwall 2014:661). Conservative churches in the past refused to marry transgender people, explaining their refusal by stating that such marriages represent gender confusion and distort

common sense understanding of what constitutes the essence of the family (Cornwall 2014:661). Theologies that are grounded in a strongly binary-sexed model have to recognise the diversities implied in the phenomenon of LGBTIQ+ people as such, and the challenges it holds in, as the issue of intersex demonstrates.

It is argued that the kingdom of God creates a space in which no one is out of place; even the very notion of gender has been transformed ('there is no longer male and female' in Christ; Gl 3:28) (Méndez-Montoya 2014:329). If this statement is true, admission to the communion table should be defined in terms of a body politics of radical inclusion, as most Pentecostal churches already do by inviting anyone who knows and acknowledges Christ as Lord to partake in the communion meal. However, as long as Pentecostal proclamation and praxis are still dominated by heteronormativity and patriarchal dominance, it is clear that LGBTIQ+ people would not be welcome. If Jesus included his betrayer Judas Iscariot and Peter who denied him at the table, the Pentecostal practice of a privatised communion excluding some people who are identified in terms of their sexual preference can hardly be justified. It is submitted that to be an authentic church, Pentecostals need to take care that their communion remains communal and includes everyone in order to challenge the powers of the world (Méndez-Montoya 2014:329) and specifically manifest God's radical option and preference for the poor, rejected, vulnerable and marginalised, by welcoming the excluded ones. Only then will the church recognise and realise the dignity of the extremely poor, those rejected by society, illegal immigrants, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders. Christ's inclusiveness should be reflected in the attitude and behaviour of his disciples. When the church deals with people who differ from the norm established by the practice within Pentecostal churches, its model should be the way its Master dealt with such people, with mercy, compassion and empathy marking his response.

The sexual ethics proposed based on Pentecostal hermeneutics points human beings towards the positive virtues and transforming power of human sexual acts and relationships, rather than emphasising what is wrong about them. Stanley Hauerwas provocatively emphasises in this regard that Christian sexual ethics should be more interested in character than behaviour (Hauerwas 2001:487). Christian ethics should be concerned with the kind of person that it wants to encourage and establish because hidden in the question of what we ought to do is always the prior question, what we ought to be. The question can be answered only by the nature of the Christian community (Hauerwas 2001:493).

Some human sexual behaviour is sinful and morally wrong; there is no question about that. Its wrongfulness is demonstrated clearly in terms of its effects, found in the destruction that defines all sin that is left behind by such choices, such as adultery, sadomasochism and crude pornography that depicts the human body as an object of desire and that objectifies especially

the female body. The principle is the same in terms of all sexual behaviours, unchaste relationships lead to dehumanisation and devaluation of other people as well as a lack of respect for oneself. For that reason, the church should keep on warning people of the dangers of sin, whether they choose to live in heterosexual or same-sex orientation.

Pentecostals in present times do not violently persecute LGBTIQ+ people although in Africa some support calls on government to do so, even agitating for the death sentence for convicted gay and lesbian people. However, in their daily conversations, Pentecostals sometimes with tasteless jokes and remarks belittle gays and lesbians. Homophobic behaviour that is characterised by humiliating jokes, anger, rejection, ostracism, mockery and punitive actions do not fit people who represent Christ. This behaviour can never be condoned among Spirit-filled people who realise that all people, without exception, portray the image of their Creator and share the same dignity. Even when Christians accept that homosexual behaviour is sinful, it may not prevent them from loving and accepting LGBTIQ+ people as participators in the *imago Dei*.

Jennings (2018:13) compares several cases where Pentecostal churches were enriched by the gifts of LGBTIQ+ Christians with the experience of early Australian Pentecostal women who were initially excluded from ministry. He argues that as the church did not expect these women to be transformed into men before the Spirit could use their *charismata*; in the same way, LGBTIQ+ people need not be rendered straight or cisgender before their *charismata* can be recognised. Divine authorisation is not contingent on gender or heteronormativity (Jennings 2018:13). In the past, Pentecostals considered the anointing of the Spirit as the basic requirement for ministry and found that the Spirit included women, children and ethnic minorities in ministry. The acceptance of anointed LGBTIQ+ people exercising spiritually empowered and authorised ministry may suggest a future direction that is both more inclusive, non-divisive and closer to the spirit of early Pentecostalism and the early church.

Conclusion

In answering the question of why African Pentecostals in many instances reach different conclusions or emphasise different aspects of the biblical text compared to believers in other Christian traditions, an attempt was made to sketch the outlines of an African Pentecostal hermeneutics. Pentecostal hermeneutic as such emphasises that the Spirit animates the Bible and empowers believers. The implication is clear, experiencing an encounter with God through the Spirit is imperative and conditional for interpreting the Bible. Biblical texts are read through the prism of the praxis of such encounters.

An African Pentecostal hermeneutic contributes various emphases to the discourse, in terms of its integration of biblical and African tradition worlds, an

intercultural hermeneutics and exegesis that use the unique African cultures in the interpretation of biblical texts that results in an inculturation theology, the interpretation of texts from African socio-political perspectives and its emphasis of an encounter with Christ through the Spirit that facilitates an African culture of orality.

African Pentecostal hermeneutics was defined in terms of orthopathy that integrates affections as the result of an encounter with God, which leads to orthopraxy, consisting of the right action and behaviour and orthodoxy, consisting of correct beliefs and confessions. For African Pentecostals, the order is essential, starting with an encounter with the Spirit that results in life transformation before formulating a theology. This accommodates Africa's widespread orality that embodies spirituality in the experiential rather than the cognitive. It also ties in neatly with Pentecostals' expectation of the reactualisation of biblical events in their contemporary situations. The significance of the Bible as the Word of God is only accomplished when orthopathic and orthopraxic perspectives on the Bible result from encounters with the Spirit that transforms listeners' lives, changing them into apostolic witnesses. Pentecostals emphasise a relational knowledge of God, impelled by the fellowship with the Holy Spirit who is known through direct and supernatural encounters.

In the previous section, 'Pentecostals and LGBTIQ+ people', the African Pentecostal hermeneutic was applied to a specific issue. Like many fundamentalist Christians, most African Pentecostals share a homophobic attitude towards LGBTIQ+ people, denouncing homosexuality as a sexual sin that is to be judged more severely than any other sin. They do not allow the involvement of any LGBTIQ+ people in their congregations. In their consideration of contentious and controversial issues like sexuality and gender, different hermeneutical stances define the viewpoints of the churches. An African Pentecostal hermeneutic is also influenced by the African worldview and values. It strives to formulate timeless sexual ethics, and in the process, it equals terms defined in modern times to describe phenomena with ancient notions and practices discussed in the Bible without considering whether it refers to the same notion. Its heteronormativity supposes a framework of relationships that limits marriage of two people of different genders with an exclusive purpose, the procreation of the race. It is argued that its restorationist urge leads Pentecostals to value the ministry of Jesus and the early church, which is characterised by radical inclusiveness. At the same time, Pentecostals should reconsider an inclusive perspective based on the hermeneutic of early Pentecostalism, which moves from the present situation and the revelation of the Spirit to the biblical text, and back. Such a hermeneutic requires that they look critically at their attitude as Spirit-filled Christians towards the 'other' people, including LGBTIQ+ people. African Pentecostals who participate in discrimination against sexual minorities compromise their Christian testimony.

Chapter 3

The hermeneutics of suspicion

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'Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.'

- Matthew 1:16

Introduction

Ever since the Protestant Reformation, an important current in theological hermeneutics holds that the most responsible approach to the meaning of the biblical text is simply to take the most apparent meaning of the words, sentences and sections as the intended meaning. In earlier Christian epochs, readers were comfortable with and adept at distinguishing various layers of intended meaning to biblical revelation. Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Augustine of Hippo, for instance, all regularly identified levels of meaning such as the allegorical, the analogical and the mystagogical that were discernible above and beyond the literal meaning of a given biblical text. Up until the high Middle Ages scholars like Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas and

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Bonaventure were similarly comfortable with a 'spiritual' reading of many, if not most passages of the Bible. Round about the 16th century CE, an important change occurred, however. It was the time of Galileo, Newton and Descartes and in the West what was later called the 'bifurcation of nature' took place (Whitehead 2015:21ff.). On the one hand, the physical world came to be regarded as essentially dead matter that moved according to the forces that affected it. On the other hand, mind was regarded as the locus of values, feelings and, above all, rationality. The primary qualities of matter – its solidity and extension – were open to measurement so that the objective world could be geometrically plotted by the mind and thus known. In the contention made famous by Descartes: whatever ideas in the mind were clear and distinct and could be rigorously connected to the extended world lying before the mind may be regarded as certain knowledge.

A definite correlation exists between the epistemological spirit of the nascent modern world and the way the responsible interpretation of Scripture came to be understood in many traditions of Reformed theological-thinking. The Bible, as God's Word, has been given to us (it is a datum), and should be studied with the most responsible philological practices that we have. Concomitantly, the grammatical-historical approach to Scripture gained prominence – it focused on the most probable lexicographical meaning of words in their historical context; the most probable meaning of sentences in terms of the literary genre and writing conventions of the time; and the most probable apparent meaning of the message in terms of the overall understanding of Christian revelation. It was, in principle, possible to have clear and distinct knowledge of the main thrust of biblical revelation, and what was not clear needed to be interpreted in terms of what was clear.

Although the scientific spirit of the modern era continues to grow to this day, it is perhaps safe to say that modern science is today the world's most powerful cultural force. However, another important development took place in the West from the 19th century onwards. In some quarters, there has been a growing skepticism about the patent meanings presented or projected to the world by dominant cultural forces. As early as the 19th century, the Enlightenment rejection of dogmatism and the pursuit of progress based on rational principles became self-reflective (Bertens 1995:68), a sign of what was to come later known as postmodernity. It became increasingly apparent to some thinkers that science itself, Enlightenment culture itself, and the human mind itself could potentially hide more sinister motives behind so many facades. It is therefore necessary to question the motives of those who speak of progress and civilised values in the name of integrity and progress. And so, the modern hermeneutics of suspicion was born, the ramifications of which are also importantly present in contemporary theological and biblical hermeneutics.

Origin of the expression: Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the symbolic function

The origin of the expression 'hermeneutics of suspicion' can be traced to the work of the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur. In his 1965 work, *Freud et la Philosophie* ([*Freud and Philosophy*]), in 1970 Ricoeur grouped Sigmund Freud together with two other 'masters of suspicion' – Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx – into a 'school of suspicion', united by a common spirit in their approach to interpretation (Ricoeur 1970:32, 33). Following Ricoeur, the approach exemplified by these three masters of suspicion became known in secondary literature as the hermeneutics of suspicion (cf. e.g. Felski 2012).

In order to appreciate his characterisation of Freud, Nietzsche and Marx as pioneers of a new spirit in modern hermeneutics, it is necessary to first understand Ricoeur's brilliant analysis of the structure of symbol in the first chapter of *Freud and Philosophy*. According to Ricoeur, the notion of 'symbol' should be regarded as a subcategory of the general signifying function whereby sensuous phenomena are filled with meaning that can be communicated, in other words, whereby they become signs (Ricoeur 1970:11). What differentiates the symbolic function from the more general signifying function is the presence of multiple layers of meaning in a given sensible phenomenon. Furthermore, the multiple layers of meaning discernible in the symbol are firstly intentional, that is the multiple meanings were purposefully associated with the single sensuous phenomenon, and they are secondly related in a kind of nested structure: there is a level of meaning that is patent, and then there is a deeper, latent level or levels of meaning that can only be accessed through the patent meaning. According to Ricoeur (1970), therefore, all symbols have a common semantic structure of multiple meanings:

> [*S*]ymbols occur when language produces signs of composite degree in which the meaning, not satisfied with designating some one thing, designates another meaning attainable only in and through the first intentionality. (p. 16)

As part of his elaboration of the general structure of symbol in the first chapter of *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur discusses two examples, the first being precisely Sigmund Freud's contribution to the theory of signification and interpretation. In Ricoeur's (1970) reading of the early Freud of the *Traumdeutung* (1900), our desires communicate in a language that must be regarded as symbolic in the just discussed technical sense of intentionally having multiple layers of meaning:

> By making dreams [...] a model of all the disguised, substitutive and fictive expressions of human wishing or desire, Freud invites us to look to dreams themselves for the various relations between desire and language. First, it is not the dream as dreamed that can be interpreted, but rather the text of the dream account; analysis attempts to substitute for this text another text that could be called the primitive speech of desire. Thus analysis moves from one meaning to another meaning; it is not desires as such that are placed at the centre of analysis, but rather their language. (pp. 5, 6)

Our desires communicate in a symbolic language, and the task of interpreters of this communication is to move from the layer of the patent communication of the dream to the latent layer of meaning that the desires communicate in the dream. In his later work, Freud would expand the psychic communication that is to be symbolically interpreted to include phenomena like neuroses, aphasia and slips of the tongue. According to Ricoeur, Freud's (1970:4) insight that human desires communicate in symbols is his enduring contribution to modern culture. The second example that Ricoeur puts forward to illustrate the double intentionality of the symbolic function hails from the phenomenology of religion. Ricoeur refers to his own earlier work on the symbolism of evil and observes that the presence of evil is always communicated indirectly – precisely via the double-layer structure of the symbol. Thus, whereas a person's sinful situation vis-à-vis the sacred is the depth layer of meaning of a symbol, the patent layer would be the image of a spot or stain that must be wiped away (Ricoeur 1970:13; cf. Ricoeur 1986:9ff.):

> [*F*]or the phenomenology of religion, symbols are the manifestation in the sensible – in imagination, gestures and feelings – of a further reality, the expression of a depth which both shows and hides itself. (p. 7)

There is, however, a crucial difference to be discerned between the two examples – of Freud and the religious symbolism of evil. Whereas psychoanalysis begins by regarding for instance the dream symbol as a distortion of language, as the dissimulation of meaning in the symbol (Ricoeur 1970), the phenomenology of religion regards the religious symbol not as a dissimulation, but as an enigma, where the patent layer provokes further reflection and an invitation to penetrate further into the meaning that is present (Ricoeur 1970:18). It is in the difference of approach between these two examples that Ricoeur discerns the conflict of interpretation that is the title of the second chapter of *Freud and Philosophy*, and it is also here that the root approach of the hermeneutics of suspicion may be found.

According to Ricoeur, the structure of symbol – that is, the absolutised meanings intentionally presented by a single sensuous phenomenon – itself calls for reflection. Citing a phrase from Kant's Critique of Judgement, Ricoeur (1970) states that symbols give rise to thought:

> [*S*]ymbols give; they are the gift of language. But this gift creates for me the duty to think, to inaugurate philosophic discourse, starting from what is always prior to and the foundation of that discourse. (p. 38)

In a real sense, for Ricoeur, symbol is therefore the wellspring of philosophy. Apart from the structure of absolutised meaning of the symbol that constitutively both conceals and reveals and therefore invokes interpretation, there are two more characteristics of symbols that make them important for the philosophical enterprise. The second characteristic becomes visible when we look at the more elaborate linguistic symbols that are called myths.

Observe the generalisation of human experience that we find, for instance, in the great myths about the beginning and end of evil (Ricoeur 1970; cf. also Ricoeur 1986):

> [*T*]he myths of the primal chaos, the myths of the wicked god, the myths of the soul exiled in an evil body, and the myths concerning the historical fault of an individual who is both an ancestor and a prototype of humanity. (n.p.)

When understood as a symbol that is generalised at a conceptual level, a myth gains heuristic value; it becomes an instrument that helps us to understand our own experience in terms of the experiential generality, the temporality and the ontology implied in the myth (Ricoeur 1970:39). Symbols as myths in other words enable us to talk about human experience in general. They both inform our worldviews and are expressions of our worldviews.

A third characteristic of symbol adds weight to the conviction that symbol is intimately linked to the invitation to think. Speaking of the symbolism of evil, Ricoeur (1970:39) observes that in a semantic as well as a mythic sense 'symbols of evil are always the obverse side of a greater symbolism, a symbolism of salvation'. What is the implication of this situation for philosophical reflection as called forth by the structure of the symbol? The answer that Ricoeur (1970:40) gives is that we must be wary of becoming so absorbed in the symbols of evil that we lose sight of the greater symbolic universe and therefore risk having our worldview skewed. As much as possible, the fullness and comprehensivity of our worldviews must be involved in our interpretation of symbols.

With Ricoeur's understanding of symbol as well as the philosophical reflection that it invokes as background, we are now in a position to begin to intimate what is at stake in the conflict of interpretation that was alluded to a few paragraphs back. On the one hand, the very structure of the symbol contains an inbuilt tension between the patent and the latent; the presented and the disguised. How is this tension to be dealt with? A first possibility is to deal with the tension with an attitude of hermeneutical naïveté. To be honest, Ricoeur (1970:28) speaks of this naïveté as a *second* naïveté because it is not a blind ignorance of the absolutised structure of the symbol but rather a conscious decision to trust the relation between the patent and the latent meanings of the symbol. It is a trust that the symbol is actually communicating in good faith; something is being communicated truthfully. Three aspects may be discerned to such a trusting approach to the interpretation of symbols. The first is an absolute of objectivity. For a hermeneutics of naïveté, the task of interpretation is to hear as objectively as possible what is being communicated. That is why such an approach rhymes well with the basic thrust of phenomenology judgement regarding the reality of what appears is suspended in order to describe the phenomenon as faithfully as possible. The focus is on description, not on explanation, and the interpreter bows to the movement inherent in the symbol that carries her from the outer layers of meaning to the deeper layers (Ricoeur 1970:28, 29). Ricoeur (1970) remarks that there is an

expectation of being addressed implicit in this objective approach and adds that this expectation implies a confidence in language:

> [*T*]he belief that language, which bears symbols is not so much spoken by men as spoken to men, that men are born into language, into the light of the logos 'who enlightens every man who comes into the world'. (pp. 29–30)

With this allusion to the famous words from the prologue to the Gospel of John, Ricoeur's point that the way we approach the inherent tension in the symbol is intimately linked to our broader views about ourselves, our world and existence becomes clear. The second aspect discernible to an approach of hermeneutical trust is a conviction regarding the truth of symbols. In this regard, one can speak of a trust that there is a 'primordial, unfailing relationship' (Ricoeur 1970:30) between the superficial and the deeper meanings of a symbol. The 'second meaning somehow dwells in the first meaning' (Ricoeur 1970:31) and the first meaning naturally finds its fulfilment in the second meaning. This is the truth of the symbol: there is a fixed bond between the patent and the latent. Thirdly, an approach of hermeneutical trust situates this approach in continuity with a long metaphysical tradition. In a foundational epoch of this tradition, Plato taught that knowing is recollection; to truly know something is to intellectually remember the eternal idea thereof, ascending from the sensible to the intellectual. Similarly, the hermeneutics of naïveté assumes an innate and natural bond and relation between the various levels of meaning in symbolic communication. In addition, it should be pointed out that hermeneutics of naiveté corresponds to the synthesis achieved in high scholasticism through the Analogy of Being: finite beings are only good, true, and beautiful in proportion to their participation in infinite Beings. Ricoeur (1970:31) further points out that the patent meanings of symbols are part of and manifest the deeper meanings in Being.

A second possibility, however, is to deal with the tension between the patent and the latent meanings of symbols with an attitude of hermeneutical suspicion. What if the communication of meaning effected by a sign does not happen in good faith but is in fact designed to deceive? We are not talking about a sign that is an outright lie, but of the case in which the sign must be recognised as a symbol, though one where the deeper levels of meaning are not in line with the patent meaning but could be something completely different, perhaps something sinister. If this is the case, then hermeneutics becomes an exercise in deciphering and decoding the real meanings behind the professed meanings. From where is the deception derived? With this question, we are no longer in the realm of naïve description but have moved on to that of explanation. As Ricoeur (1970:28) observes, one explains by reference to causes (psychological, social, etc.), genesis (individual, historical, etc.) and function (affective, ideological, etc.). The explanation of the origin of deceptive symbols will have to be taken up again in the discussion of individual exponents of the school of suspicion. For the time being it is enough to note

that, in Ricoeur's (1970) analysis of the hermeneutics of suspicion, the deception involved in symbols is always associated with a false consciousness that is present in the knowing subject:

> [*T*]he philosopher trained in the school of Descartes knows that things are doubtful, that they are not such as they appear; but he does not doubt that consciousness is such as it appears to itself; in consciousness meaning and consciousness of meaning coincide. Since Marx, Nietzsche and Freud this too has become doubtful. After the doubt about things, we have started to doubt consciousness. (p. 33)

It may be that the meaning of something seems to be clear and distinct to consciousness, but that in reality this is not the case, and another meaning hides behind the mask of the perceived clear meaning.

Hermeneutics thus becomes a kind of reverse engineering to try and understand how the deception happened in the first place and what motivated this deception. In this endeavour, the contrast with the hermeneutics of trust becomes apparent in all three of the identified aspects. The hermeneutics of suspicion does not place the emphasis on the object that appears to consciousness, but rather focuses on false consciousness itself. The hermeneutics of suspicion does not believe in the truth of the symbol, in the sense that the deeper meanings are naturally linked to the patent meaning. On the contrary, for this approach, the only truth is that deception is taking place (Ricoeur 1970:32). Finally, the hermeneutics of suspicion must be regarded as a rupture with the tradition of metaphysical thought up to the high Middle Ages. The univocity of being propounded by Scotus and Occam, and the univocity of meaning concomitantly extolled by Galileo, Descartes and Newton already represented a break with the tradition of Christian Platonism. Whereas the hermeneutics of suspicion in a way returns to premodern beliefs by discerning various layers of meaning in symbols, it is an ironical return: now an exercise in suspicion, rather than trust.

What is crucially important to realise, specifically in the light of the second and third characteristics of the symbol that Ricoeur intimates, is that the possible interpretations (trustful or suspicious) of the symbolic form are themselves connected to generalisations of human experience and interpretations of the binaries of good and evil. To prioritise a naïve hermeneutic above a suspicious hermeneutic, or vice versa, is in other words, not a neutral, objective action. It is itself embedded in a horizon of experience that situates the interpreter temporally and ontologically. An important point that Ricoeur is making in the first chapters of *Freud and Philosophy* is that hermeneutics cannot be considered in a merely technical instrumental sense as a technique of interpretation. If you approach our symbolic reality with a completely naïve hermeneutic, this is connected with your own worldview. Similarly, if you approach symbolic reality with a hermeneutics of suspicion, this is also intimately connected with your understanding of this reality. Finally, how you see the relation between a suspicious and a naïve approach will also be connected with

how you see the world. As Ricoeur never ceased to ask his students: are you aware from where you yourself are speaking? We will return to these questions in the conclusion of the chapter. First, we will take a closer look at the history and influence of the school of suspicion, as Ricoeur called them.

The school of suspicion

When it comes to his treatment of the three 'masters of suspicion' as he characterised them, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, Ricoeur is more interested in demonstrating their underlying commonality than elaborating on their differences. In fact, when he refers to Marx and Nietzsche in his text on Freud, it is almost always as part of the triptych Nietzsche-Marx-Freud and never on their own. Ricoeur's aim is to draw out the general characteristics of the school of suspicion, characteristics that were discussed in the section 'Origin of the expression: Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the symbolic function'. Be that as it may, our understanding of the hermeneutics of suspicion may be enhanced by examining the thought of these founding exponents individually all the while keeping Ricoeur's theoretical framework in mind.

Marx

Karl Marx's writings are replete with references to illusion, deception, masking and guile. As good a place to start as any is with his notion of alienation [*Entfremdung*]. In Marx's version of the ideal state of nature, human beings are able to express their humanity in the products of their labour. Our labour and the products of our labour become our lifeworld that lifts human life up to its full potential. What happens in the capitalist phase of history, however, is that the accrual of capital allows certain social actors to become so powerful that they are able to monopolise and control the means of production. All other people are now forced to sell their labour for a wage. This is where alienation happens: the objective aspects of a person's labour are now separated (alienated) from his subjective self. He is working for capital; following capitals' agenda, not his own. The labourer's humanity becomes instrumentalised so that he or she performs monotonous, repetitive work and becomes a mere cog in the machine that makes money for someone else.

Intimately linked to the alienation of labour in Marx's thought is the commodification of products and things. In the first chapter of *Das Kapital*, Marx (1990) describes how the notion of exchange value is substituted for the inherent or use value of things, thereby turning them into commodities. In his words (Marx 1990):

> [*A*]s against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing

> but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. (p. 165)

In other words, in a capitalist society goods and products become the way that social relations are regulated through the principle of supply and demand. Objects have value to the extent that value is ascribed to them in that they are in higher or lower demand. Along the way peoples' subjective, psychological appraisal of the value of something becomes transformed into an apparent objective market value. In this notion of commodity fetishism, the multiple layered structure of the symbol as explicated by Ricoeur becomes visible, but precisely in its use within a hermeneutics of suspicion: the apparently objective value of a commodity is a subjective illusion that has very little to do with its inherent value or use value.

In Marxist theory, capitalist society, characterised as it is by the domination of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, is full of contradictions that must ultimately lead to its inevitable dissolution. However, Marx calls the roles hiding these contradictions 'character masks'. In a society characterised by relations of exchange, a character mask is the role that an actor plays towards other actors. A trader must behave in a certain way in order to sell his goods; a buyer must behave in a certain way in order to purchase products. As a result, commodities (goods and services) appear different than they are because they are distorted by the masking behaviour of the buyer and the seller. In addition, because capitalism is intrinsically based on competition, a great deal of masking behaviour and secrecy reigns between various sellers of the same product, for instance. Here, as well, the hermeneutics of suspicion is at work because underneath the patent meanings of the rituals of buying and selling a disguised deeper meaning of self-interest and exploitation must be discerned.

The proletariat, as the revolutionary class, must grow into a mature class consciousness. This growth in revolutionary consciousness, as for instance described in *The Communist Manifesto*, implies that there are earlier stages in which the true destiny of the proletariat is as yet hidden to itself. Interesting to note is that whereas this idea is definitely present in Marx, Marx himself never used the expression 'false consciousness' to characterise the pre-revolutionary state of the proletariat (cf. McCarney 2005). Marx's friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels, however, used the expression in correspondence later in life (McCarney 2005), and Georg Lukács elaborated on it in his description of the internalisation and concealment of capitalism by the proletariat (Lukács 1967). Interpreting the contradictions of capitalism thereby becomes an exercise in the hermeneutics of suspicion, whereby the surface rationalisations are to be bypassed in order to expose the real tensions underneath. Lukács says (1967):

> We have now determined the unique function of the class consciousness of the proletariat in contrast to that of other classes. The proletariat cannot liberate itself

> as a class without simultaneously abolishing class society as such. For that reason its consciousness, the last class consciousness in the history of mankind, must both lay bare the nature of society and achieve an increasingly inward fusion of theory and practice. (n.p.)

Nietzsche

With Nietzsche the whole of philosophy becomes interpretation, says Ricoeur (1970:25). This is nowhere more evident than in Nietzsche's (1989) consideration of the Genealogy of Morals. His hermeneutical approach is plain in the following question from the introduction to *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche's 1989):

> [*U*]nder what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? And what value do they themselves possess? Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plenitude, force and will of life, its courage, certainty, future? (p. 17)

Nietzsche is proposing that the contemporary value judgements regarding good and evil are only the surface meanings under which deeper, hidden meanings must be discerned using the genealogical method. Values, in other words, are symbols. That he hails from the school of suspicion becomes clear a few pages further in the introduction (Nietzsche's 1989):

> [*B*]ut whoever sticks with it and learns how to ask questions here will experience what I experienced – a tremendous new prospect opens up for him, a new possibility comes over him like a vertigo, every kind of mistrust, suspicion, fear leaps up, his belief in morality, in all morality, falters [...]. (p. 20)

Nietzsche thus wants to decipher the real meaning behind the apparent meaning of the values of good and evil in his culture, and he finds the key in the '"force" and "weakness" of the will to power' (Ricoeur 1970:35).

In the first treatise of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche's argument proceeds as follows. He postulates an earlier epoch when the value judgement 'good' was a simple expression of self-affirmation on the side of strong and noble human beings. The person of strong and noble character simply acted out of his own determination, and so brought forth the judgement: 'this is good'. Nietzsche produces various philological and etymological arguments in support of his view that there really existed an epoch characterised by this noble morality (more or less concomitant with the era of Greek and Roman antiquity), the merits of which will not be considered here. He further makes the point that in that earlier epoch the value of 'good' was 'opposed to the valuation "bad", but in a derivative sense of "weak"; "not-good"' (meaning not-strong.)

In Nietzsche's view, the depravity and deception with regard to morality started with the rise of a priestly class of humans separate from the simple,

strong nobility. The priestly castes advocated introspection and reflection and did not cultivate the virtues of honour and courage. They were therefore physically weaker, which enforced the behaviour of reflection and absolutised so that devious scheming could assist them in the power play against the strong people of society. A fundamental principle in Nietzsche's thought should now become evident: the will to power. For the strong, naturally compassionate person, who nevertheless does not hesitate to despise weakness, the will to power comes naturally. It is who he is. This does not mean that the weaker person does not have a will to power, it only means that he will have to go about attaining power through deceit and cunning depravity. In Nietzsche's account of the Genealogy of Morals, the power grab of the weak from the strong happened when the priestly class – above all exemplified by the Jewish community and their Christian inheritors – started an inversion of values. The weakness of turning the other cheek was henceforth extolled as goodness. Love, as a meek goodwill to all people, became the egalitarian value of Christendom, whereas the erstwhile values of strength and noble self-affirmation were now characterised as 'evil'. The earlier dichotomy of good-bad was replaced by a new dichotomy – that of good-evil, but with an almost complete reversal of the meaning of goodness. The genealogical method thus becomes a way of explaining the origin of the patent meanings of good and evil but within a broader hermeneutics of suspicion that sees a disconnect between the patent meaning and a deeper, more original meaning.

The second treatise in the Genealogy of Morals follows a similar pattern. Here the genealogical method is used to explain how the consciousness of guilt, or the 'bad conscience' came into the world (Nietzsche 1989:62). In Nietzsche's view, a bad conscience should be regarded as a false consciousness that must be discarded in favour of something more original. The origin of the bad conscience is to be found in the fact that '[all] instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward [...]' (Nietzsche 1989:84). Thus, under the pressure of increased social obligations, the instinct towards free and joyful self-affirmation in the days of old characterised the noble races of man, turned inward and became a gnawing drive towards self-analysis and self-depreciation. Concomitantly, according to Nietzsche, feelings of social indebtedness were projected more and more, first onto the ancestors and then inevitably onto the great transfigured ancestor – God. 'The advent of the Christian God, as the maximum god attained so far was therefore accompanied by the maximum feeling of guilty indebtedness on earth' (Nietzsche 1989:90). The stark contrast between a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of trust exemplified in many manifestations of the phenomenology of religion is evident in these words of Nietzsche.

The third treatise in *On the Genealogy of Morals* likewise continues the same genetic method to explain the distortion of a more original meaning by the contemporary surface meaning of a symbol. In this case, Nietzsche treats

the origins of the ascetic ideal – not only in its religious manifestation but also in philosophy and art. The ascetic ideal is world denying. Instead of a joyful affirmation of the earth, instead of a glad acceptance of perspectivism, the ascetic ideal posits an eternal, unchanging realm of being beyond the earth that becomes the point of reference of earthly life. This eternal realm, be it heaven or the unchanging Platonic ideas, can be attained only through renunciation of the sensuous here and now. But this asceticism, according to Nietzsche, must be unmasked for what it is: a life-denying resentment. Such unmasking is in the service of the coming of the Overman, to use an expression from *Thus spoke Zarathustra* – the human that will again joyfully be true to the earth.

Freud

In Ricoeur's estimation, of the three founding fathers of the school of suspicion, the thought of Sigmund Freud is undoubtedly the most sophisticated expression of the hermeneutics of suspicion in that it achieves the highest level of self-reflective interiority. According to Ricoeur (1970):

> [/]n the beginning, Freud is one combatant among many; in the end, he shall have become the privileged witness of the total combat, for all the opposition will have been carried over into him [...]. The issues raised by Nietzsche and Marx will gradually be seen to rise to the heart of the Freudian question as questions of language, ethics and culture. (p. 60)

In line with this appraisal, the theoretical framework that Ricoeur uses to analyse the hermeneutics of suspicion remains discernible in the transition from Marx to Nietzsche to Freud.

Along with Ricoeur, we have already noted how the first stage of Freud's thought concerned the workings of human desire and the way desire communicates in the absolutised structure of symbols. The energetics of sexual desire becomes disguised in the surface meanings of the dream symbols and must be interpreted in order to uncover their more original meanings. We will not remain with this first stage that Ricoeur discerns in Freud's thought, but only note that Ricoeur deems this stage to be quite solipsistic: it is about the internal desires of the individual (Ricoeur 1970:63).

The second stage of Freud's thought is associated with the introduction of the psychological topography of the id, the ego and the superego, which are added to the topography of desires without supressing it (Ricoeur 1970:62). In this stage, relations with other people become more important to the Freudian analysis. The child's initial lack of differentiation from the mother, with the subsequent trauma of becoming an own subject that yet longs for an originary unity is explicated. The pleasure principle is still there, and the various stages of sexual maturation are considered. Yet the disguise of these underlying realities in all kinds of surface phenomena remains. Using the

conceptual framework of the id, ego and superego, the task of the psychoanalyst is to discern where fixations happened in a certain developmental stage, or repression of desire or trauma happened that are communicated in disguise by these surface phenomena.

With Ricoeur (1970:63), a third stage in Freud's thought may be discerned that is 'concerned with the final reworking of the theory of instincts under the sign of death'. In this stage, more or less inaugurated by the 1920 publication of his essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud becomes convinced that other forces apart from the erotic pleasure principle are at work in the human psyche. The basic operation of a hermeneutics of suspicion remains in place, however, in that Freud interprets certain surface behaviours (the repetition compulsion of trauma survivors, the *fort/da* game that children play) as the disguises of what he calls the death drive, and what later interpreters associated with the Greek word *absoluti.* The point for Freud was that apart from the drive to life and procreation, there is also at work in living organisms a drive towards closure and towards becoming part of inanimate matter again. Ricoeur (1970:63) interprets this final development of the Freudian theory of psychoanalysis in terms of his pronouncement, referred to earlier, that the symbol gives rise to thought, and that the understanding of symbols always involves the constitutive role played by a wider worldview.

Truth and power

The foregoing discussion has placed us in a position to discern an underlying tension in the practice of the hermeneutics of suspicion that perhaps did not receive such explicit treatment in Ricoeur's original characterisation of the school of suspicion. This concerns the tension between the notions of truth and power at work in the practice of the hermeneutics of suspicion. To be sure the tension between truth and power in a hermeneutics of suspicion did emerge in passing in Ricoeur's (1970:26) contrast of a hermeneutics of suspicion with a hermeneutics of naïveté, in that in the latter there is a trust that the rhetorical force or power of the patent meaning is bound with the truth of the latent meaning of a symbol, whereas in the hermeneutics of suspicion 'the entire problem of truth and error [is subordinated] to the expression of the will to power'. Let us now thematise the tension between truth and power explicitly in terms of the general characteristics of the worldview operative in a hermeneutics of suspicion.

The tension between truth and power is best understood in terms of the bifurcation of nature that was referred to in the introduction to this chapter. According to this bifurcation, nature was split into two opposing poles. On the one hand, an objective pole comprised inert matter and the forces operative on it, on the other hand, the subjective pole of the human mind that is able to represent and map the objective pole as well as initiate free action in

the world. The French sociologist of science, Bruno Latour, influentially demonstrated the problematic aspects of the modern split between nature and freedom, or nature and culture, as the bifurcation of nature came to be called in his thought (cf. Latour 1988, 1993). Not least among these problems is that a zero-sum game is continually at work between the poles of nature and freedom. The more everything is seen as a realm of deterministic forces at work on inert matter, the less room there is for freedom and moral responsibility. Conversely, the more everything is seen as open to choice and construction, the more it becomes a mere perspectivistic play of forces. Graham Harman, one of the foremost English language interpreters of Latour, avers that the tension between nature and culture thematised by Latour can also be translated into the realm of politics in terms of the tension between a truth politics and a power politics (Harman 2014:Kindle Loc. 201).

According to a truth politics, the ordering of the *res publica* should happen according to the objective facts established about the world by the best scientific practices of the day. Underlying this approach is the assumption that there is an objectively discernible reality that must simply be obeyed, because 'this is simply how it is – the facts speak for themselves'. In contemporary politics, a well-known example of truth politics is to be found in the politics of the Green Movement (Latour 2004:1, 19). According to this political agenda, it is an established scientific fact – it is true – that climate change is happening, that a mass extinction event is underway, that sea levels are rising, etc. Concomitantly lawmakers and governments have no choice but to be true to this state of affairs in their promulgation of laws and policies. Another example of a truth political approach to government is the response by many political leaders to the Coronavirus pandemic that swept the world in the first years of the third decade of the 21st century. Whereas many sectors of society insisted on the freedom to remain economically and socially active, the 'objective' facts presented by scientists, epidemiologists and statisticians convinced these politicians to act in a certain way.

Opposed to a truth politics, and in line with the modern bifurcation of nature and freedom, is a politics of power. Such an approach places the emphasis on human freedom and agency and is in a certain sense dismissive of the deterministic laws of nature. In its extreme form, this approach would be sympathetic to the judgement that power is the only truth – there is no other authority that can be appealed to save power itself. The sentiment that might is right received a famous expression in the 17th century thought of Thomas Hobbes. For Hobbes, the political is a construct – a social contract – that allows people to get away from a natural existence that is nasty, brutish and short. Within such constructed political realm, the monarch should have absolute power in order to deter any movements harmful to the commonwealth. Citizens are obliged to obey the monarch even though he might be self-serving and unjust because this is better than to lapse back into the state of nature.

The point to be made now is that in modernity truth politics and power politics are locked in an interminable struggle and that the same zero-sum game is discernible in this derived opposition as was apparent in the original opposition between nature and freedom. In addition, it is exactly this tension between truth and power, with its background as sketched, that is visible in the hermeneutics of suspicion. When the various layers of symbolic signification are construed to be at variance with one another, it becomes almost inevitable that a struggle will ensue between the power of the patent meaning of a symbol, and the hidden truth, as interpreted, of the latent meaning.

The Hobbesian element in Freud's understanding of the human interior life has been pointed out (cf. Pojman 2006:177). Initially, the forces at work in the unconscious were seen by Freud almost in terms of a physical energetics. Later, the symbolic communication of the drives became more pronounced, but the point is that the psyche is the site of conflict and strife. The ego can be understood as an attempt at a social contract whereby a sovereign is mandated with keeping the drives in check. Whereas formally Freudian psychotherapy is occupied with unmasking the hidden powers that manifest in neuroses and compulsions, the material truth is that human life and society in its nature is a state of conflict, not harmony.

The interaction between truth and power is even more evident in the thought of Karl Marx. On the one hand, there is the truth of a dialectical law of history, whereby human society moves towards the abolition of classes. On the other hand, the dynamo of the historical process is precisely the unjust abuse of power and the struggle against this abuse. As the proletariat grows in self-consciousness, it sees the truth of the historical process underneath the contradictions of capitalism. Conversely, this insight shows the necessity of power in the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

A line of Nietzsche commentators holds that there is only the perspectivism of a power politics discernible in his thought. As will be discussed below, this line takes Nietzsche as an important exemplar and point of reference for the postmodern cultural moment that gained momentum since the time of Nietzsche up to the present. Another line of Nietzsche commentators, however, maintains that there is a metaphysics, and thus some form of truth politics, at work in Nietzsche's thought.[32] According to this view, the doctrines of the Will to Power and the Eternal Return can be read as the agonistic metaphysics of self-overcoming (cf. Richardson 1997:11).

The point with regard to Freud, Marx and Nietzsche is that underneath the surface manifestations of powers in conflict, all three in some way also intimate a deeper truth that is hidden beneath the patent meanings. This is precisely the hermeneutics of suspicion. Once the deeper truth is uncovered beneath

32. Cf. Clark (1990) for an explication of the two lines of Nietzsche scholarship.

the deceptions of the surface, the exercise of power returns in that the hegemonic or tyrannical powers holding sway must be overthrown or deconstructed or exorcised in some way or another.

Let us now, in conclusion of this section, look at two near contemporary thinkers, namely Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault, to see how the original impetus of the school of suspicion, with the accompanying tension between truth and power, was broadened into general analyses of contemporary culture. In his famous 1979 essay, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* [*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*], Lyotard (1984) asks when what is presented as knowledge will be considered to be legitimate knowledge. In other words, what are the mechanisms whereby knowledge is legitimated. He goes on to explain that legitimation is the process whereby a 'legislator' prescribes the conditions under which a statement about the world may be included in the body of knowledge (Lyotard 1984:8). For Lyotard (1984), this, in turn, is intimately linked with the bonds ensuring social coherence in a society, because the legitimacy of knowledge is linked to the legitimacy of the legislator:

> [*T*]he right to decide what is true is not independent of the right to decide what is just, even if the statements consigned to these two authorities differ in nature. The point is that there is a strict interlinkage between the kind of language called science and the kind called ethics and politics [...]. (p. 8)

In short, there is an intimate link between knowledge and power: knowledge needs power to legitimise it; power needs knowledge to know what to legitimise.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard takes as his proximate area of discussion the status of scientific knowledge and first of all notes that in the Western world scientific knowledge came to be regarded as separate from narrative knowledge. The latter is the preeminent form of traditional knowledge. According to Lyotard, within traditional knowledge systems narratives serve to legitimise social institutions. Narratives are furthermore characterised by a variety of language games: descriptive, prescriptive and evaluative utterances occur unproblematically intermixed. And, finally, the narrator of the story finds themselves in some respects embedded inside the story (Lyotard 1984:20). In the Western world, however, a language game – science – evolved that pretended to exclude all other candidates for the role of legislator, apart from denotation (Lyotard 1984:25). 'A statement's truth-value is the criterion determining its acceptability' (Lyotard 1984:25). Based on the strict criteria of observability, proof and repeatability, the legitimacy of science was regarded as on another level than that of traditional narratives, with the result that traditional narrative knowledge could be dismissed as fables and that the language game of science gained a hegemonic position of power in the Western world.

Lyotard's allegiance with the hermeneutics of suspicion, now broadened into a cultural sensibility, becomes evident in his view that the legitimacy of modern science is actually still grounded in narrative – what Lyotard calls a

grand narrative or a metanarrative. According to him, there are two variants of the grand narrative that legitimises scientific knowledge in the West. On the one hand, there is the story of science as the instrument in the advance of human freedom (Lyotard 1984:31). According to this story, all peoples have a right to science, and the application of science in technology will lead to progress and prosperity. The sinister, controlling side of this narrative becomes evident in Lyotard's (1984) observation that:

> [*T*]he State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the 'people', under the name of the 'nation', in order to point them down the path of progress. (p. 32)

The other grand narrative that legitimises science in the West is the story of the progress of Spirit, as for instance told in German Idealism and that led to a self-conception of the Von Humboldtian research university as a place of *Bildung* [Education] for the people (Lyotard 1984:32, 33). In the introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard (1984) says that he:

> [*W*]ill use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. (p. xxiii)

The explication of the functioning of grand narratives in a way only serves to introduce Lyotard's understanding of the current state of knowledge, a state that he describes as postmodernity. In his definition, the postmodern is an incredulity towards metanarratives (Lyotard 1984:xxiv). One should think here of an incredulity regarding the metanarratives that legitimise science but also an incredulity regarding other grand narratives, such as that of religion and nationalism. According to Lyotard, the postmodern sensibility is the awareness of being situated in a communicative network. Every individual is a node in a network that decides whether to transmit a small narrative or whether to alter or to block it. This is the general communicative agonistics of the postmodern. The suspicion of grand narratives goes hand in hand with an understanding of the social as a site of conflict.

With the central idea of his thought being power, Michel Foucault's place in the lineage of Nietzsche is surely evident. What is, however, important to realise is that Foucault never meant to identify some kind of core essence to his notion of power, and thus to reify it into a philosophical concept (Koopman 2017). For Foucault, it is more important to understand how constellations of power came to be and how they operate than to understand what power is. It is precisely this approach that allows us to understand Foucault's work as a broadening and generalisation of the impetus to be suspicious of the dissonance between the patent and the latent meanings of symbols, and thus to see it as a hermeneutics of suspicion in the broadest sense of the word. In the section 'Origin of the expression: Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the symbolic function' of this chapter, it was noted, after all, that a key distinction between

a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of naïveté is to be found therein that a more naïve hermeneutics — in the technical sense of the word — focuses more on the *description* of how the deeper meanings of a symbol are nested within the surface meanings, while a more suspicious hermeneutics would tend to *explain* the ways that the deeper, hidden meanings give rise to the surface meanings of a symbol.

The relation between truth and power is also present in Foucault's work, but following the postmodern line of Nietzsche's interpretation, it is a thoroughly historicised notion of truth that he is interested in (Koopman 2013:33). If there is an element of a truth politics as understood above to be discerned in Foucault, it would be the conviction that everything is historically contingent and thus open to change. This becomes apparent in Foucault's combining of knowledge and power into the duality knowledge-power. In Foucault's (1995) words:

> We should admit [...] that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (p. 27)

Foucault is interested in how specific constellations of power shape subjects' knowledge of themselves, of others and of society, and, conversely, how certain knowledge constellations become embodied in power relations. Foucault subsequently became famous for his painstaking analyses of the power-knowledge constellations at work in the modern prison system, in institutions of human sexuality and the diagnosis and treatment of madness, among others.

In his 1975 book, *Surveiller et punir* [Discipline and Punish], Foucault (1977) considers how the modern penal system works by observing in the words of Koopman (2017) that '[d]iscipline [...] is a form of power that tells people how to act by coaxing them to adjust themselves to what is "normal"'. Discipline is power that inculcates a certain knowledge through training. It does not strike down or exterminate the offending subject like earlier forms of the exercise of power might have done. Rather, it teaches them to be obedient by inculcating a certain self-knowledge and knowledge of society in them. This form of knowledge-power then produces docile subjects.

The point of contact with, for instance, Ricoeur's understanding of the absolutised structure of the symbol, is that for Foucault, there are certain underlying conditions that make possible the surface structure of knowledge-power in a given historical situation. Foucault's indebtedness to Kant becomes apparent in that his analysis of a specific knowledge-power constellation (for instance, the modern penal system) takes the form of a critique of this constellation in order to lay bare the conditions that make it possible. Whereas

Kant's critique attempted to lay bare transcendental categories of the mind, Foucault transposes the Kantian project into the immanent process of history in order to understand the historical conditions that allowed a certain knowledge-power constellation to emerge.

Crucially important to understand, furthermore, is that the conditions that make possible a specific surface constellation of knowledge-power are thoroughly historically contingent. This is why the method of genealogy is so important in Foucault's approach. We want to try and understand how the contingent constellation of knowledge-power in the present came to be. We want to write a history of the present. Foucault's hermeneutics of suspicion is ultimately in the service of his ideal of radical freedom (Koopman 2017). We need to discern that the contemporary constellations of power shaping our self-knowledge and knowledge of society are made up of so many surface meanings that are expressions of deeper-lying knowledge conditions, or epistemes. These knowledge conditions are furthermore historically contingent, with the result that they can be different from what they are in the present.

At the end of this section, we can note that the hermeneutics of suspicion in many respects has become a generally pervasive, underlying attitude to culture at least in contemporary Western culture.[33] As has been exhibited in the consideration of the work of Lyotard and Foucault, it is furthermore a suspicion of the use and abuse of power that is prevalent today. In the zero-sum game of the relation between truth and power, the pendulum has swung far towards the pole of power, with the result that in the minds of many the only truth is the truth of the ceaseless conflict of contingent powers. Let us now consider two expressions of the hermeneutics of suspicion in contemporary cultural analysis before turning to the hermeneutics of suspicion in biblical interpretation and religious thought.

Two contemporary expressions of the hermeneutics of suspicion

Suspicion of patriarchy

The influence of the various waves of the feminist movement in general, and feminist theory and hermeneutics in particular is massive, and can only be considered cursorily in this context. Nevertheless, the points of contact and cross-pollination with a hermeneutics of suspicion should be pointed out. In broad terms, feminism is the awareness that society prioritises the male point

33. Witness the general suspicion of so-called fake news, and the general unease that surveillance capitalism is manipulating consumers through the use of personalisation algorithms (McIntyre 2018; Rufus 2020; Zuboff 2019).

of view, thereby allowing all kinds of injustice to be committed against women. First-wave feminism pointed out and fought the most glaring injustice in a patriarchal society, the fact that women could not participate in the democratic process of a country like men, that women were not allowed the same educational privileges as men, and that women were regarded to be under the guardianship of their fathers until they were married in which case the guardianship transferred to their husbands. The hermeneutics of suspicion function here in the conviction that what is presented on the surface as 'natural' is in fact not natural at all, but the result of hidden historical constructions that now function to facilitate the abuse of male power against women. The impulse of first-wave feminism has been strengthened in so-called second-wave feminism from about the middle of the 20th century that precisely sought to highlight the more subtle but pervasive forms of cultural patriarchy at work in modern societies. In this regard, one can think of the often still pervasive cultural attitude that a woman's place is at home in the role of homemaker and child-rearer, in the fact that there are still more males in top government, corporate and academic positions than women, and in the fact that there remains disparity in the remuneration that women receive for the same work done compared to men. Suspicion cannot only be levelled at the expressions of patriarchy in everyday culture but also at the whole history of Western philosophy. In her 1974 book, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray, for instance, rereads Western philosophical history as a history of phallocentrism. While there are currents and differences on the surface, a hidden guiding factor in the history of philosophy has, according to her, always been the dominant male gaze.

In response to the question, what is third-wave feminism, Snyder (2008) writes the following:

> [*T*]hird wave feminism makes three important tactical moves that respond to a series of theoretical problems within the second wave. First, in response to the collapse of the category of 'women', the third wave foregrounds personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism. Second, as a consequence of the rise of postmodernism, third wavers embrace multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification. Finally, in response to the divisiveness of the sex wars, third-wave feminism emphasises an inclusive and nonjudgemental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political. In other words, third-wave feminism rejects grand narratives for a feminism that operates as a hermeneutics of critique within a wide array of discursive locations and replaces attempts at unity with a dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition. (pp. 175–176)

Taking from this summary only what is relevant to the present discussion, one could say that in third-wave feminism the suspicion that has hitherto been harboured against patriarchy, becomes self-reflective in that there now is also suspicion of the essentialism that may be at work in the category 'woman' itself. Perhaps the gender binary man–woman disguises a similar contingent

historical construct that has gained hegemonic status in the contemporary world. The result of this suspicion has been a sensitivity towards gender fluidity in LGBTIQ+ studies. Furthermore, the awareness that feminism might hitherto have been biased towards the plight of white, individualistic Western women has led to all kinds of local feminist studies, for instance foregrounding black African feminism, etc.

Suspicion of colonialism

As was the case with the consideration of the suspicion of patriarchy, it should be acknowledged that the influence of postcolonial thought and decolonisation as a movement has been massive and that it can only be considered cursorily as part of a consideration of contemporary expressions of the hermeneutics of suspicion. The latter becomes more evident in the later waves of decolonisation that deal with the more difficult decolonisation of the mind even, and perhaps especially, where political freedom from colonial empires has been achieved. Already in the title of Franz Fanon's 1952 book *Black Skins White Masks,* for instance, the awareness of a dissonance between the surface meanings being made by the 'masks' that emulate a white mindset, and the deeper meaning inherent in the black skins of the colonised peoples comes forcefully to the fore.

The point is, to once again use Ricoeur's words (Ricoeur 1970:33), the aftermath of colonisation is characterised by a situation of false consciousness. In the language of decolonisation studies and postcolonial thought, this false consciousness is often described as a colonisation of the mind.[34] Very important to bear in mind in this regard, however, is that while a colonisation of the minds of the colonised people has taken place, there is also a false consciousness present in the minds of the colonising peoples, a false consciousness against which suspicion can and should be directed.

In his 2014 book *Epistemologies of the South – Justice against Epistemicide*, and again in 2018 *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos deals extensively with the aftermath of and reaction to the false consciousness of the colonisation of the mind. He firstly describes the colonisation of the mind in terms of a distinction between 'roots' and 'options' (De Sousa Santos 2014:76ff.) – a distinction that resonates with Foucault's previously mentioned analysis of the episteme. According to De Sousa Santos, roots are underlying large-scale structuring of worldviews. Within such large-scale structuring, a number of options are available, but these are the only options available. Structured by the underlying root, it is not possible to conceive of other options. In this regard, one can think, for instance, of the root structure of Western Enlightenment. This root opens up a number of

34. Cf. the title of the 1981 book by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind*.

options with regard to rationality, society, ethics and the understanding of human flourishing, while, *nota bene*, taking many other options out of play. With colonisation the root of Enlightenment thought was impressed upon the minds of the colonised peoples thereby deligitimising many of the options regarding thought, ethics and flourishing that were part of the worldviews of these people prior to colonisation.

Another useful conceptual instrument that De Sousa Santos proposes in *Epistemologies of the South* and later elaborates on in *The End of the Cognitive Empire* is the notion of the abyssal lines that run through our world in the aftermath of modern colonisation. In De Sousa Santos' (2014) words:

> Modern Western thinking is an abyssal thinking. It consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones. The invisible distinctions are established through radical lines that divide social reality into two realms, the realm of 'this side of the line' and the realm of 'the other side of the line'. The division is such that 'the other side of the line' vanishes as reality, becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent. Nonexistent means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the copresence of the two sides of the line. To the extent that it prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, nondialectical absence. (p. 118)

This passage forcefully illustrates how modern colonialism created a way of thinking that creates a sphere of normativity while at the same time consigning everything else literally to non-being. On the other side of the abyssal line, everything is irrational, incomprehensible and, in a word, inside the heart of darkness. If the abyssal lines running through the contemporary postcolonial world are taken to be the latent symbolic meanings of our world, it should be noted that they give rise to very different patent meanings depending on which side of the line one is looking, be it the metropolitan societies on 'this side' of the line, or the erstwhile colonised societies on 'the other side' of the line. According to De Sousa Santos (2014:118ff.), a prominent dialectic on 'this side' of the abyssal line is the dialectic between regulation and freedom. The colonising post-Enlightenment societies struggle with finding some kind of balance between the imposition of order and morality by the state, and the individual liberties that are very precious in these societies. Yet, these societies are often not even aware that a very different dialectic is at work in the erstwhile colonised societies. This, according to De Sousa Santos, is the dialectic of appropriation and violence. On the one hand, certain quaint or commodifiable cultural memes are appropriated by the colonising cultures, to be repurposed, repackaged and resold within the worldwide neoliberalist marketplace that is itself in important respects a result of colonialism. On the other hand, everything on the 'other side' of the line that is not able to be

harmonised with the worldview on 'this side' of the line is violently extirpated, either through physical violence or through cultural violence and epistemicide.

The awareness of the existence of a false consciousness among both erstwhile colonising and erstwhile colonised peoples goes hand in hand with the intellectual work of many thinkers that could be said to belong to an expanded contemporary school of suspicion. Sands (2020:8ff.) argues explicitly for the inclusion of thinkers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Achille Mbembe into an African school of suspicion that explicitly attempts to understand and explain the distortions, dissimulations and power differentials that characterise the world in the aftermath of colonisation. Speaking at a meta-level one could say, following De Sousa Santos, that these exercises in a hermeneutics of suspicion try to show that what presents itself as 'roots' to the minds of colonised peoples are in fact nothing but 'options' and should be treated as such.

The hermeneutics of suspicion is also at work in the intellectual labour of many people situated on 'this side' of the line. In their case, it involves an awakening to the presence of the invisible abyssal line, and the equal recognition that what has been taken for granted as 'roots' are perhaps nothing but 'options'. So-called 'whiteness' studies in many Western universities may be taken as a case in point (cf. e.g. Sullivan 2006).

Biblical and theological hermeneutics of suspicion

The hermeneutics of suspicion is also present in contemporary biblical scholarship and theological labour in general. In line with the general characterisation of this sentiment, in this field as well a tension between a focus on truth and a focus on power may be discerned. The point is that the naïve trust in a univocal relation between the patent and the latent meanings of theological symbols that characterised an important modern tradition of biblical hermeneutics is challenged by the suspicion that another truth is lurking beneath the smooth surface of the texts — also cultural texts — being interpreted, or that the surface meanings that are presented are, in fact, nothing but contingent constellations of power. Let us consider three manifestations of the hermeneutics of suspicion in this field: firstly, with regard to the interpretation of the biblical text in general; secondly, with regard to the interpretation of other interpretations of Christian tradition and thirdly, with regard to the praxis of Christian life.

The tradition of so-called higher criticism in biblical interpretation can be taken as a first-order manifestation of the hermeneutics of suspicion in the sense of being a direct engagement with the text of the Bible. An easy example in this regard has to do with the purported authorship of the various texts in

the Bible. Who, or which school, may be identified as the real authors of the various sections that make up the present 'Book of Isaiah' in the Old Testament, for example? Which letters or sections of letters can really be traced back to the authorship of the apostle Paul, and which letters that currently purport to be from his pen, are in fact from different authors? Intimately linked to questions of authorship are, of course, questions about the dating and the historical and cultural contexts of those times when the various traditions first appeared in textual form. Higher criticism therefore also comprises a critique of the various earlier sources that later compilers and redactors made use of, critique of various theological traditions that rub shoulders in the versions of biblical texts that we have today, critique of the original input of final redactors to the final versions of books, as well as critique of the 'books' admitted into the final canon of the Bible as it is accepted today.

Anticipating remarks that will be made in the conclusion to this essay, it is necessary to observe that an element of hermeneutical suspicion is probably inevitable in any exercise in interpretation. In this sense, an element of discernment regarding the true underlying sense of earlier canonical texts has probably all along been part of biblical interpretation – even in the handling of earlier canonical writings by later canonical writings.

With the emergence of the science of biblical interpretation, more or less concurrent with the beginning of European modernity, higher-order biblical criticism was very much aligned with science's search for truth. Later, as modernity became more self-reflexive and started to give way to its postmodern manifestation, the element of suspicion regarding abuse of contingent power also became more prominent in biblical and theological interpretation. The suspicion that theological tradition and religious practice were in fact nothing but the abuse of power, was already forcefully presented by Friedrich Nietzsche, as discussed earlier. But this second-order hermeneutics of suspicion, in the sense of being suspicion at work in the interpretation of other and earlier theological work and interpretations, are also to be found today in the work of theologians who do not reject Christianity out of hand but still work within the tradition. Here the earlier discussion of contemporary manifestations of the hermeneutics of suspicion merges with the consideration of biblical and theological hermeneutics. Feminist scholars have pointed out how the biblical text and the Judaeo-Christian tradition in general have enabled and sustained patriarchy and misogyny in many guises. In a similar vein, liberation theologians, relying in large part on Marxist class theory, have pointed out how biblical interpretation has been co-opted into the legitimation of unjust monopolies and has sought to rediscover a more original political liberatory gospel. And theologians working in environmental theology have focused attention on the way that certain readings of the Bible have enabled human exceptionalism, which in turn has legitimised large-scale and unchecked plundering of the planet's resources, leading to impending ecological disaster.

An illuminating absolute of what is here called a second-order theological hermeneutics of suspicion is to be found in the 2003 book *The Face of the Deep* by feminist and process theologian, Catherine Keller. This book considers and critiques the *Wirkungsgeschichte* [history of influence] of the foundational creation myth of Genesis 1. Keller (2003) intriguingly demonstrates how the theological doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* [creation out of nothing] was read into the text of Genesis 1, and how this doctrine fed into and fed on understandings of a male Creator God in splendid, self-sufficient isolation, with concomitant disparaging of materiality, femininity and becoming:

> The Bible knows only of the divine formation of the world out of a chaotic something: not *creatio ex nihilo*, but *ex nihilo nihil fit* ('from nothing comes nothing'), the common sense of the ancient world. Yet theological orthodoxy has from nearly its own beginnings insisted on reading its nihil into the first chapter. Thus, for example, the fourth-century bishop Chrysostom performs an exegetical gesture that was becoming standard: he cites Genesis 1:1 for the desirable message and then simply ignores verse 2. '"In the beginning God created heaven and earth." [*Moses*] well nigh bellows at us all and says, "Is it by human beings I am taught in uttering these things? It is the one who brought being from nothing who stirred my tongue in narrating them"' It is, however, Chrysostom himself, not Moses who 'bellows at us all' what the text does not say–and so effectively drowns out what the next verse does say. (pp. 4–5)[35]

In the light of this suspicion of the dominant theological doctrine of creation, Keller then goes on to propose a *tehomic* understanding of creation, that is, an understanding that takes the second verse of Genesis 1 equally seriously for our understanding of God and God's creation.

The third register in which the manifestation of a hermeneutics of suspicion may be considered within the context of theology and religion is that of religious praxis. In this regard, a symbolic disconnect is suspected or discerned between the patently confessed allegiance to a religion and the meaning of the actions and behaviour that do not rhyme with the confessed worldview. Within the context of theological hermeneutics, Todd Billings has recently described this disconnect as the difference between the professed and the functional theology at work in a given context (Billings 2010:13, 16, 22). In the language of biblical tradition, the mistrust of presented patent meanings is often expressed with reference to the human heart: while people pledge outward allegiance to the covenant with God, their hearts are not with God. The prophetic tradition in the Old Testament may be read as an exercise in suspicion against the kings of Israel and Judah, and the culture of the people under the reign of their kings. Similarly, the sharp critique of the Pharisees and the Scribes in the gospels is, in this technical sense, an exercise in the hermeneutics of suspicion.

35. Quotation from Saint John Chrysostom 1–17, transl. Hill (1947:31–32).

The exercise of a hermeneutics of suspicion regarding Christian praxis vis-à-vis confession is not restricted to the evaluation of the behaviour of others. There is an important element of religious and specifically Christian tradition that also directs the suspicion towards the deepest motives of the religious believer himself or herself. Again, this is already found in Scriptural tradition, but an important early theological expression is found in the thought of Augustine of Hippo. While following classical Greek philosophy in many respects, Augustine parted ways with this tradition in professing that the human will is in fact stronger than human rationality. More important is where the love of the heart is directed — either at God, or at fleeting and insubstantial worldly things — and reason will rationalise the behaviour stemming from the love of the heart.

An important contemporary expression of this self-directed hermeneutics of suspicion is found in the work of Merold Westphal. The latter explicitly engages with the work of Paul Ricoeur on the hermeneutics of suspicion and appropriates it in such a way that it becomes an instrument for the believer 'to become self-critically aware of how they all too often, all too humanly, co-opt God for their own will-to-power' (Sands 2020:5; cf. Westphal 1998, 2001).[36]

In this sense, the suspicion is part of the Christian practice of introspection and is salutary in that it is in service of the laying down of the false self in order that the believer's true identity in Christ may shine forth more and more.

At the end of this consideration of the presence of the hermeneutics of suspicion in biblical and theological hermeneutics, we are left with the sense that some form of a hermeneutics of suspicion is inevitably part of any hermeneutical labour, and that this element can be destructive in a negative sense, but can also have constructive and positive consequences. What can and should the overall place of a hermeneutics of suspicion then be? To this question, we now turn in the concluding section of the chapter.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been an overview and characterisation of what in the wake of Paul Ricoeur's analysis became known as the hermeneutics of suspicion. It is, however, important to bear in mind that Ricoeur's treatment of the so-called school of suspicion, and specifically the work of Sigmund Freud, forms one side of a broader hermeneutical and philosophical project. The painstaking and scrupulous tracing of Freud's intellectual journey is, so to speak, embraced at the beginning and the end by a more general consideration of the symbol and how the symbol invites reflection, thereby giving rise to philosophy. In this magnificent work, *Freud and Philosophy*, it becomes clear

36. I am indebted to the referenced article of Justin Sands in which this contribution of Westphal is pointed out.

why, in Ricoeur's estimation, philosophy is hermeneutical through and through. However, as Ricoeur is at pains to point out at various instances throughout the work, *Freud and Philosophy,* together with its earlier companion *The Symbolism of Evil,* does not yet presume to set out a general hermeneutic; these works should rather be taken as a propaedeutic to this more encompassing task (Ricoeur 1970:494). Having said that, in this 'propaedeutic', the lineaments of a more general approach to symbols and their interpretation does appear, and what already becomes clear is that In such a more encompassing view, the hermeneutics of suspicion should not be left to stand on its own; it is a moment, albeit an important moment in a more general process of understanding.

The problem that is the driving force in *Freud and Philosophy* is Ricoeur's awareness within himself and within contemporary culture in general of a conflict of interpretation. It is the conflict between 'a hermeneutics that demystifies religion and a hermeneutics that tries to grasp, in the symbols of faith, a possible call or kerygma' (Ricoeur 1970:343). The hermeneutics of suspicion is the hermeneutics that sees a mystification happening between the latent and the patent layers of symbolic meaning. The hermeneutics of trust on the other hand accepts that the latent meanings faithfully disclose deeper levels of what has been made manifest at the surface. In his attempt to penetrate the conflict of interpretation, Ricoeur does not ostensibly take sides. Even though his sympathy lies with the trust in fallible man really being addressed by an Other in and through religious symbolism, there is throughout *Freud and Philosophy*, the persistent sense that the hermeneutics of suspicion is an important stage in any hermeneutical exercise: 'first, it [is] necessary to pass through the stage of dispossession – the dispossession of consciousness as the place and origin of meaning' (Ricoeur 1970:494). This is the very legitimate value in the hermeneutics of suspicion: the awareness that the consciousness of meaning can be a false consciousness. Freudian psychoanalysis then becomes the exemplar *par excellence* of an ascesis of reflection that demonstrates how the locus of meaning can be traced to another, hidden locus (Ricoeur 1970). At the end of his analysis of Freud's journey, Ricoeur is at pains to point out that the shift in focus from conscious to unconscious meaning is only the first stage in Freud's analysis of the psyche. Whereas his earlier works are almost solipsistic in their focus on individual consciousness, Freud gradually moved towards broader psychoanalytic investigations of culture and society, and eventually treated very much philosophical themes in his discussion of the reality principle and the death drive. In this regard, Ricoeur (1970:447) argues that 'the psychoanalytic interpretation of culture contains not only a highly thematised archaeology but also an implicit teleology'. Ricoeur then further and intriguingly argues that the implicit teleology in Freud's journey of consciousness can fruitfully be compared with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, of which it is in important

ways the inverse: 'What I propose to show is that Freud's problematic is in Hegel; we shall then be able to see that Hegel's problematic is in Freud' (Ricoeur 1970:469).

The outcome for Ricoeur (1970) to the staged conversation between Freud and Hegel, is:

> [*T*]hat the key to the solution lies in the dialectic between archaeology and teleology. It remains to find the *concrete* 'mixed texture' in which we see the archaeology and the teleology. This concrete mixed texture is symbol. (p. 494)

To reaffirm: the analysis of the Freudian hermeneutics of suspicion, the intimation of an implicit teleology in Freud, and the reflection on archaeology and teleology in Freud and Hegel, and how they flow into each other are all in the service of gaining a more comprehensive approach to the interpretation of symbols; all these elements are necessary. On the very next page, Ricoeur (1970) then makes the following important observation:

> [*S*]ymbols are the concrete moment of the dialectic [*between archaeology and teleology*], but they are not its immediate moment. The concrete is always the peak or fullness of mediation. The return to the simple attitude of listening to symbols is 'the reward consequent upon thought'. The concreteness of language, which we border upon through painstaking approximation is the second naïveté of which we have merely a frontier or threshold knowledge. (p. 495)

I take this paragraph to mean that the hermeneutics of suspicion (the archaeology of hidden meaning) is an important and irreducible part of our consciousness of the meaning of symbols. Yet it is part of a greater dialectic and should not be absolutised on its own. That route is a sure path to nihilism. There must also be a second naïveté to our discernment of the meaning of symbols. This should expressly not be a naïve and uncritical acceptance of the bona fides of all symbolic communication — along that route indeed lies injustice and the abuse of power — but a *second* naïveté that, in the words of Mark Wallace who studied this notion in Ricoeur, is 'a critically mediated attitude of expectation toward the reality claims' of what is communicated (Wallace 1995:xiii). The duty to think, which is the duty to interpret, that is incumbent upon us as symbolic beings comprises both suspicion and expectation. We are indeed to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Chapter 4

The hermeneutics of liberation theology: Appreciation and critique

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Introduction

The past seven decades have been characterised by a theology that grapples with the social relevance of Christian faith in an age of reconstruction after the devastation of colonialism, World War II and the vast development of technology, which altered the way of living of human beings dramatically. The influential theology and ethic of Bonhoeffer, aiming for a 'religionless Christianity', reverberated in post-war theological debates and challenged theologians to develop a theology for the marketplace: a theology that would speak effectively to the social ills of the modern world. On 21 July 1944, nearly a year before his execution, Bonhoeffer (2015) wrote from prison to his friend Bethge (cf. Vorster 2021:2):

> In the past few years or so I've come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. The Christian is not a homo religious, but simply a human being, in the same way that Jesus was a human being [...] I do not

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> mean the shallow and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the bustling, the comfortable, or the lascivious, but the profound this-worldliness that shows discipline and includes the ever-present knowledge of death and resurrection [...] I want to learn to have faith [...] I thought I myself could learn to have faith by trying to live something like a saintly life [...] Later on I discovered and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life. If one has completely renounced making something of oneself, whether it be a saint or a converted sinner or a church leader (a so-called priestly figure!), a just or a unjust person – a sick or a healthy person – then one throws oneself totally in the arms of God, and this is what I call this-worldliness: living fully in the midst of life's tasks, questions, successes and failures, and perplexities – then one takes seriously no longer one's own sufferings, but rather the suffering of God in the world. Then one stays awake with Christ in Gethsemane. And I think this is faith; this is metanoia, and this is how one becomes a human being, a Christian. (pp. 471–473)

His plea for a 'this-worldly theology' led to a vigorous and continuous debate in virtually all traditions in late-20th century Christian theology. This occurred in the context of a considerable number of thought-provoking contributions about the futures of Christianity and the role of the church in the world that have entered theological reflection. In 1965, Harvey Cox (1965) envisioned in his bestselling book at that time that the church and theology would have to deal with many unprecedented challenges at the end of the 20th century and the new millennium. In this era, all subsequent generations had to deal with newly emerging global moral issues and questions pertaining to reason, faith and justice. Since the publication of his book, there has been an increasing questioning in academic and public debates of basic aspects such as the existence of God, the plausibility of Christian faith, the Bible as a source of spirituality and morality and theology as a science, concomitant with the quest for understanding Scripture and applying Christian morality in this era of rapid changes; the latter has become the major issue in theology today. The post-war era has been termed as 'the secular age' in the seminal and thought-provoking contribution of Taylor (2007, 2010:404–416). Furthermore, already in 1991, Lyotard (1991, 2004:123–146) and his contemporaries, such as Cupitt (1999:218–232) raised the idea that Western society and scientific research had entered the age of the postmodernist condition, which challenged the positivist approach to knowledge and science, introducing the relativity of fixed truths and moral principles as well as the need for spirituality.

However, the idea of a new secular age was not uncontested. In an interview with the Roman Catholic cardinal Ratzinger in 2004, Habermas and Ratzinger (2005) defended the concept of the post-secular as a description of an emerging new interest in religion in the so-called secular Western society (see also Habermas 2008:17–29, 2010:15–23). His observation was later supported by well-founded empirical research done by Ziebertz and Riegel (2009:300) and the later studies of De Graaf (2013:26) and Becker (2013:40). Several scholars, such as Brown (2004:37), Van de Beek (2009) and Cliteur (2010:1), questioned the notion of an emerging secular or post-Christian age and

discerned it in the contemporary Western world a new sense of spirituality. They maintain that people have not departed from religion but were instead searching for new forms of spirituality and, in the Christian sphere, alternative ways to practice their faith outside traditional, formalised religion and churches. Whether the first decades of the new millennium should be described as a secular age, a post-Christian era, a period dominated by the postmodernist paradigm or a post-secular reality, the fact is that contemporary Christian faith is challenged by a changed and changing environment. Some people question faith, others seek alternative forms of spirituality and living faith and still others seek refuge in extremist fundamentalist traditions. But one question remains: the question of the social relevance of Christian churches in modern societies, where deep-rooted constant changes in thought, worldviews, patterns of reasoning, spirituality and morality are the order of the day.

The challenge of 'this-worldly' relevance has been taken up by liberation theology in its various disguises since the 1970s, and this potent development in post-war Christian theology invigorated many churches to become moral agents in the quest for the liberation of people suffering in oppressive environments and to side with the vulnerable and the poor in their quest for freedom, dignity and hope for a better life. Arguing from the proposition of the reality and plausibility of readers' context as a prerequisite in biblical interpretation, among others, liberation theologians introduced the hermeneutics of liberation, which became the point of departure in many modern-day trends in feminist theology, eco-theology and moral theology.

This chapter aims to appreciate and critique the hermeneutics of liberation from the perspective of a hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology as developed and altered in the classic Reformed tradition. This hermeneutics, which I explained in a recent study, can be defined as one that adheres to the following confessional presuppositions and subsequent methodology:[37]

37. See Vorster (2020). This article focusses on the question of whether a hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology, founded in the classical reformed tradition, can still be regarded as plausible and intelligible for doing theology and applying Christian ethics today. The central theoretical argument of the discussion is that a hermeneutic of congruent biblical theology in the abovementioned sense can still be plausible and intelligible under specific conditions. First and foremost: Scripture should be regarded as the written revelation (Word) of God, inspired by the Spirit of God, and as more than just an ancient text. This inspiration can be termed 'organic inspiration', because the Spirit inspired and used humans, within their cultural and socio-historical contexts, including their spiritual experiences, languages and expectations, to write the texts. Approaching Scripture in terms of this premise, interpreters should aim at understanding the text, read the text using the modern tools of lexicography and deal thoroughly with the cultural and socio-historical contexts of the ancient authors and the implications thereof. In this process, interpreters must be aware that they approach Scripture with various forms of pre-understandings of their own and should deal with these by way of the tools provided by the hermeneutical circle. Passages in Scripture must be analysed and interpreted considering the wholeness of Scripture and its congruent biblical theology. Furthermore, a 'hermeneutic of congruent biblical theology' can add value to biblical studies and new theological knowledge by considering findings in modern literary theories if these do not disregard the belief that Scripture is the inspired authoritative written Word of God. Finally, a hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology must function within the ambit of the Reformed dictum of *semper reformanda* – the quest for continuous revisiting and re-evaluation of the findings of biblical interpretation in the course of history.

- Scripture ought to be perceived as the written revelation (word) of God, inspired by the Spirit of God. It constitutes than just a compilation of ancient texts (Vorster 2020:12).
- This inspiration can be termed 'organic inspiration' because 'the Spirit inspired and used humans within the contexts of their cultural and socio-historical experiences, spiritual experiences, language and expectations to write the texts' (Vorster 2020:12). Scripture is the Word of God in the words of human beings who were living in different times and contexts.
- Interpreters approach Scripture 'with various forms of pre-understandings [*Vorverständnis*], and they ought to deal with these by way of the tools of the hermeneutical circle' (Vorster 2020:12).
- The deeper meaning of passages in Scripture comes to light when they are interpreted in view of the wholeness of Scripture and its congruent biblical theology.
- A hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology 'can add value to biblical studies and engender new theological knowledge by considering findings in modern literary theories as long as it does not contravene the belief that Scripture is the inspired, authoritative, written Word of God' (Vorster 2020:12).
- A hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology must function within the realm of *semper reformanda* [always to be reformed] – the continuous revisiting of past and current interpretation of Scripture (cf. Vorster 2020:12).

The central theoretical argument of this contribution can be formulated as follows: The hermeneutics of liberation theology introduces a plausible response to the neo-Marxist social analysis of systemic violence and oppression of vulnerable and marginalised people in contemporary societies. However, this hermeneutical approach to Scripture has not yet presented a viable and sustainable strategy of change that would respond adequately to the core characteristics of Christian moral theology. The structure of this chapter will unfold as follows: Firstly, neo-Marxist social analysis, which features as an important presupposition in the hermeneutics of liberation theology, will be analysed. Secondly, the idea of a reading of Scripture from a perspective informed by the context of systemic violence and oppression will be described and thirdly, the moral agency flowing from these premises will be outlined. The chapter will then engage in an evaluation of these core fixtures of the hermeneutics of liberation theology from the perspective of a hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology.

The neo-Marxist social analysis as a presupposition

Modern hermeneutical theories accentuate the important and inevitable role of pre-understandings when it comes to reading. Interpretation as a means of

research does not take place in a void. Researchers are influenced by their presuppositions, which are paradigm driven. This is also the case in terms of biblical interpretation. In another publication, this truism is formulated as follows: 'No reader approaches the Scripture without some form of a set of pre-understandings, referred to in German theological discussion as *Vorverständnis*' (cf. Vorster 2021:7). Spykman (1995:121) explains that the self is always involved in the process of interpretation. Exegetes can never escape themselves or turn themselves off. They all approach Scripture with a sense of anticipation. In studying Scripture, they all wear 'glasses' of one kind or another. The 'glasses' can amount to the influence of their cultural contexts, social positions, education and other formative and influencing factors that determine the reader's paradigm. The 'glasses' can be belief systems, theology and ideology. Osborne (2006:29) emphasises the pertinent role of the reader's context, because they often wish to harmonise the text with their belief systems and see its meaning in light of their preconceived theological systems (cf. Vorster 2021:8). The theological and ecclesiastical tradition of the reader brings about a certain expectation of what the text may reveal. Reading Scripture always amounts to a contextual reading, and interpretation and understanding are influenced by this context (cf. West 2014:2).

Liberation theology approaches the biblical text from the context of oppressed, poor and marginalised people in today's highly industrialised societies. In their attempt to understand and define a suitable readers' context, liberation theologians resorted to the social analysis of Marx, which was revisited and altered by the social critique of neo-Marxism. With a view to explaining the pattern of reasoning in the hermeneutics of liberation theology and its alliance with the neo-Marxist social analysis and strategy of change, I revisit the original primary sources that introduced and guided the argumentation in this school of thought.

In 1974, the Spanish theologian Fierro (1977) said in the Spanish edition of his book, which was published in English in 1977, that political theology:

> [/]s a theology operating under the sign of Marx, just as truly as scholasticism was a theology operating under the sign of Aristotle and liberal Protestant theology was one operating under the sign of Kant. (p. 80)

The social analysis of Marx is well known but became outdated in post-war Western Europe. Neo-Marxism revived this analysis and applied it to highly industrialised European democracies. The work of the French philosopher Herbert Marcuse was decidedly influential in this process and became a popular foundation for critique and action against Western European societies as well as societies where the remnants of oppressive colonial rule such as poverty, racism, violation of rights of women and other social disorders plagued humankind. Marcuse argued that the problem was not class differences per se, but the fact that modern societies became what he termed 'one-dimensional' societies without real opposition. Irrespective of democracy

and the inherent means for change that democracy offers, citizens are enslaved by the industrialising societies. The opposition within democracy is not real opposition, because 'it does not liberate the master or the slave' (Marcuse 1971:28). True freedom should be 'a liberation involving the mind and the body, liberation involving entire human existence' (Marcuse 1970:9). Modern affluent democracies could not offer this radical freedom.

Why? In answer to this question, Marcuse (cf. 1971) drew on the philosophy of Marx and Bloch as well as Freud's psychoanalytical theories to develop his neo-Marxist view of radical liberation and constant revolution to attain this goal.[38] He posited that humans are captured in body and mind within the machine of modern society. They are inhibited to live out all the deeper 'lusts' of being human. They do not really live but are lived by society. The totality of life is controlled by rules, codes, regulations and commerce, while science and religion are prominent actors in this total enslavement. The highly industrialised society is therefore inherently violent. This enslavement creates deep-rooted aggression and spills over in conflict and wars. The only way out is to destroy the agents of enslavement. Liberation can only be achieved when the agents of enslavement are subjected to constant change. When they become stagnant and protect themselves with violent institutional structures, total enslavement will result. Therefore, only constant change, which is revolutionary in nature, would free the master and the slave. Liberation is only possible in a changing society where structural stagnation and its inherent violence are prevented. The main task of all moral agents should be to destruct the violent, enslaving institutions and seek total liberation, which would enable humans to live their deeper 'lusts' instead of being lived by the fossilised systems of inherently oppressive codes. With this social analysis, Marcuse challenged moral agents with the duty of becoming revolutionaries in search of 'total liberation'. They can revert to violent means as a valid strategy of change because liberating violence must be counter-violence against the violence inherent in enslaving social structures, the latter as expressed by the codes of the system and the agents executing and protecting them. His plea for such a total revolutionary liberation of enslaved humans from fossilised social institutions was taken up by the 'New Left' movement among students in the late 1960s. By means of their violent protest and refusal to live any longer according to the codes of the systems, they not only toppled prominent political leaders but also changed the institutional character and face of education dramatically.

38. I have researched and analysed the views of Marcuse and his contemporaries in an earlier publication from the perspective of culture-philosophy. I explained his application of the social analyses of Marx and Bloch and the psychoanalysis of Freud to his own vision of radical revolution as the only means of the liberation of the 'one dimensional man' in the highly industrial affluent Western countries. Furthermore, I indicated how his ethics of liberation inspired the 'New Left' in the 1970s and the theology of Revolution that became a potent force in Africa and Latin America at that time. For this analysis, see Vorster (1981:233–267). Only the main features of his social analysis and strategy of change will be presented in this survey.

Ecumenical Christian theology, searching for meaning and relevance in the changing post-war global society, also reflected on the challenges posed by neo-Marxism and engaged in understanding Christian theology within the context of the 'enslaved people' as described by the social analysis of neo-Marxism. This interest was motivated by Shaull (1968:23–28; 1969). In a presentation before the 1966 conference arranged by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Shaull argued in favour of what he termed a 'theology of Revolution' which, in his opinion, could have been relevant and could have dealt with the social ills of the world at that time. Reminiscent to Marcuse, he blamed enslaving social structures driven by the industrial age as the cause of these social ills, including huge pockets of poverty, inequality, racism and systemic violence that plagued the world. This context inspired him to re-examine the core convictions of traditional theologies, starting with the notion of sin. He defined the biblical concept of 'sin' from the perspective of the philosophical neo-Marxist framework of enslavement. He maintained that sin and evil are not conditions inherent to the 'heart' of human beings but, instead, a phenomenon that lay and bred within enslaving and oppressive social structures. Sin was not spiritual but structural. Therefore, redemption also had to be structural. Redemption had to be liberation. The struggle against sin therefore had to be a struggle against violently enslaving social structures in pursuit of the liberation of enslaved people from their bondage in one-dimensional societies. These structures are evil because, as neo-Marxism posits, they are inherently violent and exert the violence protected and kept alive by the codes of the systems themselves. These structures cannot be Reformed as has frequently been claimed by traditional Christianity, because reformation only means an adjustment of the chains of bondage. The chains must be removed, and the only way to achieve this is by way of radical revolution as Marx proposed (Shaull 1969:183). The established order must be fundamentally and radically opposed. In this way alone, the master and the slave can be liberated. In his opinion, liberation from the sinfully oppressive and enslaving social structures by way of revolution is the central message of the Bible and should be the aim of Christianity in the post-war world. Christian theology is in essence a theology of liberation with the aim of undoing the structural sin of the modern world.

To justify this opinion, Shaull argued that the biblical survey of the histories of the people of God is a message of constant social change (Shaull & Oglesby 1969:202–203). The conduct of God's people was inspired by continuous promises of change and a call to revolution. Arguing from the premise of the 'Exodus-motif' as the central message of the Bible, he claims that theology can only be relevant when it becomes an agent for continuous radical and revolutionary social change. He preferred to speak of messianism instead of the exodus-motif. Messianism, as the call for revolutionary social change is, in his opinion, the core message of the Bible. Messianism is the foundation of hope because constant change of social environments feeds the expectations

of oppressed and enslaved people and nurture their vision of a better life. This messianism was expressed in the messages of the prophets in their fierce critiques against the enslaving status quo of their times and their calls for radical change and was furthered by Jesus in his constant challenges of the Jewish and Roman leadership in the Mediterranean culture. The message of Jesus was in essence a call for liberation of the poor and the marginalised. His concern was the plight of the poor and the promise of a new society, which he called the kingdom of God. Jesus was in the first place a prophet of social change and an agent of a new social order of equality and social justice. This social order was a new building that could only be built when the old building is demolished. In the emerging ecumenical theology since the 1970s, the social analysis of neo-Marxism became the 'glasses' for the contextual reading of the biblical text.

A new contextual reading of Scripture

Shaull's contextual reading of the Bible through the glasses of the social analysis of neo-Marxism inspired theologians, especially in Latin America and Africa, to resort to new forms of understanding and inspired the WCC to become an agent of social change. Gutierrez (1985) provided a seminal defence of this new contextual reading in his influential theology of liberation, which was initially published in Lima in 1971 and translated into many languages. His study became the catalyst of liberation theologies that have developed since. To understand the hermeneutics of liberation, this new contextual reading as proposed by Gutierrez must be briefly unpacked.

The quest for liberation of people from one-dimensional societies features in this hermeneutical theory as the presupposition or *Vorverständnis* in approaching the biblical text. Developing views about Scripture among liberation theologians have one prominent feature in common, and that is that any reading of biblical texts must have the idea of Exodus as their point of departure. Gutierrez (cf. 1985:155–157) explains that the essential meaning of creation, history and salvation becomes clear when the biblical text is read within the all-embracing and all-encompassing idea of exodus, which indicates God's constant movement of humanity out of bondage. The exodus-motif is the key for the understanding of the prominent themes in the Bible, such as creation, covenant, the kingdom of God and eschatology. These themes and others have the message of breaking with the past. Creation was God's act of breaking with chaos, the covenant is God's pact with humanity to break with inhumane power structures, the kingdom is a new condition of freedom, of being fully human and eschatology lies in the constant promises of the new future that can dawn when oppressed people break with the past.

Using this theory, the deeply rooted notions of traditional theology in Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodox Theology became susceptible to

political interpretation, including sin, redemption, grace, the church, morality and the future. Fierro (cf. 1977:222) discusses some examples of this re-grounding of the deeply rooted notions of traditional Christian theology. Sin is not perceived as spiritual and as a condition of the depraved human being, but rather as political, residing in the structures controlling people's lives and happiness. Salvation, then, is not the regeneration of the human being living under the yoke of original sin but political liberation in this time and age. In a similar vein, communion is not the formation of a new humanity under the reign of the exalted Christ, but brotherhood in continuous struggles for political liberation. One can add to these examples that of the re-grounding of eschatology. Over and against the traditional Christian view of the futurist-presentist reality of the kingdom of God, as explained by Bright (1973:7) and Küng (1992:56) in their influential publications, the new political interpretation proposes a merely presentist future: again, the new dawn of a society where enslaved and oppressed people become free to live without the chains of any form of bondage. The new, liberated society must be brought about and sustained by a praxis of constant revolutionary change socially and politically. Many more examples of the re-grounding of deep-rooted notions of traditional theology resulting from this new political theory of interpretation emerged as the hermeneutics of liberation took root.

From its inception in the 1970s, liberation theology embraced the notion of this contextual reading of the biblical text and chose to read and interpret it from the perspective of the oppressed, the poor and the marginalised. Over the past decades, the movement has diverged into many 'liberation theologies' in accordance with the many experiences of oppression and systemic violence that people endure. Apart from being a theology for the poor, the liberation paradigm also became a presupposition in modern feminist theology, eco-theology and other contextual theologies. This form of contextual Bible reading also initiated a new ethic, which can be defined as an ethic of liberation.

An ethic of liberation

The political theologies of the 1960s and 1970s, such as black theology, theology of revolution and theology of transformation eventually developed into a theology of liberation as a result of emphasis on structural liberation as the essence of the biblical message in these movements. These movements all confess God as the God who is on the side of the poor and the marginalised, the prophets as vocal agents for liberation of the oppressed and Jesus as the Liberator who opposed power structures of the rich and the powerful on behalf of the poor around their quest for human dignity and freedom. Jesus preached the message of concrete, structural liberation and visualised a kingdom where the oppressed would be free to be fully human. This new theology therefore calls on churches in modern times who are confronted by one-dimensional societies to follow in the footsteps of the prophets and Jesus

and pursue the cause of the liberation of oppressed people suffering under the power of systemic violence. From this point of view, the new theological paradigm introduced the ethics of liberation, which became a highly contentious topic in modern moral theology.

The new ethics of liberation re-assessed the traditional Christian moral code of prophecy, dialogue, reformation and peaceful opposition as the means for attaining change and proposed a new vision of violence as a justified means to reach a just end. The goal of Christian ethics was to attain an end where love could flourish. Any means could be utilised to reach this goal. The movement in other words resorted to the moral theory of consequentialism, which entails that the end justifies the means. All is well that ends well.

Based on Marcuse's work, Shaull (cf. 1968:23) justifies the use of violence as the means to achieve liberation from the one-dimensional society, because liberating violence amounts to counter-violence, which is therefore by definition less violent than the perennial systemic violence of the enslaving social structures with their total control of human life. He argues that, by its very nature, revolution implies a 'violation' of the old order in the name of the new. It requires a transcendent critique of the status quo and refusal to be captured by the system by taking part in the avenues of change offered by the system, and an attempt to overshoot the universe of discourse and action towards alternatives. Systems cannot be Reformed from within and should rather be overthrown in a revolutionary way. The goal of revolutionary change validates the means. His argument is a direct quotation from Marcuse's book about the 'One-dimensional man' (Shaull 1969:231). Constant social revolution, with the use of counter-violence, if necessary, is the essence of liberation and, in this way, Shaull, just as Marcuse, has given credence and plausibility to a new ethic that can be described as an ethic of liberation.

Shaull's theology of revolution made a huge impact on the search for relevance of ecumenical theology. In 1968, the WCC initiated its 'Programme to Combat Racism', which was driven by social analysis and the ethics of liberation of neo-Marxism (see World Council of Churches 1967, 1968, 1969:348, 1971:173). At the hand of the argument that the church should engage in the revolutionary struggle against systemic racism, the WCC called on churches to support the struggles of liberation movements worldwide, not only morally but also by financial means. Influential and prominent theologians at that time supported the social analysis of neo-Marxism and pled for a Christian ethic and spirituality of liberation that might include violence to bring down systemic racism, as reflected in the work of Sölle (1972), Gutierrez (1985:204), Camara (1974:13) and Cone (1975:217), all of whom focus on liberating- or redemptive violence.

The call for action within the paradigm of enslavement, liberation and revolutionary violence also reverberated in many 'Kairos' documents that saw

the light as a result of the emerging theology of liberation. West (2014) refers for instance to the:

> Kairos documents of Central America (1988), a coalition of countries including the Philippines, South Korea, Namibia, South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala (1989), Kenya (1991), Europe (1998), Zimbabwe (1998), India (2000), the United States of America (2007) and most recently from Palestine. (p. 1)

The Institute of Contextual Theology (1985) says the following about violence and nonviolence:

> The problem for the Church here is the way the word violence is being used in the propaganda of the State. The State and the media have chosen to call violence what some people do in the townships as they struggle for their liberation i.e. throwing stones, burning cars and buildings and sometimes killing collaborators. But this excludes the structural, institutional and unrepentant violence of the State and especially the oppressive and naked violence of the police and the army. These things are not counted as violence. And even when they are acknowledged to be 'excessive', they are called 'misconduct' or even 'atrocities' but never violence. Thus, the phrase 'Violence in the townships' comes to mean what the young people are doing and not what the police are doing or what apartheid in general is doing to people. If one calls for nonviolence in such circumstances one appears to be criticizing the resistance of the people while justifying or at least overlooking the violence of the police and the State. That is how it is understood not only by the State and its supporters but also by the people who are struggling for their freedom. Violence, especially in our circumstances, is a loaded word. (p. 18)

Furthermore, in the document concerned South African theologians asserted that (Institute of Contextual Theology 1985):

> [*T*]hroughout the biblical history, God appears as the liberator of the oppressed. He is not neutral. He does not attempt to reconcile Moses and Pharaoh, the Hebrew slaves with their Egyptian oppressors or the Jewish people with any of their later oppressors. (p. 25)

Theologically speaking, oppression is sin, and it cannot be compromised with, it must be done away with. The document (1985:25) claims that God takes sides with the oppressed and refers to Psalm 103:6 (JB): 'God who does what is right, is always on the side of the oppressed'. This identification with the oppressed is not confined to the Old Testament. The Kairos Document (Institute of Contextual Theology 1985) points out that:

> [*W*]hen Jesus stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth to announce his mission, he made use of the words of Isaiah: The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour (Lk 4:18–19). (p. 25)

According to the Kairos Document Institute of Contextual Theology 1985):

> There can be no doubt that Jesus was taking up the cause of the poor and the oppressed. God has identified Godself with their interests. Not that God is unconcerned about the rich and the oppressor. These God calls to repentance. The oppressed Christians of South Africa have long since known that they are united

> to Christ in their sufferings. By His own sufferings and His death on the cross, He became a victim of oppression and violence. (p. 25)

The Kairos Document challenged the churches in South Africa to act by becoming part of the total opposition to overthrow the system, which was deemed to be unreformable. The document also defined the moral agency of Christians as agents of structural liberation, recommending that they support all forms of civil disobedience. While not inciting people to violence, the document certainly provided tacit support for violence as a justifiable strategy to attain liberation.

The hermeneutical theory of liberation theology became an important and influential theme in modern biblical understanding. Based on the premises of neo-Marxist social analysis, this theory initiated a considerable number of public theologies that addressed particular social issues in modern societies. The theory offered a new biblical perspective on all forms of human suffering. Initially, it was used to shed light on political structures of oppression, but it swiftly turned the focus on all forms of enslavement caused by systemic violence. The theory raised new interest in the predicament of women and the violation of their dignity, not only in patriarchal systems but also in well-developed democracies and macro-financial institutions. It opened vital discussions about sexuality in all its forms and called for liberation from traditional bondages. The theory also justified the use of liberating violence as a strategy of change when the moral agent was faced with oppressive structures. How should the core features of the hermeneutical theory and subsequent moral agency flowing from this theory be evaluated? In the section 'The importance and limitation of context', the theory will be appreciated and critiqued from the perspective of a hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology, as briefly explained.

The importance and limitation of context

Contemporary scholars in biblical hermeneutics generally concur that interpretation of a text takes place from within the perspective of a certain context: the context of the reader. The context of the reader determines the interpretation of the text just as much as the context of the author. The reader approaches the text with certain expectations and certain questions and seeks answers or even justification for preconceived ideas. The notion of the importance of 'reader context' in biblical hermeneutics resulted from new literary theories of contemporary philosophers. Theorists such as Gadamer (1975), Ricoeur (1981a, 1981b) and Derrida (1997, 2004) make a case for the ambiguousness of any notion of objectivity in the pursuance of truth, whether the latter claims the existence of an 'objective truth' or the neutrality of the ancient author or the modern reader. Some of the new literary theories propose a deconstruction of the text, that is, a reading against what appears

to be the text's main grain, because the text does not mean what it appears to, and nothing ultimately means what it seems to say at first. When reading the biblical text as an ancient text, the reader must be aware of the fact that the biblical text is an interpretation of an interpretation and must therefore approach it with a sense of scepticism, known as the hermeneutics of suspicion.[39] These hermeneutical theories inspired biblical scientists to apply various new literary theories to the interpretation of the biblical text and to question traditional doctrines about the notion of 'biblical truth' and the divine authority and inspiration of Scripture.

A hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology departs from the belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture and its authority for faith and life. Scripture provides a congruent biblical theology, and the text should be interpreted within the context of the whole. This theology, also defined in the past as salvation-, revelation- or covenantal history or simply biblical theology, is employed when the text under scrutiny is interpreted 'by way of the tools of the science of text-criticism and redaction criticism' (Vorster 2021:9). Secondly (Vorster 2021; cf. Van der Belt 2006:328):

> [*T*]he grammatical structure can be analysed within the historical context, and the meaning of the unit of thought in the text can be excavated by using the tools of lexicography. (p. 9)

But the influence of the context of the reader can nonetheless not be ignored. Theologians in the classic Reformed tradition will for example approach the text from the presupposition of their confessional standards. The same goes for Pentecostal theologians and scholars approaching the biblical text from other theological traditions. The question is thus not *if* the context of the reader is important, but *how* the interpreter should deal with it.

In this respect the following steps can be considered: Firstly, readers can acknowledge the fact of their pre-understandings, identify their presuppositions and affirm them in the process of deeper understanding. But they should also be aware of the fact that readers reading from other contexts may come to other valid understandings. Secondly, as Gadamer (1975:258ff.) proposes, interpreters can pose questions to the text based on the angle of their respective contexts and pre-understandings. In this way, the thought world of the text opens itself up, and the dialogue that follows reshapes the questions of the interpreter. A 'fusion of horizons' (the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text) emerges and flows into a valid interpretation. Thirdly, the findings of other readings, driven by the presuppositions of other paradigms, could be perused and compared with one's own, because biblical interpretation

39. The concept 'hermeneutics of suspicion' is attributed to the philosophy of Ricoeur. Thiselton (2009:228–254) explains and argues the hermeneutics of Ricoeur in a constructive way, with references to other exponents and critics of Ricoeur's plea for suspicion of the speech of the ancient biblical author which is a speech of another behind the author.

is a collective and ecumenical endeavour, as we are reminded by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:16–19.[40] Furthermore, the 'universal basis of language' (cf. Vorster 2021:8) brings readers closer to each other. Other interpretations of readers driven by other paradigms, while dealing with the same text, can become a corrective of our own reading and interpretation, and in this way the influence of pre-understandings can be managed. In sum, the tools of the hermeneutical circle should be utilised in dealing with pre-understandings. These are: affirm the pre-understandings, engage in the reading, compare the interpretation with other paradigm-driven interpretations, and then revisit and, if necessary, rectify the determinants of one's own pre-understandings.

The contextual reading of Scripture as proposed by liberation theology is valid, but the question arises whether interpreters in this tradition are willing to shape their interpretations by comparing them with traditional biblical interpretations. Are theologians in this new tradition willing to revisit and rectify the determinants of their own pre-understandings? A number of categorical statements of liberation theologians do not reflect such a willingness, and this attitude is highly problematic because disregarding tradition and other interpretations impede the process of understanding. A good example of such one-sidedness is the statement of Boesak (1978) that:

> [*T*]he theology of liberation believes that liberation is not only 'part of' the gospel, or 'consistent with' the gospel; it is the content and framework of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Born in the community of the black oppressed, it believes that in Jesus Christ the total liberation of all people has come. (p. 9ff.)

The same one-sidedness can be discerned in a recent article by Gathogo (2015) about reconstructive hermeneutics in African Christology.

To elevate the liberation approach in such a way, namely as the sole option of reading, may lead to the same one-sided understanding of Scripture that liberation theologians correctly discern in other interpretations. If a Christology of liberation is the only plausible paradigm for doing theology today, what then is the difference from other partisan theologies that saw the light in other political contexts such as the 'God-with-us' theologies of the Puritans in their colonial endeavours, Nazi-theology in Germany and Christian nationalism in South Africa (cf. J.M. Vorster 2019)? These theologies all viewed a certain context as a plausible lenticle to design what interpreters in these patterns of reasoning perceived as plausible pre-understandings. The errors of these theologies were the result of their negation of other perspectives, and this attitude guided them to the construction of partisan theologies. The hermeneutics of liberation theology can lead to the same sort of erroneous

40. 'I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17]so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, [18]may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19]and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God' (Eph 3:16–19).

interpretation and the establishment of yet another partisan theology. To be an active and plausible participant in contemporary hermeneutical discourses, liberation theology should engage with other readings, traditional and present and other contexts, and be willing to revisit its own premises, while refraining from constructing just another dangerous partisan theology.

The plausibility of the neo-Marxist social analysis as a presupposition

However, the utilisation of the neo-Marxist social analysis as a plausible context for biblical interpretation can be regarded as a valuable contribution by the liberationist theory of hermeneutics. What Marcuse and his contemporaries said about the enslavement of people in highly industrialised societies in the Communist regimes in that time as well as Western democracies is even more true of the world today under the force of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Schwab (2016), leader and founder, of the prestigious World Economic Forum comments:

> We stand on the brink of a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before. We do not yet know just how it will unfold, but one thing is clear: the response to it must be integrated and comprehensive, involving all stakeholders of the global polity, from the public and private sectors to academia and civil society. (p. 1)

One aspect of the revolution that should be highlighted is the huge flow of information even to countries with underdeveloped infrastructure. Electronic equipment and the free access of these, even in remote societies, make information of all kinds accessible to people in virtually all corners of the world. This flow of information has many positive results utilised in the fields of economic development, education, research and so on. It indeed has a liberating effect, because abuses of people by institutions cannot be hidden as before. The mobile phone and the Internet have become the most profound enemy of dictators and abusive systems because atrocities can be revealed to the whole world in minutes. The recent Black Lives Matter global protest about police brutality in the United States is a good example of how the potent stream of information can cause a global outcry. The 4IR indeed offers people today many avenues for development, liberty and the promotion of environments for human dignity and human rights to prosper.

It is evident that the enslavement of one-dimensional social structures, as defined by neo-Marxism in the post-war world, has not disappeared. It can even be argued that this enslavement is re-appearing in a new and dangerous form. With the positives of the growing stream of information comes the imminent danger of disinformation with the aim of manipulating people to adopt beliefs and take actions that can be inhuman and destructive. Social media has become a popular tool to spread and share information that could be uncontrolled,

incorrect and untrue. The effective way in which these media are employed in electioneering campaigns proves its efficiency around manipulating people. But the extreme freedom of social media opens the door for disinformation, which can take the form of conspiracy theories, promotion of pseudo-science, justification of destructive actions and fraudulent exploitation of people in the fields of economics and business. Up to the present, sound ethical guiding of social media with the aim of containing disinformation and its destructive effects has not yet been developed and effectively applied.

Disinformation creates a new one-dimensional society where people can be enslaved anew and manipulated by the system. They then also do not live freely but are lived by constructs rooted in untruths. Liberation theology's contextual reading of Scripture from the premise of the oppressive, one-dimensional society is therefore again proven to be highly relevant and enlightening. Systemic violence is still a potent characteristic of modern societies and can spill over into racism, xenophobia, sexism, police brutality and hate speech. Manipulation by way of a constant flow of disinformation by social media adds a new dimension to the one-dimensional society. The challenge of liberation theology in its various forms today will be to engage with the other contextual readings of Scripture not only to offer this contribution to theological dialogue but also to shape and enrich it with the insights of other contextual readings of Scripture in our time. Liberation theologians could be more accommodating of other lenticles that are used when it comes to understanding and to preaching Scripture.

However, the reading of Scripture through the lenticles of the neo-Marxist social analysis in liberation theology also accommodates the neo-Marxist strategy of change and presents an ethic founded in the moral theory of consequentialism. This aspect of the hermeneutics of liberation theology raises one or two serious questions in terms of the perspective of a hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology.

Critical reflection on the ethics of liberation

Liberation theology's idea of sin as solely a structural phenomenon can be questioned. The ideas of original sin in traditional theology have one cardinal belief in common, and that is that sin situates in the heart of the human being. David laments his iniquity in Psalm 51 with the words: 'Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me' (Ps 51:5). Another *locus classicus* [classical place] in Scripture around the personal character of sin is Paul's teaching about the human condition, where he teaches as follows with reference to several passages in the Old Testament (Rm 3):

> As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one[11]; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.[12] All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.[13] Their

> throats are open graves, their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.[14] Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.[15] Their feet are swift to shed blood[16]; ruin and misery mark their ways,[17] and the way of peace they do not know. [18] There is no fear of God before their eyes. (vv. 10–18)

Sin is located in the human heart and mind, and deeply upsets human life and human endeavours. Given this basic human condition, evil pervades all areas of human conduct, including the formation of evil ideologies and subsequent structures. Due to sin, creation became a 'kingdom of evil' under the 'prince of this world' (Jn 12:31) and the battle ground of the 'battle of darkness against light' (Jn 1:7–14). In his recent contribution to theological anthropology, Schwarz (2013:215–232) explains how this concept appeared as a prominent feature in traditional harmatology, specifically in the teachings of Augustine, Luther, Kant, Ritschl, Rauschenbusch, Niebuhr, Barth, Tillich and Pannenberg. In his thorough explanation and evaluation of the anthropology of Calvin, Nico Vorster (2019:33–58) demonstrates that Calvin described sin and evil as inherent to the human condition. Over and against these traditional views of sin, the emphasis in liberation theology is not on the experience of the sins of the individual or on the 'interior side of humanity', but on the socio-political and economic dimension of sin and the concomitant concrete historical socio-cultural context (Schwarz 2013:254). This shift from emphasis on sin as primary to the human condition, to sin as primarily a social condition, is not convincing when the idea is evaluated within the framework of a congruent biblical theology and the perspectives of the Christian tradition. Furthermore, this shift has serious consequences for the theological understanding of redemption as well as the scope and intention of Christian morality.

A further important consideration around this is: when theology departs from the concept of structural sin, the logical consequence will be that redemption in Christ must also be political in essence. Liberation theology is consistent in this respect. Since sin is structural, redemption ought to be structural, and this theological premise sheds new light on Christology, pneumatology and eschatology. Therefore, liberation theology shifts the focus from Jesus the Christ to Jesus the Liberator, the champion of the poor, the revolutionary against the oppressive socio-political structures of his time and, in fact, the model of a freedom fighter. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of freedom, which will enhance the passion for freedom and the eschatology of the new reality that emerges where the poor and oppressed are liberated from the bondage of oppressive systems. As said earlier, liberation theology can be lauded for its call to Christian faith to address the plight of the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised, to become a faith for the marketplace that speaks to oppression and offers concrete solutions. The call for a theology that is not only spiritual, but public can be welcomed, and rightly emphasises that Christianity cannot be non-committal when it comes to real, effective and deep-rooted social change on behalf of the poor. But the concomitant drastic deviation from the well-developed and founded perspectives of traditional

Christology, pneumatology and eschatology, with their various historical nuances, is not convincing when viewed from the perspective of congruent biblical theology and the Christian tradition. However, the concern of liberation theology for the plight of the poor has revived interest in the social dimension of Christian faith and inspired theologians to link traditional theological concepts with the public role that Christian theology could play today. In this respect, the contributions of Tanner (2005), Moltmann (1990, 2012), Van de Beek (2012) and Welker (2013), among others, are useful and illuminating. They offer theological perspectives on social change that flows from the Christian tradition but also take the valid concerns of liberation theology seriously.

A further point of critique I would raise is liberation theology's concept of Christian moral agency that flows from its perspective on sin, Christology, pneumatology and eschatology. The fact that Christians should be actively socially involved in the promotion of peace, human dignity and human rights is no longer in question within contemporary Christian theology. Partly due to the contribution of liberation theology, theological ethics moved beyond the traditional notion that faith is 'spiritual' and should only function as a guide for a life of piety and holiness. Faith has a clear social dimension, and Christian moral agency encompasses the totality of human life. Virtually all contemporary theological traditions in one way or the other emphasise the idea that the moral agency of churches and Christians should include socio-political concern on behalf of the poor and the vulnerable. Churches are called to act as 'watchdogs' that must raise the attention of society when the rights of people are violated. They should act as the uncompromised prophetic voice of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised when the politics and economy of the day do not take the plight of the poor to heart. The question is thus not *if* Christian moral agency includes socio-political concern, but *how* this concern should manifest in social action.

Liberation theology opted for the neo-Marxist strategy of change. Because sin is located in socio-political structures and manifests in oppressive violence by way of the enslaving rules and codes of the system, in this view, revolutionary change is the only viable and effective strategy of change. It is allowed that revolutionary change be violent because it merely embodies a reaction against the violence of the system. Violence that liberates is thus justified by the violence that oppresses (Banana 1981:52; Camara 1974:143). Using this consequentialist moral theory, liberation theology condones the use of violence as part of Christian moral agency. Consequently, liberation theologians have been supporting violence and romanticised the violence committed by liberation movements in their struggles for freedom and new dispensations. On the back of this moral theory, a considerable number of churches supported the cause of liberating violence morally and financially.

Liberation theology correctly points to the social critique of the Old Testament prophets and the call of Jesus to prioritise the poor as well as his

instructions to his followers to follow suit. Their call on churches today to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in this regard is commendable and acts as a wake-up call for Christians and churches to be socially involved. But the argument that the neo-Marxist strategy of change can be clothed in a Christian garb is less convincing. Christian prophecy clearly has a social dimension, and Christian moral agency should address the one-dimensional structures with their systemic violence but does this justify the use of violence?

To my mind, romanticising violence that liberates, distorts the biblical call of Christians to be kings, prophets and priests in society. Welker (2013:244ff.) reminds us of the threefold gestalt of the reign of Christ in the life of the pre-easter Jesus and the post-easter exalted Christ, and how this threefold office of Christ spills over to the church in its journey through human history. His study, which stems from the theory of congruent biblical theology, can rejuvenate a biblical Christology and offers a plausible social programme for today's world. As kings, Christians proclaim the reign of Christ, as prophets they call on the powers and the subjects to realise the morality of his reign in all spheres of life and as priests and, as servants, they could be in service of the poor and the marginalised. The execution of this programme is driven by two biblical concepts, namely prophecy and servanthood.

In the biblical revelation, prophecy was aimed at reminding the people of God of his encompassing transforming reign with the goal of restoring creation. God's reign is indeed liberating, and the constant promise of renewal should be the foundation of people's faith and hope. The messianic theme runs through the teachings of the prophets in the Old Testament and the laws, and the rituals of Israel convey the message of the coming Messiah who will 'bring the reign of God near' and will teach people what the present reign will entail. The cross and resurrection of Christ subdue the forces of evil and its enslaving grip on the creation and introduce the outline of the new creation. In accordance with this outline, the followers of Christ are called on to pursue the reign of God and its justice. This pursuit entails a holy life, but also the constant call for justice. The prophetic voice of Jesus and his followers is always non-violent and functions within the ambit of the love of God and the neighbour – even the enemy. Jesus criticised the rich who exploited the poor in strong terms but never campaigned for the violent destruction of oppressive systems. The prophetic voice is a dialogue that discloses all forms of evil and calls for justice and love. The church, as the spearhead of the reign of God walking in the footsteps of Christ, therefore ought to be the prophetic voice of love and justice in the world on the way to the eschatological future. To be a true prophet is challenging, though, because prophetic testimony can easily be compromised by ideologies, quietism and lovelessness – and the temptation to resort to violence. Liberation theology's implementation of the neo-Marxist strategy has the ring of such an ideological compromise. In the end, it runs against the core characteristic of true prophecy, namely constant dialogue in the spirit of love and the aim of changing the attitude of the perpetrator.

The followers of Jesus are called on to imitate the attitude of Christ. Servanthood is at the core of this attitude. The oldest hymn in the New Testament founds the motivation for all Christian moral agency in the example of Christ. Philippians 2 reads:

> [5]In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus[6]: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; [7]rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.[8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! [9] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that Is above every name [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,[11] and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (vv. 5–11)

Servanthood defines the attitude of the follower of Jesus and that includes willingness to struggle for a good cause (Bonhoeffer 1995:6ff.).

The ethical implications of Christ's act of servanthood are radical. It implies that Christians, as servants of Christ and the reign of God, must treat people as Christ treats them. They should reflect and project his truthfulness, love, peace and goodwill in their struggle against unjust social structures and they must promote peace, love and goodwill. Christ was a servant and not a soldier. In the same way, Christians must be peacemakers. To be a servant of Christ is to stand with him in his rejection of all forms of injustice, exploitation of the poor and vulnerable, thus honouring his call for human dignity, compassion and a flourishing life. The church should be the prophetic voice of Christ, the servant to humanity and the example of how people can live with each other in love and peace. In the execution of this calling, the fist and the sword have no place.

Liberation theology's romanticising of a violence that liberates runs against the core values of the reign of Christ and the essence of Christian moral agency. It calls for the prophet and the servant to become warriors and soldiers. It turns the cross into the fist and the ploughshare into the sword.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to appreciate and critique the hermeneutics of liberation from the perspective of a hermeneutics of congruent biblical theology, the latter as developed and altered by the classical Reformed tradition. The central theoretical argument of this contribution is that the hermeneutics of liberation theology introduces a plausible reader's context that utilises the neo-Marxist social analysis with its analysis of systemic violence and oppression of vulnerable and marginalised people in contemporary societies. However, this hermeneutical approach to Scripture has not presented, up to the present, a viable and sustainable strategy of

change that adequately corresponds to the core characteristics of Christian moral theology.

I argue that the hermeneutical theory of liberation theology has become an important and influential theme in modern biblical understanding. Based on the premise of neo-Marxist social analysis, this theory initiated many public theologies that addressed particular social issues in modern societies. The theory offered a new biblical perspective on all forms of human suffering. Initially, it was used to shed light on political structures of oppression but swiftly turned the focus on all forms of enslavement caused by systemic violence. The theory raised new interest in the predicament of women and the violation of their dignity, not only in patriarchal systems but also in well-developed democracies and macro-financial institutions. It opened vital discussions about sexuality in all its forms and called for liberation from traditional bondages. This contribution of the hermeneutics of liberation theology can be commended and could be an important tool for understanding and guiding Christian moral agency in contemporary forms of systemic violence.

But liberation theology's deviation from and reduction of the well developed and founded perspectives of traditional Christology, pneumatology and eschatology, with their various historical nuances, are not convincing when viewed from the perspective of congruent biblical theology and the Christian tradition. The reduction of sin to merely a political phenomenon and redemption as political liberation narrows Christian theology to just another political programme and limits the comprehensive character of biblical soteriology and the work of God's Spirit.

Furthermore, this hermeneutical theory's justification of the use of liberating violence as a legitimate tool to serve a good end, even as founded in the neo-Marxist strategy of change, can be questioned. The romanticising of violence that liberates when the moral agent is faced with oppressive structures contradicts the core values of the reign of Christ and the essence of Christian moral agency. Contrary to the biblical idea of the great commandment of unlimited love, it calls for the prophet and the servant to become instead the warrior and the soldier. As indicated, it turns the cross into the fist and the ploughshare into the sword. To my mind, a Christian moral agency that condones and promotes violence contradicts the core principles of the biblical call of love. Therefore, other avenues of Christian moral agency aiming at socio-political and ecological justice and peace ought to be investigated. The Christian tradition and other contemporary Christian voices can assist us in this endeavour.

Chapter 5

Postcolonial hermeneutics

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Introduction

Postcolonial biblical criticism constitutes an approach to biblical hermeneutics that has gained momentum in the 21st century. The main question that this chapter asks is: How does one evaluate postcolonial biblical criticism? In order to address this problem, it has to be asked (1) how a postcolonial hermeneutic[41] relates to the way in which the definition of hermeneutics has changed over the years and (2) what exactly is understood under the concept of postcolonial biblical criticism. After the above two questions are addressed, some examples of postcolonial biblical criticism will be discussed in order to demonstrate some of the underlying agendas and goals of such a hermeneutical practice. Consequently, an evaluation of postcolonial criticism will follow. As a last step, some general hermeneutical principles will be proposed for future biblical hermeneutics, especially in a South African context.

41. While the concept of 'postcolonial hermeneutics' points to a specific hermeneutical approach and 'postcolonial biblical criticism' points to the application of such an approach in interpreting the Bible, in this chapter these concepts will be used more or less interchangeably.

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A shift in the definition of hermeneutics

As discussed in more depth elsewhere (Du Toit 2016b), the definition of hermeneutics has shifted significantly during the course of the past 60 years or so (Thomas 2002). At the end of the 19th century, the tendency existed to distinguish hermeneutics from application and other biblical disciplines (e.g. Terry 1890:18–22). In other words, in discerning the grammatical-historical sense of a passage of Scripture, the language and context would be provided to make a legitimate application (Terry 1980:470). This tendency was still detectable with biblical scholars in the late 1960s and early 1970s (e.g. Hirsch 1967:8; Ramm 1970:113). Eric Donald Hirsch (1967:8), a literary critic who engaged in hermeneutical theory in the 1960s, argued that the text represents the author's meaning, which he distinguished from a contemporary interpreter's meaning that is drawn from the text. He distinguished between *meaning*, which denotes an author's intention, and *significance,* which signifies the relationship between that meaning and a person, conception, situation or anything imaginable.

Yet, the definition of hermeneutics was significantly influenced by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960, 1989:307–308), who argued that a text's application is integral to its understanding. Understanding was thus fused with application. Gadamer (1989:305, 341, 370, 475) contended that the interpretation of a text involves a fusion of horizons of history and the interpreter, or conveys a dialogue between tradition and interpreter. One of the most influential scholars in the field of theological hermeneutics is probably the Anglican scholar Anthony Thiselton (1980, 1992), who had much influence in the evangelical world. He based much of his work on Gadamer's idea of the fusion of horizons. For Thiselton, the meaning of the text is not self-evident but involves a process of dialogue or fusion between the horizons of the interpreter and the text, in which the question of how the Bible can speak anew within a contemporary context, is central. In Thiselton's view, human subjectivity in hermeneutics is embraced and hermeneutics is thus understood as inherently fallible. Thiselton thus 'rejects the notion that one can discern the meaning of the text independently of the process of fusion' (Harris 1998:291). According to Thomas (2002:18), Thiselton 'transformed the search for propositional truth into a search for subjective human bias'. This shift in the definition of hermeneutics, which involves the fusion of the horizons of the text and the interpreter, has become part of the standard definition of biblical hermeneutics for many if not most biblical scholars (e.g. Bauer & Traina 2011:45, 249; Fee & Stuart 2014:38; McCartney & Clayton 1994:78; Nida & Reyburn 1981:30; Osborne 2006:21).

Another way of looking at the shift in the definition of hermeneutics is to notice that the concept of hermeneutics has moved from a more text-oriented endeavour to a more reader-oriented endeavour. Within the field of biblical hermeneutics, one such a hermeneutic is the so-called 'New Hermeneutics',

which was developed by Ernst Fuchs (1963, 1968) and Gerhard Ebeling (1960:319–348, 1965, 1969:99–120, 1995:209–225). Although their approaches are not identical, they show a high degree of similarity, drawing from much of the philosophical work of both Gadamer (1960) and Martin Heidegger (1959). In 'New Hermeneutics', Scripture is not equated with God's Word. God's Word is seen as the original speech act behind the text, which has to be repeated or re-enacted when the reader reads the text. The hermeneutist is thus not the primary subject of the text, but its primary object. The idea of such a word event is seen as an ontological and epistemological primal category. The Word is thus primarily understood as an address and as an act of communication from one person to another (see Dekker 2018:106–114). As can be imagined, such an approach provides room for a plethora of different meanings and applications of a text, in which all meanings would be legitimate and have an equal footing. The result is that the church lost a sense of authority from the text (Kaiser & Silva 2007:34).

In reader-oriented hermeneutics, the context, interests and ideology of the reader are the most important factors in determining meaning and its application. Postcolonial hermeneutics can be seen as one of many reader-oriented and ideological hermeneutical approaches. Other related approaches include liberation theology, feminist biblical criticism and gender-critical hermeneutics, queer theory, masculinity studies, autobiographical criticism and cultural hermeneutics (Porter & Robinson 2011:287; cf. Davies 2013:6, 12; Punt 2015:3, 29).

From yet another perspective, the shift in the definition of hermeneutics coheres with a movement away from structuralism, which communicates meaning, towards post-structuralism in which the reader creates meaning (Osborne 2006:474; cf. Pears 2010:135; Porter & Robinson 2011:287; Runesson 2010:30–32; Punt 2015:1, 14, 18; Sugirtharajah 2012:11). In this approach, the 'original readers are bracketed, and the interpreter speaks only of the "implied author" and the "implied reader"' (Osborne 2006:475). Although postcolonialism also coheres with postmodernism to an extent (Pears 2010:135; Runesson 2010:30), it is different from postmodernism in that it contains both a dismantling and constructive energy (Hutcheon 1991:183), which involves 'a theory of social change' (Punt 2015:15) as well as the notion 'to speak truth to power' (Warrior 1996:209) in a world that suffers from the colonial aftermath.

What is a postcolonial hermeneutic?

One of the most important characteristics of postcolonial hermeneutics is that it is not a methodology as such but rather a certain kind of ideology criticism (Davies 2013:21, 61; Punt 2015:2, 11, 13, 22; cf. Moore 2006:7), constituting a certain focus and purpose. Neither does postcolonial hermeneutics comprise a singular or monolithic approach (Punt 2015:2). In other words, it does not add to the proliferation of hermeneutical or exegetical methods, but although some

methodologies are avoided for its imperialist stances, it relies on a variety of different methodologies (Punt 2015:13–14; cf. Sugirtharajah 2012:11). In respect of the focus and purpose of postcolonial biblical criticism, it goes beyond ideology criticism 'in that it specifically addresses the silencing of the Other through the colonial strategy of posing the colonised as the inverse of the coloniser', which is intimately related with the vilification of the 'Other', which, in turn, results from the 'structures of political power and ideology, economic structures and practices, and socio-cultural configurations and experiences' (Punt 2015:22; cf. Sugirtharajah 2002:545, 2012:53). Anna Runesson (2010) describes the colonising practice of 'othering' such as that:

> [*T*]he colonised are often described as weak, lazy, sensitive, intuitive, superstitious, and in need of protection (and education). The colonisers, on the other hand, are described as strong, they think logically, they are intelligent, have a (superior) belief in the Christ, and see their mission as protecting and 'saving' the colonised. (p. 11)

In other words, in postcolonial criticism, traditional (Western) Christian mission is understood as mostly a colonising endeavour.

Similar to feminist criticism or gender criticism that promotes the flourishing of historically marginalised persons on the basis of gender, by critically engaging the text, postcolonial criticism follows a liberationist agenda in promoting the flourishing of historically marginalised and colonised persons on the basis of geopolitical hierarchies (Spencer 2012:56; cf. Moore 2006:14–16; Pears 2010:133). Although the term 'postcolonial' is used as a qualifying term in studies of colonial history, as a temporal or spatial point of reference (or both), postcolonial theory engages imperialism and hegemony. Postcolonial criticism thus engages the complex aftermath of colonialism and theorise without excluding the colonial itself (Punt 2015:11).

Postcolonial biblical criticism involves a kind of epistemological critique that tends to criticise Western civilisation, universalism and Eurocentrism. In the latter aspects, it coheres with both poststructuralism and Marxism. Poststructuralist theory perceives Western domination to be a harmful association between power and knowledge (Punt 2015:18), and in Gandhi's (1998:25–26) words, it aims 'to diagnose the material effects and implications of colonialism as an epistemological malaise at the heart of Western rationality' (cf. Sugirtharajih 2012:10). As an example, from a postcolonial perspective, the scholarly methods used within New Testament studies are perceived to be 'part of an epistemological colonialism and neocolonialism'.[42] As '[h]aving their roots in Western rationalistic enlightenment, such methods belong to the

42. Since neocolonialism is a consequence of colonialism, it can be seen as part of postcoloniality. Neocolonial influences originate from former colonial centres. Neocolonialism is thus a form of 'economic colonialism' in that it is fuelled by the present economic system, which in turn received its structure from the colonial period. The term 'neocolonialism' is often used instead of 'postcolonialism' in order to emphasise that today's situation is not a 'post'-situation, but an ongoing colonial reality, for example having huge international loans in order to create a sustainable economy (Runesson 2010:25–26).

episteme-embedded discourses that were part of (the cultural aspects of) the colonial enterprise' (Runesson 2010:23). It has to be noted at this point that all academic disciplines exist on the foundation of a specific episteme. An episteme can be described as the web that surrounds and connects different discourses from different cultures into one system. In other words, an episteme is composed of the components that determine what knowledge is during a historical period. If an episteme is shaped by colonialism, the various discourses will be influenced by colonialism (Runesson 2010:33–35, 38).

One of the main features of postcolonial criticism is that it critiques and resists an empire or an imperial rule. It uncovers colonial domination in all forms and opposes imperial assumptions and ideologies. It includes strategies for resisting empire, exploring alternative positions and practices, and it fosters the liberation of interdependence between nations, races, genders, economics and cultures (Davies 2013:82; Dube 1996:38; Punt 2015:19; Sugirtharajah 2012:46–47). In this regard, there is a way in which postcolonial hermeneutics highlights the acquisition and propagating of a new or different identity that is based on interdependence and transformation. It realises and even embraces the importance of hybridity and liminality, which goes beyond essentialism and (colonial) dichotomies (Punt 2015:27–28; Sugirtharajah 2002:542–543; cf. Runesson 2010:20–21).

Postcolonial biblical criticism occupies itself with the rethinking of (traditional) biblical interpretation, which is characterised by the effects of colonialism, influences of globalisation, forms of neocolonialsm, the devaluing and commercialisation of human life and ongoing violent and armed conflicts (Punt 2015:1). In this process of rethinking, a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of retrieval or restoration is utilised. Yet, it is not only the past that is lamented, but as a reading strategy, it 'allows for other voices from the text' and for voices 'from other, marginalised contexts, ancient and more recent, to surface'. It could thus be described as a project to 'rewrite and correct' (Punt 2015:5).

In respect of perceiving the biblical narrative(s), there is a way in which postcolonial approaches criticise the Bible 'as a colonial document' in asserting that 'colonialism dominates and determines the interest of biblical texts' (Sugirtharajah 1998a:19). This dimension inevitably means that part of a postcolonial agenda is to review the authoritative status of the Bible.[43] More specifically, postcolonial biblical criticism perceives both the formation of the biblical texts and the canon as an imperialist construct and thus as a product of the dominant or dominating interests of the time (Punt 2015:33–34). As a kind of ideology critique, postcolonial hermeneutics is not so much concerned with the truth of the text, but the text's promotion of colonial ideology

43. See, for example, Sugirtharajah (2012:82) who views the Gospel of Mark as 'irredeemably patriarchal' and as 'no longer authoritative'.

(Sugirtharajah 1998b:19). For Punt (2015:34), the usefulness of the Bible 'on the African continent where the Bible is still highly valued for many reasons, becomes a concern'.

New Testament postcolonial criticism

Generally speaking, New Testament Postcolonial criticism originates from within the field of New Testament studies itself, especially with scholars that became aware of their own marginalised, postcolonial position. Yet, as an academic discipline, it is not located in the margins, but in the centre, involving the renewal of exegetical approaches. Postcolonial criticism constitutes one of the most recent approaches in New Testament exegesis. It criticises European epistemology and the methods used in historical critical research, and it questions positivistic truth claims (Runesson 2010:41–43).

On a more specific level, at least two tendencies can be identified in postcolonial New Testament studies (Moore 2006:12–14). The first is where the biblical text is read as an exemplary anti-imperial and anti-colonial resistance literature. An example is Richard Horsley's (2003) interpretation of the Gospel of Mark as an anti-imperial document, which critiques hegemonic ideologies and institutions. The second tendency is opposite to the first, in that the biblical text 'covertly complicit imperialist and colonialist literature' (Moore 2006:14). In other words, a book or passage in the Bible is perceived to re-inscribe imperial and colonial ideologies. For example, Benny Liew (1999) argues that Mark duplicates and mimics colonial ideology just as much as he resists it. He contends that Mark's intent is to replace the Emperor's authority with another, that of Jesus the Messiah. Some studies combine both tendencies and thus perceive some texts as ambivalent. An example is Jeremy Punt (2015) who reads Paul as both challenging the Roman Empire and as re-inscribing hegemony (especially in the way in which he uses Scripture to authorise his position or to justify his arguments). Moore (2006) follows a similar approach in respect of both the Gospel of Mark and Revelation.

Musa Dube's (2000) work, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, is a good example of combining both postcolonial hermeneutics and feminist hermeneutics. As a black African woman, she proposes contextual readings of the exodus and conquest narratives of the Old Testament, as well as the Matthean narratives, especially Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite women. Her approach offers a devastating critique of previous interpretations of white European interpreters (Moore 2006:17). In another work, Dube (1999) contemplates the translation of the Greek word δαιμόνιον [demon] in the 1908 Setswana Bible, which was translated by Alfred J. Wookey. Despite the availability of newer Setswana translations, at the time of Dube's research, the so-called Wookey's Bible was still the standard Bible used by most Setswana speakers. She conveys her shock about Wookey's Bible's translation of δαιμόνιον

in the gospels into *badimo*, a Setswana word that denotes the 'high ones' or 'ancestors'. In other words, she sees the translation of this term as a colonising act that shatters native culture and demonises ancestors.

Another cluster of works on the New Testament that loosely resort under the umbrella of postcolonial biblical criticism are those that have the words 'empire' and 'imperial' in their titles (e.g. ed. Horsley 1997, 2003; eds. Riches & Sim 2005; Walsh & Keesmaat 2004). These works all focus on the theme of empire as the hermeneutical lens through which portions of the New Testament are reread and reframed. Some of them do not only focus on the original imperial context but also account for contemporary contexts (e.g. Horsley 2003; Howard-Brook & Gwyther 1999; see Moore 2006:17–18).

Evaluating postcolonial biblical criticism

In an attempt to evaluate postcolonial biblical criticism, it has to be taken into account that any evaluation implies certain criteria or preconceived notions that serve as a point of reference. In other words, no evaluation exists in a vacuum or no evaluation is the totally objective. Yet, I will attempt to offer a balanced evaluation in that both the strengths and weaknesses of postcolonial hermeneutics will be highlighted.

Strengths

One of the main strengths of postcolonial biblical criticism is certainly that such an approach, although not monolithic but varied in itself, provides greater awareness of imperial structures that lie behind the biblical text. It has open our eyes for the far-reaching influence of empire in the biblical world. The influence of empire encompassed both political and societal structures, which included economic, ethnic and religious institutions (cf. ed. Horsley 1997:7). Imperial structures also involved the use of language and especially the rhetoric of language (e.g. the rhetorical strategy of vilification). The latter is especially relevant in analysing the rhetorical structures or strategies of the biblical text. Any socio-historical or rhetorical analysis of the biblical text must take the influence of empire into account.

Probably more importantly, postcolonial hermeneutics has brought colonised or postcolonial readers' perception or interpretation of the biblical text into sharp focus. It especially highlighted how much of traditional biblical hermeneutics excluded, devaluated or even oppressed people outside of the West. It uncovers how the Bible was used in many instances to enforce or condone colonisation, especially if missions involved the 'education' of 'uneducated' people on the basis of Western culture. Postcolonial biblical criticism thus alerts hermeneutists to be sensitive to particularity in cultures and the cultural embeddedness of any knowledge and experience. Just as the

Bible and its language are entangled with ancient culture (Wu 2019:326), biblical hermeneutics cannot be insensitive to readers' worldview, culture and particularity.

At this point, it has to be noted that contextualisation does not necessarily mean that the interpretation itself should be subjective or even reader-oriented as primary or sole point of departure. Contextualisation can be both faithful to Scripture and meaningful to local culture. In other words, it takes the influence of the reader on theology seriously, but not necessarily at the expense of the authority of Scripture, and neither does it dispense of the need for rigorous exegesis (see especially Wilder 2012; Wu 2015, 2019). In Anderson's (2014:xi; [*emphasis in original*]) words, 'the question is not "*Is* the Bible true?" but "*How* is the Bible true?"'. Contextualisation thus 'primarily concerns the communication and application of Scripture' but does so 'within a particular cultural context' (Wu 2019:313). In other words, contextualisation implies the effective communication of the Christian message and its acceptance by people whose culture is different from that of the communicator (Dei 2019:12).

On a certain level, the idea that postcolonial criticism embraces hybridity and liminality, especially as it pertains to social or cultural identity, is commendable. But these principles of identity should not be totalising principles in that they become overarching hermeneutical principles that determine the way in which the whole Bible is interpreted or the way in which identity is constructed. In a Christian context, cultural, ethnic or social diverseness in identity should be embraced but not supersede the theological and spiritual reality of the new identity in Christ (cf. Du Toit 2019:170–173;[44] Lim 2014).

Finally, postcolonial criticism alerts us to the importance of the translation of the Bible into understandable, relatable language symbols that are digestible in the language of the reader. Although there are different translation strategies, such as more text-oriented translations (e.g. a word-for-word translation) and more reader-oriented translations (a functional equivalent translation), any translation of the Bible into the native language of a reader should be relatable and understandable on the one hand but avoid a translation that is anachronistic to the symbolic universe of the biblical text on the other hand. Translators of the Bible should thus not bereft the reader from also gaining a thorough insight into the original cultural setting of the Bible (see Du Toit 2016a).

44. Although some scholars approach social identity theory such as that Paul's 'theologising' is seen as subordinate to an ideological and social agenda, I argue with Lim (2014) that the in-Christ identity, although inclusive of social or cultural sub-identities, constitutes a predefined theological reality to which believers align themselves.

Weaknesses

One of the weaknesses of postcolonial hermeneutics is its tendency to be a totalising hermeneutical strategy. As Sugirtharajah (2012:53) points out, '[n]ot all biblical accounts are preoccupied with political oppression, resistance, and protest. The focus of some biblical texts falls outside the concerns of postcolonialism'. As examples, he names the love relationship of the unnamed lovers in the Song of Solomon and affirmation of the wonders of creation in the book of Job. Postcolonial biblical criticism could thus not be an overarching approach for all other hermeneutical approaches. Behind the totalising tendency in postcolonial hermeneutics, the danger lurks that one stereotype is replaced with another: 'the colonial god with a postcolonial god, evil imperialists with nice indigenes, native informer with diasporic intellectual' (Sugirtharajah 2012:54).

While postcolonial biblical criticism is related to or involves the practice of deconstruction, one has to realise that deconstruction does not take place in a vacuum. Any deconstruction (Conway 1990):

> [*P*]resupposes the critic's insight into the contingency of the construction of authority. By exposing the empowering presuppositions of the author's discourse, deconstruction effectively discredits any claim to an epistemically privileged authority. (p. 91)

In other words, a postcolonial reading is not free from subjective, preconceived notions. Davies (2013) in fact warns against the danger that a postcolonial reading strategy might result in a:

> [*S*]eemingly uncontrollable proliferation of subjective and idiosyncratic readings, and that readers might abuse their new-found authority by arbitrarily imposing their own meaning on the text and riding rough-shod over the aims and intentions of the original author. (p. 16)

Postcolonial hermeneutics thus does not only presuppose a certain interest, agenda or ideology; it also implies certain preconceived, *a priori* criteria against which colonial power structures are identified. Yet, as stated above, the latter is true of any kind of critical endeavour. In other words, postcolonial biblical criticism could also be relativised just like any other critical approach.

Postcolonial hermeneutics rightly value the cultural embeddedness of texts and their reception and aims to uphold cultural particularity, especially of the reader or hearer of the biblical text. Yet, in light of the Christian faith, not everything within any given culture can be considered as theologically or spiritually neutral. In other words, just because something such as ancestor worship would be a sacred practice in certain cultures, does not mean that such a practice is beyond critique in light of the gospel message. The idea that ancestors serve as mediators between God and people, that they are attributed divine status or that they would bless or punish the living (Dube 1999:39), has to be weighed against the principle of Jesus being the only

Mediator between God and people (e.g. Jn 14:6; 1 Tm 2:5–6; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) or the notion that dead people go to heaven or hell when they die and do not inhabit the physical world (e.g. Lk 16:19–31; 2 Cor 5:6). These are beside the notion that the Bible explicitly prohibits contacting the dead (e.g. Ex 22:18; Lv 20:6, 27; Dt 18:10–11). This is not to say that these texts are not also embedded within a cultural symbolic universe, but if one acknowledges the divine and the supernatural, there comes a point where the cultural, the natural and the anthropological have to be differentiated from the divine, the spiritual and the supernatural. Otherwise, the danger exists to reduce everything in the Bible to the domain of the cultural, psychological or anthropological.

On this point, it has to be acknowledged that according to Paul, all human identities or ethnicities (both Judaean[45] and Greek) are considered to be 'under sin' ([ὑφ' ἁμαρτίαν], Rm 3:9). Everyone has 'fallen short of the glory of God' ([ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ], Rm 3:23). This reality relates to probably the most fundamental dichotomy in the Pauline corpus: the opposition between σάρξ [flesh] and πνεῦμα [Spirit]. Although the term σάρξ can have a wide range of meaning in Paul (and the rest of the New Testament), it never transcends the human or anthropological domain. In contrast, πνεῦμα, which is also used variously, always represents the domain of the spiritual and/or the divine, with the exception that it can point to the non-material human faculty that is 'potentially sensitive and responsive to God' (domain 26.9 in Louw & Nida 1989:323). I have argued elsewhere (Du Toit 2020:2–3) that according to Paul, the cultural sphere, which includes cultic, ritualistic and even religious practices (cf. Hutchinson & Smith 1996:6–7), resorts under the domain of that which is human or anthropological (esp. Rm 9:3–5; Col 2:16–23). Paul implies that these outward, cultural practices are all in the domain of σάρξ and not πνεῦμα (esp. Col 2:23; cf. Rm 9:3; Phlp 3:3). In fact, there is a sense in which the whole existence outside of Christ, which points to the eschatologically old era under the law, is considered as being in the realm of σάρξ (esp. Rm 7:5–6; 8:1–16; Gl 5:16–25). According to Paul, nothing in a culture is thus inherently good or spiritual, and all cultures are in need of salvation and purification in Christ. To apply these principles to postcolonial hermeneutics, the notion to preserve everything cultural can run counter to the biblical message itself. For example, the postcolonial notion that the traditional reading of the letter to the Romans, which understands Paul to point out universal human sinfulness, would not be genuinely multicultural but constitute a politics of eradicating cultural embeddedness (Elliott 2012:195), seems to absolutise culture at the expense of the gospel message. In other words, the gospel message itself is also forced through an ethnic, colonial optic.

45. I prefer this translation instead of the translation 'Jew' to highlight the hermeneutical distance between the descendants of ancient Israel in the second temple period and contemporary Jews (see Du Toit 2019:31–39).

Part of acknowledging the spiritual and the divine is that God's divine revelation in and through the Bible is acknowledged. Divine revelation, in turn, presupposes a created order and even structures in society that are divinely ordained. For example, the principle in Genesis 1:27 that God created people as male and female and the principle in Genesis 2:24 that a man shall leave his father and mother, hold fast to his wife and become one 'flesh' with his wife are confirmed in the New Testament as a divinely ordained principle (Mt 19:4–6; Mk 10:6–8; Eph 5:31). Similarly, Paul affirms the divine order of the separation between created beings, which ought not to be worshipped, from God who is the only entity to be worshipped (Rm 1:23–25). He also presents governing authorities as being appointed by God (Rm 13:1–2). Again, although cultural elements in these structures can be identified, it would run contrary to the whole principle of divine revelation if they are reduced to mere cultural or social institutions.

One of the greatest weaknesses of postcolonial biblical criticism, is that it is a purely reader-oriented hermeneutic that prioritises the needs, desires and context of human beings over-against divine revelation and divine will. As pointed out above, this is not to say that the culture and context of the reader should be ignored, but culture, which is in the human sphere, should always be subordinate to divine revelation, which is in the divine sphere. In other words, the direction of the gospel should always be from God to people and not the other way around. As Paul indicates, he received the gospel message not from people, but 'through a revelation of Jesus Christ' ([δι' ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ], Gl 1:12). Otherwise, the gospel would merely become a social gospel or a human-made gospel that is based on the desires and interests of people and not on the desires and interests of God. Again, this does not mean that God stands cold towards the needs of people. Rather, God knows how to address our needs better than we do. Yet, the acknowledgement of the origin and direction of the gospel goes both ways. It also implies that people cannot take the gospel in their own hands and use it as a weapon of oppression or as a means to advance their own interests or their own culture at the expense of the needs and culture of the hearers of the gospel.

Finally, an over-appreciation of culture can lead to a truncated and even a syncretistic gospel. Culture must be judged by Scripture, not Scripture by culture. It has to be noted, however, that syncretism might involve 'cultural syncretism', which points to the adoption of religious or cultic elements from a certain culture or 'theological syncretism' in which a person's church background filters out legitimate interpretation that does not fit church tradition. In other words, both ethnic traditions and church traditions can be seen as forms of culture or subculture. Whereas cultural syncretism may insert unbiblical elements into Scripture, theological syncretism might create a canon within the canon in that parts of Scripture may be silenced in only upholding certain doctrines (Wu 2019:313, 316, 318–319).

Towards an evangelical hermeneutic within a South African context: A Pauline perspective

The question still remains: How does one approach hermeneutics in a South African context and in what way does postcolonial biblical criticism help the hermeneutist in this regard?

As pointed out above, postcolonial biblical criticism can serve as an aid to better understand the imperial context in which the biblical writings are set, as well as to be more sensitive to the postcolonial or neocolonial context of the readers or hearers of the Bible. In a post-apartheid, postcolonial South African context, postcolonial hermeneutics helps to identify the influence of Western culture in evangelisation as well as practices of discrimination or insensitiveness towards the diverse cultures in South Africa. It thus helps interpreters to unearth the wrongs that were committed towards cultural groups in the name of the gospel and correct such wrongs. But, probably most importantly, it underlines the ongoing necessity of contextualising the biblical message in understandable language and symbols that are culturally intelligible and relatable, which, in turn, should truly empower and change people in line with the gospel itself. Postcolonial hermeneutics helps the interpreter to respect the cultural embeddedness of people's worldview in order to better contextualise the gospel. But in the process, it also helps to uphold the cultural heritage and dignity of all people groups in South Africa.

In practice, the interpreter should avoid the absolutising of any particular hermeneutical approach. Since postcolonial biblical criticism is not a methodology as such but rather a criticism of previous, colonial hermeneutical practices, it can be utilised as an aid alongside other hermeneutical approaches, such as rhetorical criticism, canonical criticism and ethical criticism. Rhetorical criticism researches classic rhetoric as it developed in ancient Greece and Rome (Davies 2013:106). There are numerous hermeneutical resources in this regard (e.g. Classen 2000; Kennedy 1984). Even church fathers such as Augustine believed that Paul had been influenced by classical rhetorical style (Tull 1999:156–157). Rhetorical criticism is related to postcolonial biblical criticism in that ancient rhetoric was shaped by imperial structures. Canonical criticism was especially advanced by Brevard Childs (1986, 1992), who pointed out that the interpreter must appreciate the biblical message as a whole, especially how the whole relates to its parts and the parts relate to the whole. In canonical criticism, Scripture is viewed as a unified, organic entity, requiring the reader to respect the overarching perspective and character of the tradition in its entirety (cf. also Wu 2019:325). It also appreciates the norms and values that Scripture establishes. Canonical criticism serves as an antidote to the otherwise one-sided emphases of many contemporary approaches in biblical scholarship, of which postcolonial biblical criticism is one (Davies 2013:112–113). Ethical criticism is a branch of reader-response criticism but

emphasises on the ethical ramifications of the biblical text. It also evaluates and critiques the ethics of biblical characters (Davies 2013:117–118,[46] see e.g. Clines 1997). Ethical criticism might also help to identify the oppressive conduct of some biblical characters as stemming from their inherent immorality, rather than (solely) ascribing their conduct to colonial power structures.

The utilisation of postcolonial hermeneutics does not have to undermine the authority of the Bible or the divine origin or direction of the gospel message. To point out colonial structures behind the biblical text or in the practice of hermeneutics, does not have to mean that biblical interpretation should be subject to a postcolonial optic in all respects, especially if the latter threatens to become a totalising principle. Postcolonial hermeneutics should rather stand in service of the necessity to contextualise the biblical message (cf. Coe & Sapsezian 1972:30). To contextualise the biblical message involves sensitivity for culture, but it should not undermine the Bible's authority or the single direction of the gospel (from God to people). In other words, postcolonial biblical criticism should alert the interpreter to the importance of contextualising the gospel for a specific culture or subculture in language and cultural symbols that are understandable and relatable, without compromising the truth and revelatory quality of the biblical message itself.

At the heart of contextualisation of the biblical message, which involves sensitivity to cultural particularity on the one hand and an awareness of oppressive, colonial atrocities that have been committed, on the other hand, lies the principle of flexibility. This is exactly the principle that Paul advances in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 (cf. Dei 2019:14; Wilder 2012:12–17). Here, Paul states the following (1 Cor):

> [19]For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. [20]To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. [21]To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. [22]To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. [23]I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (vv. 19–23)

The context in which Paul writes the above words is that of Paul's advice on the eating meat offered to idols (1 Cor 8). Eating meat offered to idols was clearly part of gentile culture, whereas Judaeans were offended by such practices, especially in light of their purity laws in their culture. Although Paul acknowledges that idols are nothing and that there is only one God (1 Cor 8:4–6) and later

46. As an example, Davies mentions Lot's willingness to allow his daughters to be sexually violated instead of the two strangers (Gn 19). While commentators traditionally admired Lot's conduct as an act of hospitality, ethical criticism helps to unearth such conduct as immoral.

states that a Christ-believer has the freedom to eat such meat (1 Cor 10:25), he admonishes his readers that such freedom should not become a stumbling block for someone who does not have such knowledge (1 Cor 8:9). In other words, the gentile Christian congregants should restrict their freedom and their knowledge in order not to offend their believing brothers and sisters that come from a Judaean cultural background. But part of the context of the passage at hand (1 Cor 9:19–23) is Paul's defence of his apostleship (1 Cor 9:3). In other words, Paul probably ate meat bought from the gentile market himself under certain circumstances, and some Judaean believers might have been offended by such a practice (cf. Fee 2014:468–469).

Here in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Paul puts his evangelising approach into words in laying down the principle of voluntarily becoming a slave [δουλόω] to all (v. 19). This principle represents the core attitude of approaching people from various cultural backgrounds. Paul is foremost a slave to the Lord (Gardner 2018:403) but also to the people he wants to reach (Schreiner 2018:190). His interest in the people is not self-interest or to enforce his own culture on the people but to win them for the gospel (v. 19). According to verse 20a, Paul became 'as' or 'like' [ὡς] a Judaean in order to win them. To bring the gospel message thus involves that one puts oneself in the shoes of someone else's culture. In other words, one has to study someone else's culture and identify with them. Such a gesture excludes a superior or colonial attitude towards others. As examples of adhering to the principle of becoming 'like' the Judaeans in order to win them, although not himself being under the law (v. 20b), Paul circumcised Timothy for cultural reasons (Ac 16:3) and even participated in purification rites (Ac 18:18; 21:17–26). But this did not mean that Paul still saw himself as a Judaean as such.[47] Conversely, as example of becoming like those outside the law (gentiles) in order to win them, Acts 17:22–34 describes the way in which Paul, in addressing the Athenians on the Areopagus, related with the cultural symbolic universe of his gentile audience. He referred to quotations from Athenian poets such as Epimenides, Menander and Aratus, to point out that their culture contains reminders of God, the Creator (Dei 2019:14). Paul used these to win them over for the gospel.

According to 1 Corinthians 9:20b, it is quite significant that Paul, being brought up in the Judaean law and culture, did not merely retain his Judaean cultural identity in respect of Judaean law. Paul, in fact, considered himself as not being under such law anymore (see esp. Du Toit 2015:32–35) and perceives himself to be under a different law, Christ's 'law' (1 Cor 9:21), which probably points to the 'law' of Christ's self-giving love (Schreiner 2018:192–193). The implication of Paul's identity change, especially in respect of his relationship to the Judaean law, is that all aspects of culture do not necessarily have to be retained in the wake of the gospel. In the case of Judaean culture, it involved

47. I argue this in some length in the context of the Acts of the Apostles (Du Toit 2016c).

that Paul did not maintain adherence of things such as food laws, the observance of certain days or circumcision. Since these cultural symbols also had religious significance, they became redundant in light of the new identity in Christ (Du Toit 2015:32–35). In the context of the contextualisation of the gospel, it does not mean that all elements of culture need to be retained in the process of conversion. Since not all aspects of culture are theologically neutral, certain elements of culture, especially religious, cultic or spiritual aspects may become renewed or even redundant as the biblical message is appropriated.

It is significant that ethnic background is not the only parameter that dictates Paul's evangelising approach. He also becomes 'weak' [ἀσθενής] in order to save 'weak' persons (1 Cor 9:22). In other words, he does not have the attitude of exercising his powers, and neither does he approach people from the stance of superiority, whether such power or superiority would stem from imperial structures or even from Paul's knowledge itself. In Paul's approach, he lays down all of these and becomes weak in order to reach 'weak' persons. The 'weak' probably points to marginalised (Schreiner 2018:193) or vulnerable persons (Thiselton 2000:705). Gardner (2018:404) sees the 'weak' as 'those who were being hurt by the elitists'. Again, such an attitude is utterly non-colonial. Whether Paul's actual conduct did indeed meet these set out criteria (1 Cor 9:19–23), is not what is at stake here. It is probably true that despite Paul's best efforts, his embeddedness in imperial culture did inevitably influence the way in which he interacted with people or at least his rhetorical style in his letters, but that is not the point here. The point is that Paul lays down principles of approaching people with the biblical message from diverse cultural backgrounds – principles that supersede his cultural embeddedness and represent divine revelation.

Apart from the fact that the South African population consists of diverse cultures, there are many 'weak' people: people who are marginalised, vulnerable (esp. women and children) and poor people. This is especially the case in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rightly applied, a postcolonial hermeneutic is thus especially relevant and helpful in contextualising the biblical message for the people of South Africa.

Finally, it can be derived from the principles that Paul lays down in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 that he was flexible but stayed firm and uncompromising at the same time (Wilder 2012:16–17). In Paul's flexibility, two aspects have to be distinguished: (1) Paul did not compromise the theological content of the gospel, but (2) he did become 'weak' and flexible in his approach and in the way in which he related to people, in order to meet them within their particular context.

Conclusion

Postcolonial biblical criticism can be understood within the context of a general shift in the definition of hermeneutics from being a more text-oriented

endeavour to being a more reader-oriented endeavour. Postcolonial hermeneutics is a kind of ideology criticism that exposes the abusive, exploiting and marginalising effects of colonialism, both behind the biblical text and the context of Christian evangelisation. It is thus a valuable approach in aiding the understanding of the socio-historical context behind the text of the Bible as well as in making the biblical interpreter aware of the colonising effects of much of traditional biblical hermeneutics. Postcolonial biblical criticism brings awareness of the cultural embeddedness of both the biblical text and its readers.

Yet, postcolonial hermeneutics should avoid attempting to reverse the direction of God's revelation (from God to people) and refrain from becoming an endeavour where the needs and interests of people trump the will and interests of God. While postcolonial hermeneutics is a valuable aid in biblical interpretation, the hermeneutist should avoid a totalising approach that overarches all hermeneutical practice. Postcolonial biblical criticism should rather find its place among other approaches, such as rhetorical criticism, canonical criticism and ethical criticism, to serve the necessary aim of contextualising the biblical message for diverse cultures.

Paul's approach in evangelising different cultures, as laid out in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, is especially helpful in this regard. Without compromising the integrity of the biblical message, the gospel should be presented in a selfless, serving manner in which the communicator becomes like those to whom the gospel is directed, in order for them to understand it and relate to it. In other words, the biblical message should be processed and applied within their own cultural symbolic universe. Such a contextual approach includes the attitude in which the biblical message is presented as well as the frame of reference and the language in which the message is conveyed. This mode of communication is especially paramount in a South African context where there are many marginalised and vulnerable people, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 6

Can the indigenes outwit the colonial settlers and regain land? Rereading the Joshua narrative: Land grab through decolonial lens in the South African context

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Introduction

The land question in South Africa remains a political and emotive issue. The recent debates on the proposal to amend Section 25 of the South African Constitution to explicitly mandate the state to expropriate land without compensation are highly charged. The constitutional amendment's key political proponents are the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party. Political organisations such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and Congress of the People (COPE), and organisations such as

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the Institute for Race Relations (IRR), Agri-South Africa (AgriSA), and AgriBusiness, GrainSA, and the Banking Association of South Africa (BASA) are opposed to the amendment (for further discussion, see Akinola 2020; Clark 2019; Kwarteng & Botchway 2019; Mtero & Hall 2020; Sihlobo & Kapuya 2018; Vorster 2019; Xaba Mzingaye 2021). In its attempt to stop the amendment, the Institute of Race Relations engaged in a campaign to get a million people to endorse its submission to parliament. For those opposed, the constitutional amendment will give the state undue powers to take away people's property and leave the country poorer and hungrier.

Using the biblical concept of jubilee, Kaunda and Kaunda (2019:91) argue that the move to land expropriation without compensation (LEWC) will not liberate the land from human enslavement but will merely be the transference of the land from one slavemaster to another. In a similar vein, Kepe and Hall (2018) argue that the ANC-led government has been gravitating toward becoming the land's chief owner, shifting from the ideal of social justice. While these concerns may be valid, we do not have to ignore that in a democratic state, the government is supposed to carry the people's mandate in addressing past injustices and therefore to deliver on its mandates, the government does require from time to time to be explicitly empowered through amendments and introduction of new policies. Further, the land question in South Africa cannot ignore the dynamics of settler coloniality which continue to shape South Africa's post-liberation context.

Veracini (2011) calls for a distinction to be made between the decolonisation of colonialism and the decolonisation of settler colonialism: settler colonialism have distinct characteristics, further noting that if colonialism ends with the colonisers' departure, settler colonialism ends with the settler's permanence. This distinction, as Veracini argues, is crucial in analysing the context in which settler colonialism was in operation. In this chapter, I engage in a rereading of the Joshua narrative from a decolonial perspective, focusing on Rahab and the Gibeonites, considering the dynamics of settler colonialism past and represent. As I will argue, the land question in the colonial settler situation is complicated by the settler's permanence.

The decolonial hermeneutical option

In the early 1990s, a time when South Africa was negotiating its transition from apartheid government to democratic government, Deist (1992), reflecting on South African Old Testament scholarship, writes:

> It is… not surprising that the present South African scene of Old Testament studies does not look very different from that in Europe or the USA. I am sure scholars overseas will feel themselves much more at home in our discussions today than I felt when I first went to study in Germany in 1971. We have in the meantime all but duplicated European and American academic environments here. (pp. 313–314)

Since then, several positive developments have taken place in South African biblical scholarship, including the growing interest in African biblical hermeneutics (see Adamo 2003; eds. Dube, Mbuvi & Mbuyewasango 2012; Mbuvi 2017; Punt 1999, 2006). However, the Euro-Western hermeneutical paradigms remain the dominant interpretive grids in our context (see Adamo 2018; Masenya and Ramantswana 2012). Thus, to overcome the tendency of duplicating Euro-Western paradigms, we need to develop our unique ways of reading the Bible in our African context. In terms of my interpretive grid, I opt for a decolonial approach to reading the Bible. The decolonial option entails the following, among other things.

Firstly, it is an option to read the Bible from 'outside' of the Euro-Western hegemonic approaches. The decolonial approach resists the notion of superiority, not simply the idea that a particular race is superior over other races but also the idea of knowledge superiority – the idea that the knowledge systems of a particular race are superior to all others. As the late Vuyani Vellem (2017:3) argued, we need to engage in the process of 'un-thinking' the Euro-West by decentring the Euro-Western canon and its antics.

Snyman (2013) proposes an epistemological transformation that does not require an either-or approach – either Euro-Western paradigms or a turn to Africa – but rather 'a both-and approach':

> We should broaden the curricula to include both perspectives. On the one hand, it will be foolish to simply abandon the link with the Euro-American (Western) study of the Old Testament. On the other hand, our context in Africa demands an even closer link with African Old Testament scholarship. The popular term 'glocal' may be an appropriate term. (pp. 2–3)

I find Snyman's view of epistemic transformation problematic as it does not demand a radical shift in knowledge production. Snyman's epistemological transformation amounts to the accommodation of 'contemporary issues' or 'contextual issues' within the established canon of thought. The turn to Africa is reduced to the 'practical application' of the Bible in Africa. In this sense, Africa becomes the social location on which the meaning of the text – meaning retrieved using Euro-Western approaches – is applied. The idea of 'glocal' in Snyman's view sets the Euro-American (Western) as the global and the African as the local. This idea perpetuates the continuity of coloniality structures in which the Euro-American (Western) knowledge systems remain superior to other forms of knowledge. Snyman's view assumes that the Euro-Western view is essential for Africa but not vice versa. *Contra* Snyman, instead of privileging Euro-Western hermeneutical practices, the challenge for African biblical scholars is to delink from the Euro-Western paradigms and start thinking from outside. As Escobar (2007:186) rightly notes, 'it is impossible to think about transcending or overcoming modernity without approaching it from the perspective of colonial difference' – that is, from the perspective of the of those on the underside of the colonial matrix of power and/or the

marginalised. In my view, therefore, the future of South African Old Testament scholarship lies in the delinking from hegemonic Euro-Western paradigms that have for way too long dominated our scholarship. As the Tshivenda proverb reminds us, *hu si halwo lukunda a lu kokomedzwi, lwa kokomedzwa lu a ṱhara* [do not force a bracelet where it does not belong, because when you force it, then there is damage].

Secondly, the decolonial option is cognisant that the colonial system relied on turning those located in the subaltern regions to think epistemically as those situated on the hegemonic side. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) notes, the most critical area of colonial domination:

> [*W*]as the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. (p. 16)

As a result, Africans looked down on themselves and their cultures and knowledge systems and started to identify whiteness as a category of superiority, privilege, civilisation and power and to associate blackness with inferiority and primitivity. Among the Vhavenḓa, the saying *mukhuwa ndi mushonga* [a white person is a medication] emerged, associating whiteness with things considered good, advanced and superior. Thus, being a black person and socially-located in Africa does not automatically imply that one is epistemically African any more than does being a white person and socially-situated in Africa (Ramantswana 2016). The tendency to regard the Euro-Western paradigms as models that we have to mimic in Africa as our social location speaks to the continuity of the colonial matrix of power even in our scholarly disciplines.

Decolonisation of the mind requires a shift in the 'geography of reason', that is, a process of delinking from Euro-Western paradigms and relinking with our African systems (Mignolo 2011, 2013). Delinking, as Mignolo (2013) argues:

> [*M*]eans not to operate under the same assumptions even while acknowledging that modern categories of thought are dominant, if not hegemonic, and in many ways, if not in all of us. (p. 206)

The delinking process is the refusal to play the game under the rules and dictates of Euro-Western thinking. The delinking is a means of liberating reason 'from the monopolistically possessive claims of the West' and to 'recruit reason in the service of emancipation' by 'a rethinking of the problematics of being or existence in a manner other than within the confines of the Western metaphysics of presence' (Banchetti-Robino & Headley 2006:8). Thus, relinking requires us to cherish our African knowledge systems and see their value as interpretive lenses. As the Tshivenḓa proverb captures it, *u ṅala tshau ndi u laṱa* [to disown that which is yours is a loss]. However, it should be noted that relinking with our African systems is not an obsession with the ancient past. In the relinking process, we rediscover ourselves afresh, opening up room for new and fresh interpretive grids to emerge. The wisdom of our ancestors that says, *thonga ipfi ndo vhaḓa a i pfi ndo doba* [a staff is one that

you made yourself, not the one which you picked up] comes to mind. The proverb's main point is that something that you created yourself is more valuable than the ready-made things that you just happen to find or adopt as your own. This calls for African biblical scholars to develop creative ways of interpreting the biblical text.

Thirdly, the decolonial option is necessitated by the continuing dictates of the colonial and settler colonial matrix of power. In postcolonial and decolonial studies, focus has been pretty much on unmasking colonialism's operations; however, not much attention has been given to settler colonialism and settler coloniality. Decolonial scholars distinguish between *colonialism* and *coloniality*, with the former referring to the conquering of foreign lands and setting up colonial administrations by the European empires and the latter referring to the colonial structures of power that remain in place even after the demise of colonialism (Grosfoguel 2002, 2007; Quijano 2000). As Grosfoguel (2007) writes:

> Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of the colonial administration, produces colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system. (p. 219)

Therefore, the decolonial option problematises the so-called 'postcolonial situation'. In this view, colonialism is not simply viewed as the political factor of subjugating the land and peoples but as a complex system that established structures that did not vanish with the political liberation and independence of the colonised land. Thus, the end of global colonialism by the Euro-Western empires did not imply the end of the colonial structures (see Maldonado-Torres 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2014).

Veracini (2010) argues for settler colonialism to be viewed as a distinct mode of domination: colonisers and settler colonisers, while they are intricately linked, operate differently. Youé (2018) also calls for a distinction between colonies with settlers and settler colonies. Pointing to some casing examples, Youé (2018) writes:

> When whites formed a distinct minority, their political power was tenuous. Their numerical strength was a good measure of their political power. South African settler-colonialism was stronger than Rhodesia's, Rhodesia is stronger than Kenya's. Kenya had just enough white settlers to make it into the settler colonial club. Nyasaland (Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) did not make the cut; they did not have the critical mass to justify a future of unfettered white independence. (Malawi's settlers did not self-describe as settlers: they considered themselves planters, a term usually applied to those who saw colonies as temporary homes.) When the settlers formed a majority (as in the temperate Antipodes and North America), the indigenous peoples could be robbed of their resources and subjected to white cultural hegemony with relative impunity. (p. 81)

Colonisers have as their chief interest the exploitation of land, resources and labour in the colonised territories. Veracini (2011:2) argues, 'In the case of colonial systems, a determination to exploit sustains a drive to sustain the

permanent subordination of the colonised'. In a colonial system, the colonised may be given certain rights, but they remain the subjugated other. Settler colonialism is (Veracini 2011):

> [*C*]haracterized by a drive to ultimately supersede the conditions of its operation. The successful settler colonies 'tame' a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity. (p. 3)

In settler colonialism, as Youé (2018) argues:

> [*I*]ndigenous peoples are permanently trapped in the racist–capitalist web of the settler-colonial state. The legal-political structure that we established after the invasion, the argument goes, still prevail; settler colonialism does not die or fade away but is disguised as a multiracial democracy. (p. 3)

Therefore, it is proper to follow the decolonial scholars by referring to settler colonialism's continuing patterns as settler coloniality. In disguise as post-racial states, settler states perpetuate inequality and are characterised by a culture of greed and theft embedded in the so-called postcolonial situation (Youé 2018:81). In our South African context, the culture of greed and theft is now also visible in our African political elites as we evidence of deep-rooted corruption is put forward at the Zondo Commission. Settler colonial ideology continues to permeate the state in the new liberal democracy that emerges from settler colonialism. As Elkins (2005) notes:

> [*T*]he size of settler populations in Africa paled in comparison to those of the New World or Australia. Nonetheless, when judged by their influence on colonial state institutions, the conduct of colonial rule, and the violence of colonial retreat, their impact was no less significant. (p. 219)

The recent calls for decolonisation in the South African context are a response to the deep rootedness of settler colonial ideology. The challenge for African biblical scholars, both black and white, is to overcome the colonial mentality lest we remain trapped in the Euro-Western train by making the standard of our scholarship that of Europe and America.

Thirdly, the decolonial option is to have as a preferential option the *damned*, that is, the oppressed, poor, marginalised, victimised, abused and exploited. This is in a similar vein with black theology of liberation, which focused on the poor and oppressed.

Fourthly, the decolonial option would drive us to the Bible from our social location. We do not decipher the text in a vacuum; rather, we do so from this place (South) Africa. (South) Africa, as a social context, is burdened with the structures of coloniality and settler coloniality. Taking social context seriously also implies considering the situation of damnation that the African continent finds itself in as a result of colonialism and the resultant global structures that continue to render Africa a 'shit hole' (to use the words of the infamous former president of the United States, Donald Trump). African states are still exploited,

marginalised and sinking in debt. Damnation stares the African people in the face through poverty, poor healthcare, no access to basic services, landlessness and exploitation; therefore, the decolonial option has as its preferential option the damned.

Decolonial reading strategies

There are various ways of applying a decolonial reading or approach to the Bible. However, before proceeding to highlight the different practical decolonial reading strategies, it should be noted that decolonial reading of the Bible presupposes the basic hermeneutical questions through which we make sense of the texts: Who wrote the text and for what purpose? To whom was the text written? Under what social, political and cultural conditions did the text emerge? What is the literary structure of the text and its usefulness in understanding the text? Are there different literary strands discernible in the text? Is there evidence of textual development over time discernible in the text? What ideology underlies the text? Various approaches may have as their primary focus any of these questions; however, there is no monopoly on these questions.

Presented below are various decolonial reading strategies, which may be applied in the reading of the Bible.

Reading the text through African Vhufa (heritage) lenses

In our African context, Justin Ukpong (1995) popularised the idea of reading through African lenses or eyes through his inculturation hermeneutics. However, it should be noted that the term Africa does not imply a singularity of thought among Africans. In its breadth and width, Africa is diverse and presents us with a wealth of knowledge systems. Africa is rich with people who have a wealth of diverse 'heritage'. Reading through African lenses implies reading the Bible through the lenses of our diverse heritage.

Our African heritage is valuable in shaping our view of reality and therefore valuable for interpreting the Bible. It supplies us with critical and creative interpretive tools for engaging the biblical text. This is a deliberate shift in the geography of reason and learning to think outside of the Euro-Western canon. In this case, the 'outside' implies a relinking with ancestral or traditional knowledge systems as lenses through which to critically and creatively decipher the text using African proverbs, sayings, stories, songs, concepts, cultural resources and practices; African experiences of reality past and present with their good and bad; the knowledge of ordinary people and the custodians of customs and drawing concepts from African thinkers past and present.

Furthermore, the decolonial approach is also rooted in our African cultures from when Europeans started toying with and exploiting Africa. The same is also true for other areas where European colonialism left its footprint and for African souls who were captured and forcefully taken to different continents as slaves. As Fernández Albán (in Arce-Valentin 2017:44) notes, decolonial thinking is also found in 'the experiences lived and the discourses elaborated by the colonised, oppressed and silenced objects'.

Focus on imperial or colonial dynamics and anti-imperial or anti-colonial dynamics as projected by the text

Decolonial reading may be applied with a focus on imperial or colonial issues and anti-imperial or anti-colonial issues as projected by the text. This can be done by paying attention to two things: (1) Analysis of imperial or colonial ideologies, (2) and anti-imperial or anti-colonial ideologies underlying the biblical texts. The Bible is a product of history produced within Israelite/Jewish culture under the shadow of the empires – Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome. Judah and Israel (or collectively Israel), while they might have displayed imperial tendencies in relation to their neighbours was, however, not an empire of the magnitude of those mentioned. Davidson (2011) notes:

> The Bible represents the work of different imperial forces on multiple levels. Compiled, edited, and authored amidst the background of a series of empires, the Bible deals with the fortunes of the nation of Israel/Judah in relation to these empires. As a minority group in the context of empire, Israel/Judah possesses little military power to control its destiny. As a text product of the era of colonisation and domination, the Bible represents a discourse of resistance and accommodation to the realities of empires. (p. 42)

The Hebrew Bible, to some extent, was produced under the sponsorship of the empire and imperial authorisation (Berquist 1996; Perdue 2015; ed. Watts 2001), but this does not automatically imply that the Hebrew Bible as a whole simply projects support for the empire under which it was produced. This would be to undermine the use by the dominated of the dominator's weapon as a weapon of liberation (ed. Horsley 2008). In our context, the Bible was used both as a weapon of oppression and as a weapon of liberation.

While I subscribe to the view that we have to be critical of the text's ideologies, considering that the elites produced the biblical text, I also think we have to be cognisant that those elites who produced these texts simultaneously belonged to those elites in the zone of the oppressed. Therefore, we do not have to overlook the text's anti-colonial and liberation voices in analysing the texts' ideologies. As McLeod (2000) notes regarding literary texts:

> Many literary texts can be reread to discover the hitherto hidden history of resistance to colonialism that they also articulate, often inadvertently [...]. In rereading a classic text, readers can put that text to work, rather than placing it on a pedestal or tossing it to one side as a consequence of whether or not it is deemed free from ideological taint. (p. 157)

Analysis of imperial or colonial binaries. Attention may be paid to binaries such as coloniser and colonised, dominator and dominated, self and other, enslaver and enslaved, oppressor and oppressed, conqueror and conquered, exploiter and exploited, possessor and dispossessed (see Sugirtharajah 1998; Yee 2010). Such bifurcations further presuppose tensions or oppositional operation: domination and resistance, conquest and revolution, enslavement and freedom, oppressor and opposition.

Colonial representations

Decolonial reading can be applied to biblical texts focusing on colonial or imperial textual representations of the self and the other. I am indebted here to Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said applied representation analysis to European colonialism's depiction of those in Asia, but it is also a useful strategy for reflecting on biblical texts. As Anand (2007) notes:

> [*A*] concentration on Western representations does not deny the fact that representational practices were prevalent in non-Western societies too. In fact, historically, all cultures and civilizations have had their own particular representational practices for perceiving those they considered as Other. (p. 25)

The representations of the self and the other are not innocent; rather, they are shaped somewhat by ideologies that influence one's view of reality and feed into identity politics. In representation analysis, as Said (1978:29) argues, attention is not paid to things such as 'style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, [nor to] the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original'.

Representations are literary devices used by writers or authors in fictional works and in the so-called factual texts. The Bible is not an either-or literary work; it includes both fictional and factual texts. Representations in the Bible cut across genres, be they narrative, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, apocalyptic, parables or epistles. Biblical texts are not neutral texts, and some of the biblical texts are also caught up in their authors' colonial or anti-colonial ideologies. Texts infused with colonial ideology are products of their authors' imperialist mindset. The colonial representations operate at various levels:

- *The coloniser (representer)*. In texts infused with colonial ideology, the coloniser is also represented in the text. The presumption here is that the text is produced in favour of the coloniser. Therefore, the coloniser is largely represented positively in the grand scheme of things, though colonial texts occasionally portray the coloniser negatively. The negative portrayals that are there, however, are there to serve the coloniser's grand scheme.
- *Representation of the colonised other (represented)*. In the colonial representation of the other, there is a tendency to denigrate, misrepresent and cast stereotypes. For example, conquest of the Canaan in the book of Joshua arguably contains a colonial ideology that presents the others as evil and uses that as justification for taking over the land and enslaving

people of the land. As Aladaylah (2012:125) also notes concerning recent European colonialism, 'Colonial ideology is achieved through comparison–binary opposition: the colonial form versus the native formlessness, colonial order versus native chaos, et cetera. These comparisons are the basis of colonial hegemony' (Aladaylah 2012). In colonial ideology, the other is not just denigrated and negatively portrayed but is disposable and killable for as long as it is justifiable in the eyes of the killer.

- *Representation of the other colonial (represented).* The representation of other colonial forces depends on what purpose they serve in the text. In colonial texts, the colonial other may be a force that the author or text is opposed to or a collaborator or a competitor or a saviour. The representation of the colonial other depends on the nature of the relationship between the text producers. For example, Egypt may appear in one text as a place of refuge, in another as an oppressive force and in some other cases as a competitor.
- *Representation by voice.* In the text's representation of the other, sometimes the other is given a voice; however, we should not lose sight of who controls the narrative. Control of the narrative is in hands of the composer or author, who restates what the other has said. In the restatement, there is also 'silencing' and subordination of the other.

Decolonial reading also reads the biblical text with attention to the features of the legacy of the colonial settler. In so doing, the decolonial reading unmasks and unpacks the colonial settler's modus operandi, which in some instances presents them as victims while they are truly the victimisers who disguise their imperialism as nationalism (Watts 2010). Pitkänen (2013) highlights the need for decolonisation, focusing on ancient Israel with reference to settler colonialism. However, pertinent also is the current settler colonialism inherent in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see Lloyd 2013; Raheb 2014; Whitelam 1996).

Contested land in the Joshua narrative: Can the conquered outwit the conquerors and reclaim their land?

The Joshua narrative (or the book of Joshua) tells a tale of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan. There are various perspectives regarding the literary unit with which the book belongs: Hexateuch, Deuteronomistic History or Enneateuch (Auld 1980; Dozeman, Römer & Schmid 2011). In this study, the concern is not with the compositional issues and historical veracity of the book; rather, it is with the narrative's presentation of the land as a contested space with Israel as the conqueror and the inhabitants of the land as the conquered. However, we do use the literary concept of the Hexateuch considering the backward thematic and textual linkages with the preceding books, Genesis-Deuteronomy, which set the Joshua narrative as a fulfilment of

YHWH's promise of land (to Abraham, Gn 12:6–7; 13:15–17; 15:18–21; 17:1–8; 24:7; to Isaac, Gn 26:1; to Jacob/Israel, Gn 28:10–15; 35:9–13; to Moses and his generation, Ex 6:1–8; 33:1–3; Lev 20:23–24; 23:9–10; 25:2, 38; Jos 1:1–7) and patriarchal pledges (Gn 50:25; Ex 13:19; Jos 24:32). The land promised to the patriarchs, which Israel inherits in the Joshua narrative, was occupied land. In this tale of conquest, I pay attention to the textual features that undermine the ideology of conqueror takes all. It is immaterial whether the book is fictional or factual; however, it does reflect challenges that emerge in contexts of land conquest as the original landowners would strive to cling to their land.

Pitkänen (2013), applying settler theory to Genesis-Joshua (the Hexateuch), reads this narrative as a settler colonial product set in the highlands of Canaan during the second millennium BCE. As Pitkänen argues, settler colonialism should not simply be viewed as a modern phenomenon as there are features that transcend modernity and apply to the ancient world. Following Day's (2008) taxonomy of settler colonialism, Pitkänen highlights the following settler colonial features in the Hexateuch: establishing a legal claim over the land (Gn 12:6–7; 13:18; 21:33; 35:1–7; 23; Jos 3–4; 22); mapping the land (Gn 12:6–9; 13:17; Nm 13–14; Jos 2; 18:3–10; 20–21); claiming by naming (Nm 3:42; 32:31; Jos 5:3; 7:26; 14:15); foundation stories (Ex 3:16–17; Dt 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20); tilling the soil and peopling the land (Nm 21:25; Dt 6:10; Jos 24:13; 17:4–18); defending the territory (Nm 32) and organising the supplanting society (Dt 7:5). The settler colonial ideology does indeed underlie the Hexateuch; however, this ideology is not presented uncontested. However, before reflecting on the text's anti-colonial features, it is necessary to highlight that the Joshua narrative projects a land taken through violence and does not presuppose that it was originally empty.

Below, attention is paid to stereotyping as part of the textual features used in the Hexateuch to justify the takeover of the land from its inhabitants by the invaders. The textual features form part of various cross-redactional links in the context of the Hexateuch (see Boorer 2011); however, in this study, we do not occupy ourselves with the diachronic issues. The promise of land runs through the Pentateuch and fosters coherence, but the ultimate fulfilment of the promise is found in Joshua.

Stereotyping of the inhabitants of the land

Stereotyping is a representation strategy of negatively portraying the other based on certain traits that are exaggerated and simplified as though they perpetually characterise the other (Hall 1997:257–258). As Hall (1997) argues, stereotyping:

> [*R*]educes, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference', in so doing setting a division between the acceptable and unacceptable, the normal and the abnormal, insiders and outsiders, us and them. The stereotyping also serves to produce inequalities as the other becomes subordinated and excluded. (p. 258)

Stereotyping, as Anand (2007), reflecting on European colonialism in Tibet, notes:

> [*F*]lourished to justify imperialism as a civilizing mission – the restless, honest, active, exploratory, masculine, enlightened, modern spirit of the 'white man' stood in contrast to the laziness, deceit, passivity, fatalism, femininity, backwardness, and traditional spiritlessness of the natives. (p. 26)

In an imperial context, stereotyping serves to justify the imperialists or colonisers' inhumane actions towards the other, which implies exoneration from accountability and consequences and not having to deal with moral guilt (see Lebow 1976:22).

The colonial ideology that underlies the Hexateuch is evidenced through the stereotyping of the people of the land as seen here:

- *Canaan is cursed to be a slave*. In Genesis 9:25–27, Noah curses his grandson Canaan by relegating him to the status of slave for the action of his father Ham, who saw his father's nakedness. Thus, Canaan is cursed for the actions of his father, and, as an Israelite saying goes, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' (Jr 31:29; Ezk 18:2). However, the curse only becomes effective when Israel takes over the land many generations later.
- *The iniquitous Amorites will have their land taken.* In Genesis 15:16, with no specific iniquity mentioned, the Amorites are declared to be iniquitous people whose iniquity will continue until it reaches its limit. When the Amorites' iniquity has reached its limits, it is the descendants of Abraham who will take over the land. The contrast made between the descendants of Abraham and the Amorites is telling: on the one hand, the descendants of Abraham 'will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years' (Gn 15:13), and on the other hand, Abraham's descendants will have to wait until the fourth generation before they can return to the land because 'the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure' (Gn 15:16). The takeover of the Amorites' land is also confirmed by Jacob on his deathbed when he gives the Josephites the land of the Amorites, which apparently he had already conquered by his own sword and bow (Gn 48:21–22).
- *The people of the land are sexually immoral people.* In Leviticus 18, the Israelites are instructed on the unacceptable behaviour that characterised Egypt, where they used to live, and the land of Canaan, where they are going to live (v. 3). The laws in Leviticus 18 are mainly sexual laws, thereby presenting the people of the land as sexually immoral nations who have defiled the land, whom the land would therefore vomit out (vv. 24–25).

The stereotyping of the people of the land inserted at various points in the Pentateuch synchronically anticipates the takeover of the land as destiny determined over 400 years earlier, even going back to the foundation of the

re-created order with Noah's curse of Canaan. When the Israelites take over the land, the people of the land are, in a sense, just getting what has been coming their way. Therefore, when the land became the land of promise to Abraham's descendants, they were thereby granted the right to take over the land through violence and enslave the people of the land. In this colonial ideology, the people of the land were killable and enslavable. Moreover, God is not left out of it – it is he who gives the land that belongs to others to them and even orders the destruction of the people of the land. The colonial ideology that underlies the text, when approached from a decolonial perspective, should not simply be considered as something 'perplexing' or 'troubling' or 'offensive' or 'embarrassing' (Brueggemann 2013:13–14; Copan & Flannagan 2013:201; Cowles 2003:179; Heimbach 2013:36, 179; Prior 2002:48–49). This is beyond just perplexing, troubling, offensive or embarrassing; it reveals the disturbing nature of the colonial mentality, both ancient and modern. Those in a position of power, privilege and control of the narrative would commit atrocities and feel justified in the actions.

The stereotyping of the people of the land invokes the memory of the stereotyping of African people (savages, lazy, inferior) and the African continent ('the dark continent') under modern colonialism, and the continuing stereotyping of Africa and the African continent as poor and underdeveloped, ripe for intrusion, invasion and exploitation. The Euro-Western subjects enunciated themselves as the centre, blind to their own limitations and social locations. Grosfoguel (2007) notes:

> By hiding the subject of enunciation, European/Euro-American colonial expansion and domination constructed a hierarchy of knowledge with superior and inferior knowledges and, thus, of superior and inferior people around the world. We went from the 16th century characterisation of 'people without writing' to the 18th century characterisation of 'people without history', to the 20th century characterisation of 'people without development' and more recently, to the early-21st century, 'people without democracy'. (p. 214)

It also invokes recent memories of the invasions of Iraq and Libya, which resulted in drawn-out civil wars in those countries that have claimed more lives than most dictators have killed in their lifetimes.

Outwitting the coloniser: Rahab and the Gibeonites (Amorites)

The so-called promised land, as already noted, was occupied land. In Israel's perspective, as projected by the text, the destined transaction would be the people of the land vomited out or wiped out of the land as the Israelites took over the land as promised to their forefathers. However, the land takeover was not going to happen without resistance. Our interest in this section is on the resistance, and therefore, a reading from a position of colonial difference – a

reading through the eyes of the Canaanites or Amorites whose lands were invaded and taken (cf. Fisk 2019). It is the resistance of the people of the land, as we will highlight below, that neutralised the God-sanctioned invasion. Veracini (2010) notes:

> Differently organised groups develop distinct anti-colonial responses [...] resistance and survival are thus the weapons of the colonised and the settler-colonised; it is resistance and survival that make certain that colonialism and settler colonialism are never ultimately triumphant. (pp. 3–4)

Below, we zoom in on Rahab and the Gibeonites to examine their responses to the invaders and argue that their response should be viewed as outwitting the invaders, anti-colonial responses to the setter-colonialists who were invading their land.

The displaced Rahab: Outwitting the conqueror for survival

Rahab and her family's survival, as presented in the text, is problematic. When the Joshua narrative is read from a position of colonial difference, the temptation is to outrightly condemn Rahab as a traitor who sold out her own people. Others highlight her vulnerability, pointing to the fact that as a prostitute, Rahab was marginalised in her own society, which made her a target of manipulation by Israel's spies. However, the inclusion of Rahab into the Israelite community for collaborating with them neutralised these *herēm* warfare rules:

> When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them. You shall not make marriages with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons. For they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. 'For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD, your God, has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. (Dt 7:1–6; [RSV])
>
> And you shall destroy all the peoples that the LORD your God will give over to you, your eye shall not pity them; neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you. (Dt 7:16; [RSV])
>
> Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes.[1] 'But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you, in order that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God'. (Dt 20:16–18; [NAS])

Yet they did not utterly destroy Jericho but left survivors. With the exception of the city of Jericho, the Joshua narrative gives the impression that Joshua executed the *herēm* warfare regulations to the letter by destroying anything that had breath (Jos 10:28, 40; 11:11, 12–14). However, in terms of the Judges narrative, the Israelites sparring of Rahab's life was an act of disobedience to YHWH's voice, which rendered *herēm* null and void (Jdg 2:1–3):

> The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you,[2] and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this?[3] Now, therefore, I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides, and their gods will be a snare to you. (vv. 1–3)

Any further attempts to execute the *herēm* by the invaders of the land was by itself an act of disobedience to YHWH. The first major battle across the Jordan, as narrated in the Joshua narrative, thus, sealed the fate for the invaders – the land of promise was not going to be theirs alone; it was going to be a land they would share with the people they were supposed to kill off. While Rahab may be viewed as a sell-out or collaborator with the enemy, her actions guaranteed that the conquest would not be the hoped-for success. The tendency to regard Rahab as a heroine of faith through alliance (Jos 6:22–25; Heb 11:31; Ja 2:25; 1 Chr 12) is one-sided. From the conqueror's perspective, her alliance was because she saw the ultimate victory of Israel; however, from the position of colonial difference, her alliance foresaw the inevitable permanence of the people of the land as they lived in the midst of Israel 'to this day' (Jos 6:25).

The survival of Rahab, however, also embodies trauma. Rahab and her family lived with the trauma of seeing all that their ancestors had built over generations brought down to rubble and deserted (Jos 6:25–27). The relocation of Rahab and her family was not a relocation by choice but a forced relocation. While accommodated in Israel, Rahab and her family were still the other:

> So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her; and they brought all her kindred, and set them outside the camp of Israel. (Jos 6:23; [RSV])

Rahab and her family were brought to Israel, but they were *set outside the camp of Israel*. The boundary markers were still in place: Rahab and her family were insiders but yet still outsiders. If Rahab was marginalised within the Jericho community for being a prostitute, her co-operation with the invader did not save her from marginalisation in the new community. Rahab and her family became the accommodated others in their land who lived at the borderline. Their ancestral land was reduced to a heap of rubble and had become a sight of terror – a cursed city: 'Cursed before the Lord anyone who tries to build this city, Jericho! At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its

foundation, and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gate' (Jos 6:26). The marginalisation would have been furthered by the stereotyping of the people of the land, which did not vanish with her inclusion into the Israelite community. The stereotyped people of the land were still being killed. To be a Rahab was to be a thorn and a snare in the colonial settlers' side (Jdg 2:2–3).

In my South African context, the Rahab story invokes the memory of forced removals, which was a matter of death and life. Our ancestors' options were to either die fighting a losing battle in the face of heavy weaponry or surrender and move to less fertile areas. The atrocities of genocidal extermination, dispossession and apartheid degradation are not just a matter of historical memory; it is a present reality as we continue to live with disconnected from our ancestral lands. While the option of death would have been a brave and bold step, it could have resulted in the extinction of our ancestors; the option to face the torment and subjugation of removal was still a bold and brave move. The displacement of our people is still a reality in the postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa. The informal settlements keep on sprouting, and the people are displaced – it is a never-ending cycle of building and demolition. It is the curse of displacement.

Fisk (2019), in his reflection on the Canaanite genocide and the Palestinian Nakba, who were disposed of the land by Zionism, argues:

> Those who read Joshua from below groan under the burden of Rahab's terror, for she resorted to treachery only because she foresaw Israel's inevitable victory, precisely like many 20th century Palestinian collaborators who foresaw the assured victory of Zionism. (p. 34)

The Joshua narrative, however, was not the last word on Jericho. Joshua's curse could not stop the rebuilding of Jericho – despite the deaths of his sons, Hiel rebuilt Jericho (1 Ki 16:34). Who was Hiel? I dare not speculate.

The retainers of their land: Outwitting the conqueror to retain the land

In the Joshua narrative context, Rahab's covenant-making with the Israelite invaders was just the first, but not the last, successful defence against Israel. The conquest of Jericho, as the narrative claims, spread Joshua's fame throughout the land (Jos 6:27), and the conquest of Ai did so even more. The spread of Joshua's fame would have also included the news about the survival of a prostitute and her family from the rubble of Jericho. The spread of the news invoked different responses from the people of the land. The other people of the land (the kings of the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites) opted for resistance (Jos 9:1–2), whereas the Gibeonites (an Amorite section) opted for survival. Though, as Veracini (2011) argues, the two, resistance and survival, are distinct approaches; yet they are simultaneous operations. Depending on circumstances, some will

survive to resist, whereas others will resist by surviving. The option to resist by some of the people of the land implied engaging in battle to defend their cities; however, the Gibeonites followed Rahab's route of survival by opting for a treaty to keep invaders from attacking their towns or cities.

It stands to reason that as the news of Joshua's conquest and Rahab's survival spread, some people of the land would have considered it important above all else to source information on how the prostitute managed to survive. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the Gibeonites adopted the survival strategy using Rahab's formula (Table 6.1).

While the survival treaties follow the same pattern, the circumstances under which the treaties occur differ. In the case of Rahab, it was the Israelite 'secret' [חֶרֶשׁ] spies who went into Jericho and entered her house. She collaborated with the secret spies by not handing them over; however, she initiated the treaty discussion to save her own life and the lives of her family members and all who belonged to them. According to Perdue (1997:175), a family in ancient Israel was 'multigenerational (up to four-generation) and included the social arrangement of several families, related by blood and marriage, who lived in two or three houses architecturally connected'. It is anyone's guess as to how many people would have survived Jericho, considering the associate families Rahab might have brought in for their survival. Therefore, while Rahab may not have saved a whole city from the invaders, she would have saved many nuclear families. The survivors of Jericho surely have a right to claim her as their heroine.

TABLE 6.1: Survival treaty formulas.

Formula	Survival treaty/Covenant	
	Rahab (Jos 2:9–13)	**Gibeonites (Jos 9:9–11)**
Appeal to YHWH	[9]*I know that the LORD* has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you	[9]'Your servants have come from a very far country, *because of the name of the LORD your God*; for we have heard a report of him, of all that he did in Egypt'
Recounting of the previous victory	[10]For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed [11]As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below	[10]and of all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, King Sihon of Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth
Treaty/covenant request	[12]Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the LORD that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith [13]that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death	[11]So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey; go to meet them, and say to them, "We are your servants; come now, make a treaty with us"'

In the case of the Gibeonites, they are the ones who opted to approach the Israelites by sending their delegation. However, theirs was an orchestrated plan [עָרְמָה] to engage the Israelites to enter into a treaty with them (Gordon 2003). The plan worked: 'Joshua made peace with them, guaranteeing their lives by a treaty; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them' (Jos 9:15 NRS). Trapped by their own oath, the Israelites could not kill the Gibeonites; all they could do was change the treaty's terms and render the Gibeonites labourers in their own land. More interesting is the reasoning the Gibeonites provide for their actions (Jos 9):

> Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; so we were in great fear for our lives because of you, and did this thing. (v. 24; [NRS])

Thus, the plan of the Gibeonites was a response to neutralise the *herēm*. The orchestrated plan projects an awareness of the *herēm* instruction, which did provide for the survival of the distant cities (see Rofé 1985:28–29). While Rahab's treaty with the Israelites saved several families from Jericho's destruction, the Gibeonites' ambassadors managed to save four of their cities. In light of 2 Samuel 21:2, the Gibeonites managed to preserve their unique identity as Amorites even in the enslaving invaders' presence. Therefore, considering the parallels between Rahab's story and the Gibeonites' story, it is probable that Jericho's survivors also maintained their own unique identity.

The Joshua narrative presents Rahab and the Gibeonites as informed of Israel's modus operandi when they entered the land. Theirs is not a story of passive people of the land, but those who had become aware of YHWH's instructions to Israel before the invasion of the land. Theirs was the choice between death and life, and they chose life. Their choice of life was the choice to survive rather than to resist, which would have resulted in death. The choice to survive, in turn, gave them a chance to resist.

Those like Rahab and her family who survived but were displaced from their land would have had to wage their resistance at the following fronts: Firstly, they would have struggled to live as the marginalised other in their own land, which would have called for resistance against oppression. Secondly, they would have struggled to reconnect with their own land, which would have called for resistance through reclaiming the lands. Thirdly, they would have struggled not to be completely subsumed under Israel's identity, which would have called for resistance to maintain their own (Canaanite) identity. The traditional view that Rahab is a heroine of faith who married into Israel does not imply that all who survived became subsumed under Israel's identity. Fourthly, if the traditional view that Rahab's collaboration subsumed her under Israel's identity is true, her being subsumed goes against the notion that Israel's identity or holiness is maintained by marriage only to those of Israelite descent.

Those like the Gibeonites who survived but managed to cling to their land had to exercise resistance on the following fronts: Firstly, they had to continually resist the notion that their presence was a threat to Israel's own unique identity and manner of worship. Secondly, they had to continually resist the land grabbers who wished to exterminate them. Thirdly, they had to continually resist the temptation to lose their own unique identity and be subsumed under Israel's identity or embrace a hybrid identity as Gibeonite-Israelites. Fourthly, they had to continually resist their relegation to the status of slaves in their own land.

Lasting effects of settler colonialism on the land question

As projected in the text, the Israelite land invaders were not a colonial power that had its base elsewhere; rather, it was landless people with a goal to take over other people's land and settle permanently. The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt was not a decolonial event of colonial settlers returning to their land as a result of a colonised territory attaining its freedom; rather, it was an escape of an oppressed and enslaved population. However, Israel's conquest of Canaan, as already discussed, may be construed in terms of settler colonialism, although Israel was not a colonial power. Israel is projected as an invader that comes to stay. As Veracini (2013:28) argues regarding the characteristics of settler colonialism, 'a settler-colonial project is ultimately successful only when it extinguishes itself – that is, when the settlers cease to be defined as such and become "natives", and their position becomes normalised'. In the case of the ancient Israelite story, when the Israelites took on the status of natives, the people of the land did not necessarily lose their status as people of the land. Therefore, the latter so-called Judah and Israel was a land of various people who lived alongside each other. However, the Rahab story and the Gibeonites story, which likely originally circulated as independent stories, highlight the struggles of those indigenous people of the land who were displaced and those who hung on to the land but were treated as slaves.

The acquiring of the promised land motif in the Hexateuch is construed in multiple ways: Firstly, people leave their own people and homeland for a new land wherein a new life is established (the Abraham story). Secondly, people return to the land in which their forefathers lived and already had some claims (the Jacob and Joseph stories). Thirdly, people leave the land of slavery (Egypt) for the promised land (Canaan) – a land to be conquered with no other territory to report back to. All these ideologies intersect within the Hexateuch with the Joshua narrative as the culmination point – the final fulfilment of the motif of the land of the promise. Hawk (1991, 2000) rightly observes that contrary reports in the Joshua narrative serve the plot(s) by

creating tension between obedience and disobedience, thereby creating ambiguity about the promise's fulfilment. Therefore, Israel's settler colonialism was ultimately not entirely successful, with YHWH complicit in the failure (Eslinger 1989). Credit goes to the people of the land's survival instincts as a form of resistance to the invaders.

In our South African context, the decolonial project construed as the struggle of liberation of black people or indigenous people in asserting our humanity and right to participate in the country's politics brought about a resounding victory with the rise of a democratic South Africa. Freedom was attained through a struggle for liberation that also took place within the dynamics of settler colonialism. The Republic of South Africa, initially the Union of South Africa, emerged from the union or compromise between British colonisers and settler colonialists (specifically Afrikaner colonialists) that established the land as white people's country. The Republic of South Africa prior to 1994 was a colonial settler state, which operated colonially in relation to the segregated black people. As in other European settler colonies such as North America, Australia and New Zealand, settler colonialism in South Africa became irreversible. As Youé (2018) notes:

> [*T*]he settler-colonialists transcend their settler origins and become the new 'natives', with the old 'natives' literally and metaphorically pushed to on one side. When liberal democracy is achieved, the idea of the 'settler' is redundant because 'settlers' have transformed themselves into citizens of a nation-state who have dispensed with their imperial overlords (and one-time protectors) and inhabit a modern, urban-based society. (p. 70)

The permanence of the settlers in our context was solidified in the preamble of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, which declares (Republic of South Africa 1996):

> We, the people of South Africa, recognise the injustices of our past; honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity. (p. 1)

As Veracini (2013:28) notes regarding settler colonialism, 'a settler-colonial project that has successfully run its course is no longer settler-colonial'. Therefore, the land question from the perspective of the settler colonialist has been settled – they are now 'natives' – citizens of the Republic with constitutional guarantees of belonging in the land and the land belonging to them, and property rights. For indigenous people of the land, to live in democratic South Africa or the rainbow nation is to accept the settlers' permanence with no calls for their expulsion, or their murder, or for seeing them as an existential threat. This is in contrast to the settler colonial ideology in the Hexateuch, which required the complete annihilation of the people of the land: the European settler colonial ideology exercised in our land was founded on racial superiority, segregation and apartheid.

The noble intentions expressed in the South African constitution's preamble form part of telling our story but do not necessarily reverse the gains of the settler colonialists. The land question in our context forms part of the ongoing struggle to decolonise settler colonialism. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's well-meaning process, which was intended to heal the wounds, could not completely heal. The apologies and forgiveness require concrete action to address injustices of the past and to construct an inclusive future. Therefore, the land reform project in our context is not simply an attempt to redress the past injustices; it is also intended also to address the current social and economic inequities. For most indigenous people in South Africa, our displacement, like that of Rahab and all those associated with her family, has become permanent. The land reform programme in our country does not have as its goal the complete reversal of the country's dispossession that occurred in our land during the colonial-apartheid period. In our context, the land reform programme is not a *lex talionis* project; it is aimed at fostering inclusivity and mutual flourishing. However, this process does require redress of the past injustices through the return of land to those whose land was dispossessed – an ideal that is unattainable as the land cannot be fully returned to the original owners. The settlers are now natives of the land to whom the land also belongs. Furthermore, as Maluleke (1999) notes, pursuing the ideal of restitution can be desirable, but we cannot forget that the ideal can be perverted and access to the land unequal. For Vorster (2019:8), 'land reform cannot be aimed at returning South Africa to an "ideal" original situation, but must rather ensure a fair distribution of social goods in a plural modern state'.

The Land Restitution Programme, in terms of the Restitution of Land Right Act 22 of 1994 in our country, allowed indigenous people to reclaim their land back if dispossessed after 19 June 1913 due to discriminatory laws and practices. However, the Land Restitution Programme was not open-ended and it had cut-off dates: the 1913 cut-off date ignored the loss of land before 1913, and there was a cut-off date for lodging claims, initially set for April 1998 and then extended to December 1998. Fifteen years later, the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act of 2014 opened a five-year window for submission (2014–2019). Presenting the dispossessed with windows is like saying, 'Speak now or forever hold your peace', thereby cementing the dispossession of land. The idea of giving the previously dispossessed particular time frames in which to lodge their claim is further injustice. The restitution programme's operation in terms of time frames to a certain extent makes displacement and dispossession permanent.

While the opportunity to reclaim the land might have come and gone, what we have is the historical memory of where our ancestors used to live. Our historical memory is a powerful tool that keep our Jerichos alive – even when they are reduced to rubble and others consider rebuilding them anathema. In the words of the Jewish Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel (1996):

> Memory is a power no less powerful and pervasive than love. What does it mean to remember? It is to live in more than one world, to prevent the past from fading and to call upon the future to illuminate it. To remember is to revive the fragments of existence, to rescue lost beings, to cast harsh light on faces and events, to drive back the sands of time, [...] to combat oblivion and reject death. (p. 150)

My father does not cease to remind me that our family's ancestral place is in the mountainous area at Swongozwi – a fertile land set what is now known as the Soutpansberg mountain range. Swongozwi had a vibrant and growing community at some point; however, when whites and their corporations took over the land, they choked that community. Every time I drive through the Soutpansberg mountain range, I cannot help but wonder: how long do we have to live with the disconnect with our ancestral land? For many of our younger generation, the disconnect with their ancestral lands is becoming permanent, and even more so as the older generation with the historical memory is quickly fading away. With the fading of the historical memory of ancestral land, so is the loss of ancestral inheritance.

Due to the displacements and disconnections, the indigenous people of the land are now the ones who carry the burden to prove their historical connection with specific territories. When the indigenous people pursue land claims of certain parts of the country, it unfortunately affirms settler colonial imaginary of the emptiness of the land. The unclaimed land is, thus, projected as an empty land, which the settlers had the right to occupy. However, simply thinking in this manner is paralysing. As Khoury (2011) argues, we have to distinguish between closed memories, that is, memory as prisons, and creative memories, that is, memory as prophetic. As Khoury (2011) states:

> As a prison, memory could mummify us in a certain time and place and prevent us from getting out of it. According to that meaning, memory is no more a stimulant, but a paralyzing reality. It paralyzes our vitality and creativity. We ruminate on the past, but we remain unable to imagine the future. We are more able to invent history. As a prophecy, memory is a stimulant. It helps us, on the basis of our vivid memory, to go forward and invent a new future and a new untold narrative. (p. 266)

The recent move to amend the constitution to allow for LEWC as pursued by the EFF and the ruling party, the ANC, highlights the failure of the current land reform programme to radically address past injustices. For those in support of the expropriation without compensation, the LEWC will empower the state to be more proactive in addressing the imbalance in land ownership, open up land for development and reduce inequity. Furthermore, the LEWC is intended to be a shift from the market-driven 'willing buyer, willing seller' model, which has failed to produce the desired results over the years (for further discussion, see Akinola 2020, Xaba Mzingaye 2021).

For those opposed to the LEWC, it has the potential to threaten property rights, food security, and investors' confidence (Boshoff 2017; Sihlobo &

Kapuya 2018). Mtero and Hall (2020) highlight that the state has the powers to expropriate land, but it has not really used its powers to do so within the current constitutional prescripts. Therefore, the amendment will serve to strengthen the existing expropriation powers. For some, the concern is not so much the LEWC, but the corruption in government that may undermine such a policy as those who benefit most are probably the political elites and those in their network (Mubecua, Tembe & Mbatha 2020). For Xaba Mzingaye (2021), the LEWC is the football in the political game as the EFF and the ANC regard the land question as a key factor in their own survival in South African politics.

The political failure to adequately address the land question in South Africa since 1994 points to the deep-rooted structures of settler colonialism, which cannot be easily undone. To use Fanon's (1963:37) terms, we still live in a 'world cut into two' – poor and rich, underprivileged and privileged, the landless and the landed. In this world, the rich, privileged and landed fear losing their wealth, privileges and land. This is a world in which the dispossessed of the land must make a constitutional oath to deal justly and within the prescripts of the law in any effort and attempt to redress the socio-economic injustices of the past. For the indigenous people of the land, this is our oath: 'The land does not just belong to us, the indigenous people of the land, it now belongs to everyone who lives in it'. And no one will be deprived of their property rights except in terms of law of general application, and no law may permit arbitrary deprivation of property. Therefore, when we now say, *Mayibuye iAfrika*, it means that it 'comes back to us all'.

Conclusion

Can the indigenes outwit the colonial settlers and regain the land? Yes and no. A decolonial reading of the Joshua tale highlighted various ways in which the people of the land opted either to resist or survive the Israelite invaders. In this reading, Rahab and the Gibeonites are viewed as those who opted for a strategy of surviving to resist in the context of colonial settlement. The colonial invaders became the 'natives' of the land who had to share the land with the indigenous people of the land who could not be extinguished from the land because they survived or resisted thereby presenting a lingering possibility to regain (some of) the land from the colonial settlers. In the South African context, the indigenes can regain some of the lands, but not the whole land. The indigenes can regain the land, but not just for themselves but for everyone. The colonial settlers are now natives of the land too. As Veracini (2010:112) notes, '"settlement" establishes legitimacies without extinguishing indigenous ones, and that the indigenous sovereignties need to be accommodated in a decolonised, post-settler move, has remained elusive'. However, this should not stop us from imagining and inventing a new future in which we appreciate

our land as a precious inheritance from the past and our hope of salvation in the future. Therefore, LEWC should form part of a prophetic memory that hopes for a new order in which we can combat poverty and build a prosperous nation from our land's wealth. As the Vhavenḓa people say: *lupfumo lu mavuni* [wealth is in the land].

Chapter 7

Ecofeminist hermeneutics

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Introduction

Ecofeminism originated in the 1970s[48] and is associated with third-wave feminism. It refers to 'feminist theory and activism informed by ecology' (Howell 1997:231). Feminism and ecology have merged into a 'new social theory and political movement' (Eaton 2000:55). Feminism, ecology, environmentalism and social justice provide a theoretical framework for the formulation of the liberation of the environment (Nhanenge 2007:137). Ecofeminism thus looks simultaneously at feminist and ecological issues without giving precedence to either. It aims at ecological and social harmony. Just as there is no single feminism, there is also not one ecofeminism. The common feature in ecofeminism is the social critique of systems of domination (Warren 1994:44). Ecofeminists have drawn parallels between the theological, historical, empirical, conceptual, political and theoretical oppression, and exploitation of the environment and the oppression and subordination of women.

48. The earliest reference to this interconnection is publications *inter alia* by Rosemary Ruether (1971), Elizabeth Dobson Grey (1979), Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), and Nancy Chodorow (1974).

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Ecofeminists are committed to understanding and revealing the conceptual frameworks responsible for these oppressions. According to Warren (1994:45), 'conceptual frameworks are socially constructed lenses or filters through which one perceives oneself and others'. Frameworks based on anthropocentrism, patriarchy, dualism and androcentrism are oppressive when they explain, justify and maintain relationships of domination and subordination. Eaton (2000:55) says that 'mistrust of women and fear of dependency on the natural world are the interlocking forces and underpinnings of a patriarchal world view'. Therefore, ecofeminists suggest a transformative worldview that places a higher value on *connection and relationship*, *reciprocity and mutuality*, *equality* and *solidarity* rather than a worldview of contrast and separation. A main goal of ecofeminism is social transformation, which means establishing a society where women and nature function rightly. Society needs to emphasise the intrinsic worth of nature and introduce a different worldview on the location of nature in general, and more specifically animals, in creation. Ruether states that ecofeminists aim 'at strategies and world views to liberate or heal these interconnected dominations by better understanding of their aetiology and enforcement' (Ruether 2012:22).

Ecological hermeneutics as a reading-focus

According to Kavusa, when the term hermeneutics is used in singular form, it relates to the 'general theory of interpretation dealing with matters of understanding as maintained in the works of scholars such as Heidegger, Schleiermacher and Ricoeur'. The plural form of the term applies to 'modern and postmodern hermeneutical stances focusing either on the explanation [*Erklärung*] of the text or on its understanding [*Verstehen*]' (Kavusa 2019:231). In hermeneutical interpretation, reading and interpretative approaches are 'socially, politically and institutionally informed'. Therefore, hermeneutics indicate a specific ideology or doctrine that influence and shape someone's interpretation of, *inter alia,* biblical texts and the environment (Kavusa 2019:231).

Ecological hermeneutics tries to subject biblical texts to the hermeneutic of suspicion and to retrieve the ecological knowledge in biblical texts and traditions in an attempt to address the ecological crisis (Conradie 2010:295). Kavusa (2019) says that:

> [*A*]t the same time, it tries to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew Christian traditions in light of ecological challenges. This task urges interpreters to go beyond what has commonly been the meaning of the biblical text in order to generate 'new possibilities' of understanding these biblical texts [...]. (p. 231)

This understanding of biblical texts is for the wellbeing of the environment. This approach has been adopted by many biblical scholars focusing on liberation and feminist hermeneutics. With this focus, the Bible develops into a '"site of struggle" where readings come into conflict with each other' (Conradie 2010:297).

Ecofeminism as pluralistic perspectives

Ecofeminism signifies various historical, contextual and other theoretical approaches to combine feminist religious perspectives and ecology. It also requires supporting political, economic, social and cultural evaluation (Howell 1997:232). Ecofeminists are not committed to agreeing with each other. They rather 'identify some common presuppositions, principles, precepts or beliefs' that influence ecofeminist thinking and strive to reach common goals that end the oppression of women and nature to secure the survival of nature and humankind (Howell 1997:240).

Howell (1997) mentions four shared ecofeminist presuppositions. The first presupposition and expectation are a focus on social transformation (Howell 1997:233), which has to 'reassess and reconstruct values and relations towards equality, cultural diversity, and nonviolence in associations that are non-hierarchical, non-competitive, and fully participatory' (Birkeland 1993:20). Secondly, social transformation necessitates an intellectual transformation in an attempt to change the mindset of people: 'Whereas normative logic relies on formulaic dualism and hierarchy, ecofeminism urges non-dualistic and non-hierarchical forms of thought' (Howell 1997:234). These dualistic and hierarchical thoughts include a negative association of women with nature. Ecofeminism demands 'new intellectual frames of reference' as alternatives to the defective dualisms that divide female and male, privileged persons and 'others', as well as 'environment' and humanity (Birkeland 1993:20; Howell 1997:233).

Thirdly, there is a need to transform human interactions with nature. Ecofeminism advocates a 'shift from instrumental value to intrinsic value in assessing nature' (Birkeland 1993:20). This entails that nature should not be treated as a commodity and object but respected as having intrinsic value instead of focusing on its usefulness to humans. Howell (1997:234–235) describes the fourth shared ecofeminist presupposition as 'what ecology teaches about nature is equally relevant to humans, since humans are part of nature and participants in ecological processes'. Ecofeminists are of the opinion that 'biological diversity suggests that human diversity is valuable', which emphasises that women, like other marginalised persons, must be acknowledged for their intrinsic value and subjectivity.

Different ecofeminist frameworks

Ecofeminism, like feminism, functions in different ideological and contextual frameworks or models. Within these models, there are different approaches and methods of analysis, such as 'liberal ecofeminism, spiritual/cultural ecofeminism, and social/socialist ecofeminism (or materialist ecofeminism)' (Merchant 1992:193–221). It is not possible to discuss all these approaches within the scope of this chapter. However, Howell (1997:236–240) gives

examples of ecofeminist models that demonstrate the variety in ecofeminist ideological frameworks.

Rosemary Ruether (1992) and Sallie McFague (1993) construct ecofeminist models from the position of North American and European females favoured by race, class and education. Their 'models have a common holistic view of the cosmos' and do not 'focus upon particularity or species' (Howell 1997:236).

Ruether suggests a theocosmology in *Gaia and God* (1992). In her discussion of theocosmology, she implicates the systematic process of creation and consequent destruction stories, and the emergence of male domination that informed the Christian tradition. As early Christianity was influenced by Greek, Babylonian and Jewish traditions, contemporary Christianity should address new scientific findings and the ecological crisis (Howell 1997:236).

In her theocosmology of Gaia, Ruether (1992:247) does not replace a male god with a female god, but rather with the '"coincidence of opposites" in which the "absolute maximum" and the "absolute minimum" are the same'. God and Gaia are rather conflated.

McFague (1987, 1993) explores ecofeminist metaphorical theories to find new metaphors and representations of God and the relationship of God with the cosmos. In *The body of God: An ecological theology* (1993), she suggests that the theories of the Big Bang and evolution should serve as a 'Common Creation Story to remythologise the scientific story in particular religious contexts' to create a 'common global point of contact'. This 'common creation story describes the common origin of all bodies in stardust and the evolution of a diversity of bodies' (Howell 1997:237; McFague 1993:38–47). Howell (1997) comments on McFague's model that:

> [*T*]he model of the world as the body of God breaks down the spirit/body dualism, values the body, and expresses divine concern that the basic human needs of all bodies be met. (p. 237)

McFague (1993) portrays the model as:

> [*A*]gential-organic and panentheistic, referring to a theology of nature that affirms divine purpose in the universe, God as the spirit (life) of the body (cosmos), God as transcendent and immanent, God and the world as interdependent, and all bodies (living and non-living) as interconnected, interdependent, and valuable in the divine body. (pp. 140–141)

Another ecofeminist, Carol Adams, is concerned with animals and animal rights rather than with the whole cosmic matrix (Howell 1997:238). In *Neither man nor beast: Feminism in defence of animals* (1994), she critiques animal experimentation, the fur industry and the politics of meat-eating. However, she mainly focuses on a critique of the polarisation of genders and objectification of females and animals that reinforce the superiority of males over animals, females and other marginalised persons in joint systems of domination. In addition, Adams proposes how feminist theory could change

'beastly theology', meaning 'beastly authority and ontology' (Adams 1994: 179–185). She asks two questions (Adams 1994; Howell 1997:238):

> Does the creation of some beings solely for the purpose of being objects make sense in the face of an intrinsically and radically relational divinity? And if God is process, *being*, and revealed through relationship should we not situate all beings within that divine relationship, seeing with loving *eyes*? (p. 195)

Delores Williams functions within a womanist ecofeminist model. This approach emerges from the framework of an African American ecofeminist theory that opposes racism against African Americans in general and specifically black females. It emphasises the similarity between the attack on Earth and the attack on black females' bodies (Howell 1997:238). Williams (1993a) describes in *Sin, nature, and black women's bodies*, the 'sin of defilement' as a:

> [*H*]uman attack upon creation so as to ravish, violate, and destroy creation: to exploit and control the production and reproduction capacities of nature, to destroy the unity in nature's placements, to obliterate the spirit of the created. (p. 25)

She applies the 'sin of defilement' to nature and to black females' bodies and states that 'Christianity, science, and politics conspire to render the defilement invisible by associating permanent negative valuation to the colour black' (Howell 1997:239; Williams 1993a:28). In another publication, *Sisters in the wilderness* (Williams 1993b), the story of Hagar in Genesis 16 is used as a framework to support a womanist motivation to survive and achieve a quality life. For black females, 'nature as wilderness has spiritual and political significance as a symbol of resistance to and freedom from enslavement' (Williams 1993b:20–22). It also symbolises their encounter with God, who is not only a liberating them from oppression but also a 'participant in survival, visionary, a source of promise, and a source for black females' liberating power and resourcefulness' (Howell 1997:239; Williams 1993b:120–130).

Starhawk's Wiccan ecofeminism represents neopagan ecofeminist earth-based spirituality and functions in the framework of neopagan and Native American ecofeminism (Howell 1997:239). Starhawk gives a critique on 'how Christianity and science seized the power, healing, and spiritual wisdom of females who practiced the old religion [Wicca]' (Starhawk 1982:183–219). She lists three origins of earth-based spirituality: 'the immanence of spirit (god, goddess) in the living cosmos' (which can be interpreted as pantheism), 'the interconnection of everything in the living earth' and 'the community of beings who are part of the living cosmos' (Starhawk 1990:73–74). The neopagan earth-based spirituality necessitates 'integrity and both antinuclear and environmental activism' (Howell 1997:239; Starhawk 1982:199).

Paula Allen, a Laguna Pueblo/Sioux,[49] revives indigenous American myths and traditions that focus on creation, nature and females (Howell 1997:239).

49. Native American people from west-central New Mexico in the United States of America.

She reintroduces different stories of female spirits who occupy everything on Earth, bestowing sacredness with their blessing and informing harmony and balance to nature (Allen 1992:13–14). Different from 'traditional' images of creating life, the 'spirit Creatrix thinks or names beings into life' (Allen 1992:15–16). Earth is understood in Native American mythology as 'female, Grandmother Earth, a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional being' (Allen 1992:52; Howell 1997:239–240).

Third-world ecofeminism is represented *inter alia* by the work of Vandana Shiva (1989; Howell 1997:240). She discusses Indian Hindu cosmology and the involvement of females in the production of food, the management of water and silviculture (the growing and cultivation of trees). She (1989) argues for the reintroduction of the:

> [*A*]ncient practices of women whose care for the land, water, and forests were supported culturally and religiously by the notion of Shakti as dynamic energy, the feminine principle, and of Prakriti as nature, the manifestation of Shakti. (p. 38)

Her constructive Hindu Indian ecofeminism demands the restoration of its cosmology and ethnoscience to 'replace Western maldevelopment and to restore cultural harmony for women, men, nature, ecological sustainability, and biological diversity' (Howell 1997:240; Shiva 1989:223).

African ecofeminism is a field that is vigilantly explored at the moment. Many articles and books publish various approaches to bring feminism and the environment together. For example, Munamato Chemhuru is 'combining ecofeminist environmentalism in African communitarian philosophy and *ubuntu'.* She emphasises the role females play in the African communities to transfer traditional knowledge of traditional wisdom through structures 'that are aimed towards protecting water sources, plant species, animals and the environment in general' (Chemhuru 2018:250).

Nontando Hadebe (2017) from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians introduces a framework of 'see, judge and act' methodology from liberation theologies and applies three themes that provide context for dialogue with ecofeminisms: the 'cry of the earth is the cry of the poor'; 'core values of interconnectedness, relatedness and justice with related theologies; and ecological conversion that includes dialogue'. However, the approach of Masenya, namely an *ecobosadi* African feminist framework, will serve as an example of an African ecofeminist approach.

In her article '*An ecobosadi reading of Psalm 127:3–5*', Madipoane Masenya (2001) places ecofeminism in an African feminist framework and terms her approach an '*ecobosadi*' reading of biblical texts. *Bosadi* is a Northern Sotho word that refers to womanhood (Masenya 2001:109). Her context is African and South African females. According to Masenya (2001:110), the African context is characterised by sexism, racism, classism, hierarchies and

earth-demeaning elements: 'The approach therefore critiques elements in the Bible that devalue Earth and women and embraces the liberatory traditions'.

Masenya identifies five principles of the *ecobosadi* approach. Firstly, it acknowledges the uniqueness of the context of African-South African females. The context is characterised by sexism, hierarchies, and post-apartheid racism and classism. As a result, females and the earth community have been relegated to the realm of inferiority. A second principle is that the worldviews of African and ancient communities, like those of the Old Testament, are holistic and agree upon the historical marginalisation of Earth and females (Masenya 2001:110). The third principle is that the *ecobosadi* approach is anchored in faith because for many African females, the Bible is a spiritual resource. However, *ecobosadi* combines an element of faith with an element of critique, which makes the African and especially the *mosadi* reader aware of anthropocentric readings of the Bible that harm the non-human and marginalised members of the earth community. Fourthly, *ecobosadi* also criticises, challenges and resists oppressive elements of African culture such as a worldview that promotes large families at all costs. The fifth principle emphasises the interconnectedness between African females and Earth. African females are taught to listen and hear Earth's voices. They 'understand times and seasons, not through a calendar but through a mastery of the movements of heavenly bodies – stars, sun and moon' (Masenya 2001:111). The moon is particularly important as it has a connection with a female's femininity in terms of her monthly cycle and birthing.

Masenya continues by discussing the African worldview of procreation from an *ecobosadi* perspective. Childbearing is one of the sacred activities in African culture and a woman is valued as a mother. Females are seen as life-givers and their role as mothers is emphasised. Furthermore, African culture perceives a newborn as the return of an ancestor and therefore the naming of a child after a deceased parent is important: linking children and venerating ancestors closely (Masenya 2001:113).

From an *ecobosadi* perspective, Masenya (2001:115) criticises the population explosion the African view on procreation is encouraging and calls it 'hazardous to Earth and non-human members of the earth community'. She says that Africans have chosen to listen to the call of their culture to 'have as many descendants as we possibly can', ignoring the impact that this has on the environment. She emphasises that being responsible parents also means being responsible members of the earthly community. Masenya concludes by saying that 'mothers and Mother Earth suffer a common abuse from the male drive to have many children'. Motherhood should not be pursued at all costs. Nortjé-Meyer suggests mutual mothering as 'an ethos for living wisely and justly', 'having instincts to care and to protect are not exclusively female attributes, but extend to the whole human community and Earth community'

(Nortjé-Meyer 2017:1—6). An *ecobosadi* perspective confirms mutual mothering by recognising the interdependence of women, children, community and land. The focus needs to shift from populating Earth to preserving Earth.

Ecofeminist approaches

The concept of stewardship

The biblical portrayal of humans as stewards of creation is based on Genesis 1:26–28. It serves as a 'metaphor for human responsibility for time, treasure, talents and care of Earth' (Hutchinson 1994:18). Douglas Hall (1990) propagated the idea of the steward as a biblical image describing the responsibility of humanity to care for God's creation.

The discussion of humans as stewards was a reaction to Lynn White's (1967:1203–1207) argument that Genesis 1:26–28 and similar biblical texts[50] give humans (and especially Christians) the mandate to 'dominate, harness and exploit Earth'. This attitude is seen as responsible for the ecological crises.

Understandings of stewardship within the Christian tradition have changed over time. Supporters of the human-centred responsibility for nature make a distinction between the 'managerial' image of the steward in Genesis 1 and the 'gardener' image in Genesis 2. These biblical notions of stewardship have been criticised as rooted in hierarchical, human-centred assumptions and domination. Attempts have therefore been made to address these issues in different ways: Firstly, attention was drawn to 'balancing managerial and gardener images'; secondly, to 'changing understandings of the master on whose authority the steward manages and cares for the earth'; thirdly, that 'the steward is a responsible moral agent rather than simply an amoral functionary carrying out someone else's orders'. (Hutchinson 1994:18).

The image of the steward as 'manager' comes from Genesis 1:26–28, which narrates the creation of the different domains of nature, each as the generation of a new domain from an existing domain, for example, light from darkness; day from night; fauna and flora from land, water and atmosphere and so forth. Earth was co-creator with God, Earth was born from Earth. But when it comes to the creation of humans, they do not emerge from an existing domain of nature like all other living beings; they were created by God in a totally new process, namely created in the image of God, in God's likeness (Habel 2009:2), with the instruction to rule and dominate (Gn 1:28). This sets humans apart from other creatures.

The second image connected to stewardship is that of the 'gardener', who in Genesis 2:15 is instructed by God to take care of the Garden of Eden, to

50. Genesis 2:4–4:16; Psalms 8, 19, 74, 104; passages from Isaiah (40:12–31; 45:9–13; 48:12–13) and Jeremiah (27:5, 32:12), Proverbs (3:19–20, 8:22–31).

protect and preserve the natural environment and act for its wellbeing. Therefore, Warren (1994:43) says that stewardship is perceived as an 'environmental and theological position involving humans' relationship with and duties toward nature. This implies specific moral attitudes and responsibilities, including 'an obligation to preserve and protect the natural environment in a way that reflects benevolent care and concern for the environment itself' (Warren 1994:43).

Bauckham defines stewardship from a Christian and theological perspective. He is of the opinion that this kind of stewardship (human as a gardener) provides an alternative to the traditional perception of the human as dominator. This role of stewardship stresses the responsibility to God with accountability for caring management and not exploitation of creation (Bauckham 2010:1–2). He quotes a report published by the Board of Social Responsibility of the General Synod of the Church of England in 1991 (Attfield 2006):

> We all share and depend on the same world, with its finite and often non-renewable resources. Christians believe that this world belongs to God by creation, redemption and sustenance. And that he has entrusted it to humankind, made in his image and responsible to him; we are in the position of stewards, tenants, curators, trustees or guardians, whether or not we acknowledge this responsibility. Stewardship implies caring management, not selfish exploitation; it involves a concern for both present and future as well as self, and a recognition that the world we manage has an interest in its own survival and wellbeing independent of its value to us [...]. Good stewardship requires justice, truthfulness, sensitivity and compassion. (pp. 78–79)

Bauckham (2010:2) says that the main value of stewardship is to provide an alternative to human domination and exploitation of Earth. This alternative human role involves care and service on behalf of God. Furthermore, he says that this model has had an enormous influence in giving Christians a framework within which they can approach ecological issues.

Ecofeminist critique of stewardship

In reaction from an ecofeminist point of view, Warren (1994:42) sees domination as a sort of dictatorship. According to the idea of humans as stewards, is their rule over the natural environment and to have the right to manage this environment as they wish, perceiving the value of nature as solely 'instrumental' or 'extrinsic'. With this attitude of superiority, humans not only are allowed to exploit Earth and its 'natural resources' but assume that it is 'our legitimate right as superior agents, heirs and controllers of God's creation' to dominate the less valuable, less prestigious and lower status in nature (Warren 1994:42).

Ecofeminists reject this account of environmental stewardship. The main weaknesses of the concept of stewardship are that they situate themselves within traditional theological (primarily Judeo-Christian) contexts. Furthermore, stewardship is problematic due to the lack of adequate attention

to the 'institutional, systematic, structural nature of domination and oppression which characterises androcentric and anthropocentric models/systems of human–nature relationships' (Warren 1994:43).

An additional ecofeminist critique of stewardship is that it is anthropocentric and hierarchical. It also applies to Bauckham's (2010:164–168) presentation of the universal lordship of Christ and the Kingdom of God as the renewal of all creation, which still involves the 'domination and oppression that characterises androcentric and anthropocentric models' of human–nature relations (Warren 1994:42).

The stewardship approach is not sufficiently radical to address the systems of oppression to have a profound impact on changing the human–nature relationship, because it works within the existing patriarchal Judeo-Christian traditions instead of promoting a different order. It reinforces binary thinking. It does not perceive nature as having intrinsic value, or as being eco- and biocentric; stewardship sees nature as only a resource for humans to profit from. Stewardship claims nature as possession, 'things to be owned, subdivided' and 'transformed' by humans, 'cared for, and protected' – the typical patriarchal views of men's behaviour towards women (Warren 1994:43).

Furthermore, Beavis (1994:182) is of the opinion that the language of stewardship reinforces old anthropocentric and patriarchal patterns instead of empowering humans to move outside their androcentric images of their relationship to nature. The 'historical and conceptual baggage' of the term stewardship is essential to its meaning (Beavis 1994:182). Supporters of stewardship are yet not willing to redefine these related ethics to fit contemporary theories and needs.

Warren (1994) says that stewardship ethics:

> [*A*]re well-entrenched in theological assumptions and religious practices which do not themselves confront the dysfunctional, structural, institutional nature of patriarchy and environmental injustice. As such, they do not challenge or make visible how concepts of dominion and stewardship function within patriarchal conceptual frameworks and institutions to maintain those institutions. (pp. 54–55)

Gaian Earth hypothesis

The Gaian Earth hypothesis was originally formulated by James Lovelock[51] as a theory of the Earth system that incorporates the principle of interconnectedness. He named it Gaia after the Greek goddess who was the personification of Earth and one of the primordial Greek deities (Clayton 1990:87). This hypothesis entails that all life on Earth, including the material environment, acts as a single system, behaving as a unified organism

51. A British environmental scientist, who turned 100 years old.

(Ruether 1992:4). It is a self-regulating system that automatically controls and sustains the habitability (e.g. global climate and composition of the atmosphere) of Earth. The essence of this viewpoint is 'organicism', the notion that the universe is alive, is sensible and operates as a self-sustaining living organism.[52] The concept of Gaia can be formulated as (Brunner 1996):

> Gaia is a complex entity involving the Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet. The maintenance of relatively constant conditions by active control may be conveniently described by the term 'homeostasis'. (p. 1)

Critique of the Gaian earth hypothesis

Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis was not accepted by professional scientists (Ruse 2013). Richard Dawkins (1976), the author of *The selfish gene*, was at the forefront of this criticism. His problem with the Gaia theory was from an evolutionary point of view. Dawkins was an enthusiastic opponent of group selection, denying that evolution takes place for the 'good of the group (organisms) simply because they were for the good of the group (organisms)' (Dawkins 1982:n.p.). Dawkins considers Darwin's 'mechanism of natural selection' as a key theory. This means that (Dawkins 1982):

> [*L*]ife is produced by natural selection, by the competition between individuals for reproductive success and for survival, and that evolution has no goal or "telos" of making Earth a better place for life. (pp. 235–236)

Dawkins (1982:82) refers to life on Earth as 'survival machines'.

For Lovelock, the most important characteristic of life on Earth is 'balance and stability', also termed 'homeostasis' – sustaining the balance on Earth by dynamic-interacting processes which define Earth as a living organism. In Lovelock's scientific and popular writings about Gaia, everything that happens in the universe happens for the best interest of Earth – a kind of end-directed, final cause thinking (what we would call 'teleology'). This thinking goes back to Plato, who maintained that the 'whole cosmos is alive and that Earth itself is a living organism with a circulation system in the form of rivers and lava'. He understood that Earth has a 'final cause' (Gebara 1995:209).

The way that Gaia is portrayed as teleological is unacceptable to many scientists, especially evolutionary biologists. Postgate (1988) uses the term 'pseudo-science' to refer to Gaia theories. He states that they appear scientific without meeting the standards of 'proper' science: 'they are not predictive,

52. Lovelock teamed up with Lynn Margulis on the idea of Gaia. She published a major work in 1967 on symbiotics – 'the idea of organisms coming together for mutual benefit'. This publication was meant to give her academic credibility in academia (Brunner 1996).

but are inconsistent, powered by external values and means'. However, Postgate (1988) says that:

> [*T*]he ideas underlying Gaia have a proper basis in real science and her acolytes often offer common sense about environmental matters. But, dignified as a "theory" and too often wrapped in mystical, cultish language. (p. 60)

This is the antithesis of science, and it is for this reason that Postgate (1988:60) insists that Gaia should remain a 'metaphor' and not science.

Gaia has never been accepted as 'real science', but it has stimulated imperative scientific work on the environment. Researchers realised that the world and the presence or absence of homeostasis are interesting and important topics that are worthwhile to research. Climate change impacted largely on the reformulation of systems about the global environment. For this reason, Lovelock (2006), despite the critique, received the Wollaston Medal, which is the highest award granted by the Geological Society of London. 'Earth Systems Science' thrives despite the Gaia hypothesis not being perceived as science.

As a result, deep ecologists, ecofeminists and other environmental movements have made a significant contribution to the relationship between humans and the natural environment. The living interdependency of all things, namely our kinship with the rest of the universe, is linking us to the whole living Gaia. Ruether (1992) says that:

> [*H*]umans, animals and plants are centers of organic life who exist for a season. We all finally die because each of our roots shrivels – those organic structures that sustain our life fail. The cutting off of the life centers also means that our bodies disintegrate into organic matter, to enter the cycle of decomposition and recomposition as other entities. (p. 252)

Ruether continues to say that eventually, the 'material substances of our bodies live on in plants and animals', in the same way that our bodies are composed of substances that were once part of animals and plants, going back to 'prehistoric ferns and reptiles, to ancient biota that floated in the primal seas of Earth' (Ruether 1992:252).

The Gaian Earth approach can be divided into Gaian spirituality and Gaian naturalism. Supporters of Gaian spirituality perceive (Taylor 2010):

> Earth as a conscious, living being upheld by some supernatural being, whereas Gaian naturalists focus on the 'laws of nature' that sustain life on Earth and do not acknowledge a supernatural presence. (p. 16)

Exponents of Gaian spirituality believe in a supernatural, conscious being that can be perceived as a deity that sustains Earth as an organism. Research results of different sources, including those 'outside conventional science', are the basis for this belief system 'for its pantheistic or panentheistic and holistic metaphysics' (Du Toit 2019:40).

Gaian naturalism

Gaian naturalism does not acknowledge the existence or influence of supernatural beings or forces that support Earth (or the universe) as an organism (Du Toit 2019:40). Berkes is of the opinion that 'Gaian naturalism may be considered an expression of pantheism, where pantheism is the belief that the entire phenomenal world contains godlike attributes' and is not confined to a belief in a supernatural being or beings (Berkes 2008:114; Du Toit 2019:41). Gaian naturalism combines 'reverence for Gaia' and 'scientific facts' regulating the survival of living organisms. Ecofeminists find it challenging to bring this into line with traditional ideas of religion and demonstrate that believing in supernatural or divine beings is not a qualification for ecofeminism (cf. Berkes 2008:114; Du Toit 2019:41).

The main ecofeminist exponent of the Gaian hypothesis is Rosemary Ruether (1992) known especially for her book *Gaia and God: An ecofeminist theology of Earth healing*. Ruether's theocosmology (Howell 1997):

> [*S*]ketches an eco-feminist theology of nature indebted to the creation spirituality of Matthew Fox, the cosmological theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and the process metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead. (p. 237)

Ruether's theocosmology includes three principles: We have to 'accept the integrity and transience of our personal centers and the personal centers of all beings', 'affirm the value and interdependence of all living things' and 'act upon the value of communion and kinship with other personal centers' (Howell 1997:237; Ruether 1992:251–252).

Ruether is of the opinion that the underlying negative influences on the environment are situated in dualisms. Her approach is to undermine the dualisms that have negatively influenced gender, class, sex, nature, religion and history. This includes the dualisms of spirit/matter, mind/body, culture/history and the projection of these dualisms 'onto class or sex relations, such that lower classes and women are viewed as inferior' (Bouma-Prediger 1995:33). These two ideas form the basis for a worldview of 'alienation' and view salvation as an escape from material existence. It has entered Christianity through the influences of apocalyptic Judaism and classical Greek philosophy. Although there were attempts in classical Christian spirituality to unite the God of creation with the God of salvation, 'cosmic alienation and spiritual dualism triumphed' (Ruether 1975:190).

The underlying domination reflected by these dualisms belongs to the dominant class, sex and cultural group, namely men who enforce social injustice and unequal power relations. Ecological crises can only be understood if seen in terms of social justice: 'the movements for ecological wholeness and social justice must be seen as interconnected and ultimately as two sides of a single movement for ecojustice' (Bouma-Prediger 1995:34). The emphasis on differences between

males and females, saying that females are less rational and therefore closer to nature, resulted in the domination of both females and nature (Ruether 1971:267).

According to Ruether (1975:195), the primary and implicit assumption of this historical development is 'the male ideology of transcendent dualism'. This means that reality is seen in terms of 'a whole chain of dualistic relations, namely male/female, soul/body, spirit/matter, culture/nature – in which the second half of each pair is seen as alien and subject to the first' (Bouma-Prediger 1995:34). This 'alien' or 'other' is females dominated by males, the soul controlling the body, and the exploitation of non-humans by humans.

This whole set of dualisms can be added to the socio-economic patterns of society, namely 'work/leisure, public/private, competition/nurture, business and politics/morality and religion, immoral society/moral man' (Bouma-Prediger 1995:35). In the liberation of women and nature, the current social structures of domination need to be replaced by a 'transformative worldview in which reciprocity and mutuality, equality and solidarity, function as the new norms for society' (Bouma-Prediger 1995:36), embedded in our solidarity with all other creatures and with our Mother Earth, which is the actual ground of our being and existence.

In her formulation of an ecofeminist theocosmology, Ruether says that ecofeminist theology and spirituality have assumed that the solution to the ecological question is the need for a 'goddess' as the reverse of the God in monotheistic Semitic traditions, and that the goddess represents 'immanent rather than transcendent, female rather than male identified, rational and interactive rather than dominating, pluriform and multicentred rather than uniform and monocentered' (Ruether 1992:247). However, Ruether does not replace the traditional oppositions with yet another dualism, namely a male god with a female god, but rather with the '"coincidence of opposites" in which the "absolute maximum" and the "absolute minimum" are the same' (Ruether 1992:247). The voice of the biblical God and Gaia is the same, they are on terms of amity, if not intermingled. Ruether (1992) explains Gaia as:

> [*T*]he wellspring of life and creativity from which all things have sprung and into which they return, only to well up again in new forms [...] the great Thou, the personal center of the universal process, with which all the small centers of personal being dialogue in the conversation that continually creates and recreates the world. The small selves and the Great Self are finally one, for as She bodies forth in us, all the beings respond in the bodying forth of their diverse creative work that makes the world. (p. 253)

Ruether suggests an ecological spirituality and ethical practice that builds on three assumptions: 'the transience of the selves, the living interdependency of all things, and the value of the personal in unity' (Ruether 1992). Humans need (Ruether 1992):

> [*T*]o affirm the integrity of their personal center of being, in mutuality with the personal centers of all other beings across species and, at the same time, accept the transience of these personal selves. (p. 251)

Humanity needs new rituals, songs and meditations to undermine patriarchy, androcentrism, anthropocentrism and the dualisms they sustain and rather confirm and make real their interconnectedness and interdependent kinship with Earth.

Dark Green Religion

The growing tendency among people to consider spirituality as a substitute for religion has already been identified and widely discussed (Olupona 2009:62). This concurred with the rise of environmental movements and the greening of religion(s). Bron Taylor, an exponent of green religion, supports this observation by voicing that 'nature-based spiritualities are a growing social energy worldwide' (Taylor 2011:12–15).

These nature-centred spiritual belief systems are increasingly recognised to provide moral and ethical guidance to the environmental crisis, resulting in the greening of religions (Du Toit 2019:14). Taylor (2004:992) is of the opinion that green religion can be constructed in three ways. Firstly, traditional or mainstream religions (including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, indigenous traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism) hope to find and revitalise green dimensions within their scriptures, rituals, myth, symbol, cosmology, sacrament, etc. These movements within religions consider environmentally friendly behaviour as a religious obligation. Secondly, there are alternative types of nature-as-sacred religions. In this (Darwinist) approach, evolutionary science or an evolutionary-ecological worldview 'is the central driver producing green religion' (Taylor 2004:994). The core issue of this approach could be regarded as (Du Toit 2019; Taylor 2005:1174):

> [*C*]ertain tendency or focus that is found within a religion or across different religions; it does not refer to a specific group or type of religion and is not a separate autonomous religion. Naturalist tendencies may be found in various religions or other nature-revering movements. (p. 15)

Green religion focusses on an individual's understanding of divine existence as 'lateral' rather than 'vertical'. According to Du Toit, 'the milieu of the sacred is nature, not primarily the supernatural' (Du Toit 2019:15; Taylor 2005:1175). Thirdly, Taylor (2004:995) describes alternative forms of nature religions that 'move beyond supernaturalism' and that are 'based on scientific understandings and narratives'. Gaia and Dark Green Religion (DGR)[53] fall in this third category.

Environmental supporters from different movements venerate nature as sacred and as having intrinsic worth, which is the basic feature that characterises the 'phenomenon of Dark Green Religion and identifies DGR organisations, movements and individuals' (Berkes 2008:11; Du Toit 2019:14; Taylor 2010:15).

53. Louisa J. du Toit has written her PhD on *Evaluating the life of Wangari Maathai (1940–2011) using the lens of Dark Green Religion*.

Viviers (2017:8) confirms that 'the respect and acknowledgement of nature as intrinsically worthy, or the religious equivalent "sacred", constitutes "Dark Green Religion"'. Therefore, according to Viviers (2017):

> [*D*]ark green religion emphasises a belongingness in nature, an interconnected and interdependent kinship among all and the inspiring belief of the fundamental value of nature. It becomes manifested in a rich diversity of circles (individuals, movements, NGOs, artworks, films, etc.). (p. 7)

Principles of Dark Green Religion

Dark Green Religion is not a religion in the traditional understanding of what religion is (Du Toit 2019:36). Taylor (2010:13) says that one can define DGR as 'generally deep ecological, biocentric, or eco-centric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, valuable apart from their usefulness to human beings'.

Principle of kinship or belonging

Kinship with nature is when an 'existential' and specific bond between humans and nature, including animals, is created and experienced on a 'physical, mental, spiritual and emotional level' (Viviers 2017:4). Accepting the Darwinian theory that 'all life forms developed from common ancestors, and therefore share physical and emotional characteristics' is the origin of the appreciation of this bond (Du Toit 2019:37; Taylor 2010:13).

Principle of interconnectedness and interdependence

Assumed to be a living organism (a principle that is shared with the Gaia hypothesis), Earth is recognised as the 'habitat for nature's living and non-living systems' (Du Toit 2019:37). Furthermore, the interconnectedness and interdependence of 'all life on earth is the same cycle of life and eventual death that is shared by all living beings' and is confirming the intrinsic belonging or kinship with the universe (Viviers 2017:6).

Principle of sacredness

'Sacred' in nature includes spaces, trees, rocks and places where important events happened, which are 'traditionally highly valued and respected', and has a 'certain religious association' (Viviers 2017:3). Du Toit (2019:37) says that 'indigenous people and their communities have been recognised for venerating nature and bestowing sacredness on specific places, forces or animals' (e.g. totems). Indigenous people also do not make a distinction 'between the sacred or spiritual world and their own living reality' (Kruger, Lubbe & Steyn 2009:38), which constitutes a typical aspect of ATRs. If the principle of sacredness is violated by making a distinction between the spiritual and

materialistic world, then 'it triggers a dualistic view, creating a separation between humans and nature and elevating humans to a position of dominance over nature' (Viviers 2017:2). The principle of intrinsic worth (cf. Du Toit 2019):

> [*B*]estows the aspect of sacredness onto Earth, her resources and the other living organisms sharing Earth's habitats, thereby elevating the value of nature and natural resources and developing a sense of respect and care. (pp. 37–38)

The Green Belt Movement

Africa is particularly affected by climate change. People who live in areas that are sensitive to food scarcity and famine are suffering due to climate variability. The Green Belt Movement (GBM), as a typical example of DGR, originated in Kenya specifically to address environmental challenges (Du Toit 2019:60–61). Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist, initiated and established the GBM in 1977 to fight for 'environmental justice, gender equality and democratic governance' (Gorsevski 2012:2; Hunt 2014:235).[54] The report of a seminar of the National Council of Women of Kenya on conditions in rural areas describes the problems experienced by rural women. These include 'no access to potable water, insufficient firewood for cooking and warming, and not enough land to cultivate food crops to sustain themselves' and their families (Maathai 2007:123–124). It was also documented that children are suffering from poor development and diseases linked to malnutrition (Du Toit 2019:75). These problems were related to the increased production of processed foods with high contents of carbohydrates but insufficient contents of minerals and healthy vitamins. Colonial farmers and governments established these agricultural practices, and local farmers continued those practices after independence because they wanted to increase their income by growing 'cash crops' (Du Toit 2019:25; Muthuki 2006:83). As a result, GBM 'activists organised and participated in tree-planting initiatives, civic and environmental education seminars, and prodemocracy demonstrations' (Hunt 2014:236). Ecofeminists such as Maathai, Ruether and Hunt *inter alia* are of the opinion that environmental restoration cannot materialise without social justice and political change.

Five forms of power are described by Karen Warren (1994):

> '[*P*]ower-over', creating relationships in which one party dominates another; 'power-with', creating coalitions and solidarity; 'power-within', empowering and mobilising a group's inner resources; 'power-against', the inverse of 'power-over'; and 'power-toward', changing from one belief system to another. (p. 183)

54. Gorsevski reports in more detail the non-violent actions taken by Maathai and her followers to protest against Kenya's politicians and international stakeholders' 'human-made, government-sanctioned environmental disasters'. She was arrested many times, brutally attacked when planting trees and once was forced into hiding. 'As a mode of peace building, Maathai's activism directly confronted postcolonial economic imperatives instantiated by globalisation' (Gorsevski 2012:9).

Hunt (2014:236) says that '(S)such a conception of power and social change is rooted in a materialist understanding of the intervention and transformative action (i.e. praxis)'. Warren's concept of 'power-toward' constitutes a functional heuristic approach for focusing on 'dynamics of power and transformative social change'. She suggests that systems of power-seeking move 'away from unhealthy life-denying systems and relationships' and in that way support healthy behaviour that represents 'power-toward' (Warren 2000:200). Maathai employs the ecofeminist conception of 'power-toward' (that means working *with* instead of working *for* rural women) combined with a 'rhetorical materialist conception of praxis' (Maathai 2007:136).

Maathai intended to 'combat deforestation and environmental degradation' by inspiring people of the rural communities to plant trees throughout Kenya. This became a movement to help the local people (especially rural women) to address basic needs through the planting of trees (Nhanenge 2007:3). In the first 30 years, the GBM has planted 30 million indigenous trees, creating the so-called 'green belts' by clustering up to 1000 trees in specific areas (Maathai 2007:137). Firstly, the trees contributed to restoring the 'effects of the degradation of the environment'; and secondly, they combatted poverty among rural women and empowered them to 'become self-sustaining and able to provide for their families' (Du Toit 2019:12; Maathai 2008; Merton & Dater 2008).

Maathai (2010:13) says that 'specific spiritual or religious traditions' did not ground her motivation or the work of the GBM. She has demonstrated rather a tendency towards an 'ecumenical and interreligious understanding of faith' (Du Toit 2019:12; Maathai 2010:14). However, the GBM employees used the Bible to identify in which way the 'natural resources of Earth should best be treated' (Maathai 2010:20) and combined this with concepts from other religious traditions that 'promote respect and care for the resources of Earth' (Du Toit 2019:12; Maathai 2008, 2010:15).

By involving rural women and focusing on their needs, GBM could develop a solution to help them, and in the process, the GBM accomplished more than planting trees. People were affected 'physically and spiritually' by the degrading of the natural environment (Du Toit 2019:77; Maathai 2010:25). The health of the environment, as well as the general state of a society, is demonstrated by the following (Merton & Dater 2008):

> By taking action to improve their degraded environment, the women and men of the Green Belt Movement are empowering themselves to protect their lands, to take back their voices, and improve their circumstances. Thus, they are changing the mechanism of oppression. (p. 2)

Maathai and the influence of the GBM changed the environmental perceptions of rural women in Kenya from a 'traditional African worldview to a scientifically-based environmental worldview aimed at sustainable living for all' (Merton & Dater 2008:3).

The core values of the GBM constitute DGR principles, which are outlined below (Du Toit 2019:86–88).

Love for the environment

'This love involves positive actions to care for the environment and the non-human inhabitants of the environment, such as planting and nurturing trees' (Du Toit 2019:82; Maathai 2010:15). Maathai uses kinship to remind her listeners that all life on Earth is dependent on every 'human family' member[55] who has to look after the natural resources and transcend international and intercultural differences (Gorsevski 2014:8). This value involves the DGR principle of belonging, interconnectedness and kinship.

Gratitude and respect

Having respect and gratitude for what Earth offers, creates the recognition that Earth's resources are important and limited, resulting in efforts to 'reduce', 'reuse and recycle' and eventually 'repair' (Maathai 2010:15). These are the essential components of environmentally responsible behaviour to prevent unnecessary excess. 'Love, gratitude and respect clearly resonate with DGR's sacredness' (Du Toit 2019:86).

Self-empowerment and self-betterment

This principle aims to 'take control of one's own life and relationship to nature, ending destructive habits and activities that have a negative impact on the wellbeing of nature' (Du Toit 2019:87; Maathai 2010:15).

Spirit of service and volunteerism

The most important programme of the GBM is service and volunteerism, involving the support of 'countless volunteers, especially rural women who provided their energy, means, enthusiasm and ideas in the project without requiring compensation in any form' (Du Toit 2019:87; Maathai 2010:15).

Maathai, as the main proponent of the GBM, is of the opinion that 'people's actions towards the environment affect them physically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually'. Living in an environment that is degraded and in the process of dying affects humanity on all levels of being. If Earth is endangered, then humans and all other living beings are also endangered. According to Maathai (2010:16–17), the opposite is also true – actions to restore

55. Gorsevski (2014:8) says that 'Maathai's use of "family" invokes the individual audience member's placement within a specific, micro scale, nuclear family, while also summoning the audience as an interconnected whole of the broader "human family" to their physical placement on "planet Earth"'.

Earth and to heal the wounds caused by destruction will eventually heal Earth itself and will also heal humanity in the process.

Du Toit (2019) says that although:

> Maathai mentions spiritual values when recounting her life history, she does not refer to a supernatural power. She expresses a deep-felt love for the earth as a living entity and motivates her actions on knowledge from her scientific education rather than on a belief in a supernatural being or force. (p. 90)

The spiritual foundation of Maathai's actions originates rather from a naturalistic viewpoint, which is attached to her scientific background. Gaian naturalism is also expressed in terms of a holistic view comprising the universe and the ecological systems on Earth. Maathai links up with this view by considering the GBM as a holistic approach for the progress of nature and human communities (Du Toit 2019:58; Maathai 2005:2–4). As stated, Gaian naturalists rather acknowledge 'the laws that are governing nature and the self-regulating organic system of Earth' as the *supreme power*' than believing in a theistic god(s) (Berkes 2008:114; Du Toit 2019:90). The vision of the Gaia Foundation is 'a new era in which humans are living in a respectful, just and mutually enhancing relationship with the Earth, with all her life forms and with each other' (Gaia Foundation 2017). Being a co-founder of the Gaia Foundation,[56] Maathai's involvement confirms 'a mutually respectful relationship between humans and Earth' (Du Toit 2019:19).

Holistic actions such as those taken by Maathai and the GBM are what is needed to reverse the environmental degradation that Earth is encountering. Changing the worldview and the actions of communities may bring about the restoration that environmentalists are working towards. Maathai and the GBM worked towards 'environmental justice, gender equality and democratic governance to move away from unhealthy life-denying systems and relationships' (Hunt 2014:235).

Although Maathai and the GBM critique environmental, gender, social and political injustice, they need to be careful not to employ anthropocentrism in their actions and approaches. If the restoration of Earth is about the development and wellbeing of humans and their communities, then it is not primarily about Earth anymore and the movement will fall back into the trap of Earth exploitation. This is a fine line that needs to be continuously reviewed and re-evaluated.

Another point is that it seems that Maathai and the GBM largely ignored the water pollution problems in Kenya. Although the planting of trees contributed to the cleaning of the surface and underground water systems, the pollution of these water systems seems not to be addressed properly.

56. Liz Hosken, born in South Africa, but based in the United Kingdom, is the director and co-founder of the Gaia Foundation.

Kenya is perceived as a water-scarce country (Kithiia 2012:509). Reports on the degradation in Kenya's water quality date back to the 1950s. It is not a new problem. Many water pollution laws are in place, but serious water pollution continues. Studies show that groundwater resources were not the problem, but major concerns have been expressed about surface water, especially in the river systems. The city of Nairobi contributes most to the water pollution problems, especially as a result of the growing population. What is also contributing to the problem is 'sewer pipes carry industrial and domestic waste (including plastics, faeces, detergents, disinfectants, chemical waste, insecticides and petroleum hydrocarbons)', directing their effluents into the rivers. Some of these toxins are absorbed into the soil and pollute the groundwater. The Nairobi rivers collect most of the waste and discharge downstream into other systems, even into lakes such as Lake Victoria (Kithiia 2012:511).

Actions to raise the capacity for purifying water are essential in providing safe drinking water. In Kenya, especially women in rural areas experience insufficient supply of clean and safe water (Kithiia 2012):

> They walk for long distances in search of this precious commodity and use it raw and untreated from rivers, lakes and dams. The untreated water is not only turbid, but also contains disease causing bacteria and in some cases chemicals. (p. 510)

Norman Habel and the Earth Bible Team interpret biblical texts from an environmental viewpoint (Du Toit 2019:19). This approach to re-interpret the Bible is aligned with their view that the 'solution to the environmental crisis is not the sole responsibility of scientists, but that we are all part of the crisis and therefore should take responsibility for the solution' (Habel 2000:7). The Earth Bible Team took their inspiration from feminists who challenge the patriarchal outlook of biblical texts and apply this method to biblical texts in an attempt to 'reveal and expose the anthropocentric nature of these texts' (Eaton 2000:55).

Heather Eaton (2000) is of the opinion that if people want to read the Bible with consciousness, they have to stand with the oppressed Earth and from there dialogue with the Bible. This liberationist stance does not pretend neutrality or objectivity (2000:54).

She applies the six ecojustice principles of the Earth Bible Project to add an ecofeminist perspective to ecojustice hermeneutics. She uses it as a hermeneutical lens through which Earth is viewed as a 'silent, oppressed or liberated subject' (Eaton 2000:54). She follows two interconnected tracks: the first is the range of socio-political critiques considered to be necessary for satisfactory biblical methods – the need for biblical methodologies (Eaton 2000:54). The second is a larger issue and concerns changing worldviews and determining which worldview the reader finds themselves reflecting on – there is a need for alternative worldviews (Eaton 2000:54).

Even though ecofeminist interpretations of some biblical passages and many ecological readings exist, there are no distinctly ecological or ecofeminist biblical methodologies. Therefore, the development of methodological and hermeneutical parameters to guide ecofeminist readings is the first step for the exploration of the intersections between ecofeminism and the Bible. In her interpretations, Eaton identified three issues that are constant themes in feminist scholarship: 'the sacrality and authority of the text, location of meaning, and ethical accountability' (Eaton 2000:57).

Feminist scholarship exposed the power relations behind the formation of religious canons. The formation of authoritative structures came first; sacrality and canonisation only followed after (Eaton 2000:58). Sacred texts, therefore, hold intrinsic power that is culturally informed by revelation, truth and divine authority. An ecofeminist approach '[...] would insist that the issue of biblical authority and sacrality first be addressed to avoid manoeuvres' (Eaton 2000:58).

Most feminist scholars do not accept an authoritatively closed canon, which means that the Bible may be accepted in essence, but not in its authoritative totality. Similarly, ecofeminists can either accept the patriarchal Bible as sacred and authoritative and be satisfied to expose its patriarchy and androcentrism, or they can expose its patriarchy and reject its sacredness and authority (Eaton 2000:59).

The scholarly biblical question is no longer what the Bible means or even why the Bible means, but how it means (Eaton 2000:59). This is reflected by the reader-response approach. This approach entails a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text, and this differs as individuals and communities create meanings from their distinct socio-political and contextual identities. Meaning is therefore located in the reader; the reader makes – not takes – meaning from the text (Eaton 2000:60). Just how much of this meaning-making is located in the text and how much is located in the reader is disputed. However, meaning-making cannot be random. Eaton (2000:60) argues that both the reader and text are accountable for meaning, the possibilities of which are rooted in the text. The text is limited by its historical, biographical and ideological reality. Similarly, the reader is limited *inter alia* by her ecosocial locations, subjective positions and the conventions of the time. The Earth Bible Project trusts that a reading of the Bible from a perspective of Earth consciousness may result in revealing insights to shape a new worldview, which will reclaim a sacrality of Earth (Eaton 2000:61). But this does not avoid the possibility that the reader may rework the collection to reveal different meanings.

Ecofeminists consider the ethical accountability of biblical interpretation as central (Eaton 2000:62) because it acts as an ethical liability when possible conflicts emerge. If some interpreters justify sexism, racism, oppression, ecological ruin and elitism, then those with an understanding of how oppression works will contest, if not the interpretation, then the praxis thereof (Eaton 2000:63). The six

principles, 'intrinsic worth, interconnectedness, voice, purpose, custodianship, and resistance', act as limitations of the ethical impact of interpretation because they do not address the issues mentioned before. Eaton, therefore, considers each of the principles in light of the three issues, the 'sacrality and authority of the text, location of meaning, and ethical accountability' and points out the interpretive dangers from an ecofeminist perspective (Eaton 2000:63).

Principle of intrinsic worth

The perspective that Earth and all the life on Earth have intrinsic worth or value appears simple, but it has textured layers of complexity and is ambiguous. Ecofeminists notice a dilemma: 'intrinsic value' can be assigned to the Earth community without being aware of the political, sexist, ethnocentric and class issues associated with it. Therefore, a social and political ecofeminist analysis is an essential element (Eaton 2000:64).

Principle of interconnectedness

Ecofeminists and other ecologists acknowledge the importance of and have done extensive work on the principle of interconnectedness: '[...] it may even be possible to detect interconnectedness as the basic dynamic of life, and evident within biblical texts' (Eaton 2000:65). But it could be difficult to build an ethic on this principle, especially if it is based on new physics. Many environmentalists and even theologians use interconnectedness as an overarching framework claiming that it is based on science, and scientific foundations are universally endorsed. If it is based on science, it can be perceived as a male-biased culture that could be a new form of misogyny. Therefore, interconnectedness should be based on more than only science.

Principle of voice

Eaton says to experience Earth as a speaking subject, a living entity is to engage all the senses (Eaton 2000:66). Even though consciousness of Earth as a living being is increasing worldwide, meanings and implications differ. In choosing to 'speak' for Earth, many questions regarding authority and power should be raised. The subjectivity of Earth and the voice of Earth will be mediated through human understanding together with the belief prejudices of the day (Eaton 2000:67). To address the issue, ecofeminism offers a great tool to examine covert world views and belief systems (Eaton 2000:67).

Principle of purpose

By situating the origin and specific histories of each religion within the history of Earth, the principle aims to provide a fundamental orientation to the whole.

It is to accept fully a comprehensive ecological earth-based approach to situate (Eaton 2000):

> [*S*]pecific histories of each religion within the history of the Earth and to perceive that the entire religious enterprise is an emerging process of human development within the evolutionary processes of the Earth. (p. 69)

As all the religious frameworks are part of the whole, it prevents one from seeing their religious framework as being the definitive reference (Eaton 2000:67). This principle has the danger to function as a hegemonic metanarrative (Eaton 2000:68).

Principle of custodianship

The shift away from stewardship to custodianship may be subtle, but the problems of stewardship, namely anthropocentrism, remain (Eaton 2000:68). Both systems are based on hierarchical dualism; they preserve a human-Earth division and miss the underlying reality that humans are dependent on Earth. Instead of a new and different order, there is rather an indication of a shift within the present system, which is not a feminist ethic. Eaton's concern is that the larger evolutionary worldview has not been acknowledged; therefore, custodianship is merely the same old paradigm but has been rewritten (Eaton 2000:69).

Principle of resistance

Eaton (2000:69) questions whether anthropomorphic qualities such as being capable of agency and being sensitive towards justice can be attributed to Earth. Essentially, Eaton is concerned with issues of power: who will interpret the 'actions' of Earth with which tools and from or through which worldview? These concerns are similar to the ones she raised in the Principle of Voice.

Eaton questions the six principles of the Earth Bible Project, firstly from a feminist perspective and secondly from an ecological view. She highlights that the six principles, though attempting to provide a set of Earth-centred guidelines to reading the Bible, fail to include women and other oppressed peoples. She also questions positions of authority that appears to be assumed by the authors of the Earth Bible.

Conclusion

Ecofeminism has made an important contribution to the environmental crises by suggesting approaches and possible solutions. This contribution is coming from a variety of ecofeminisms because there is no single or united ecofeminism. However, ecofeminism is united in its aim to critique social systems of domination and abuse.

Ecofeminism is not without its challenges. The weaknesses of specific approaches, namely stewardship, Gaia hypothesis, the GBM and the Earth Bible Project have been pointed out. But it is not only the individual approaches that have been criticised, but ecofeminism as such.

One of the most important challenges is the possibility that ecofeminism reintroduces anthropocentrism. With its strong emphasis on social reform and harmony, the danger is that the wellbeing of humans (women) is viewed as more important than the restoration of the natural environment. It is true that the ecological crises can only be understood if seen in terms of social justice. Bouma-Prediger (1995:34) says that 'the movements for ecological wholeness and social justice must be seen as interconnected and ultimately as two sides of a single movement for ecojustice'. But there must be awareness among ecofeminists and motivations for actions need to be reconsidered and restructured regularly.

Ecofeminism has also been accused of essentialism, namely that ecofeminism has connected women with nature. Essentialism puts all women in the same basket and re-enforces the same social norms feminism strives to remove, specifically to emphasise and develop patriarchal dominance and norms over women and nature. Ecofeminism was also accused of maintaining the strict dichotomy between women and men, culture and nature, which generates a dualism that focused too much on the differences between women and men (Zein & Stiawan 2019:6). Non-essentialists are of the opinion that women and nature have 'both masculine and feminine qualities and that should be included in their approach' (Zein & Stiawan 2019:7). As a result, ecofeminism is (Zein & Stiawan 2019):

> [*C*]oncerned about a variety of issues, including reproductive technology, equal pay and equal rights, toxic poisoning, Third World development, and more. Eco-feminists with a materialist lens began doing research and renaming the subject to queer ecologies, global feminist environmental justice, and gender and the environment. (p. 6)

Many ecofeminists oppose women taking an active part in positions of power in politics, industry and business, using their participation as a process to achieve economic equity and increase their influence. These are the very structures that exploit the environment for financial and business advantage, and these are the very structures that the ecofeminist movement intends to destroy.

Regardless of the critique, ecofeminism has an important contribution to make for environmental and social justice. The interconnectedness and interdependence of nature and humans, especially women, are demonstrated by a true and serious relationship of humans (women) with other living beings on Earth; and this means acknowledging and accepting the connection of our purpose on Earth and our future as well as our interdependence.

Chapter 8

Towards embodied biblical hermeneutics – A conversation with *ubuntu* and Gabriel Marcel's philosophy

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Introduction

Hermeneutics refers to the interpretation or meaning-making of the Bible, and in Africa, it is the way Africans, generally, approach and make meaning of the biblical text and its theological themes. The question or task of African biblical hermeneutics has a long history across Africa and a general categorisation is to view it from the perspective of Southern African discussions vis-à-vis the East-western African approaches. Taking this perspective, western African discussions about African hermeneutics have largely been seen as focusing on the question of incorporating the African culture as the husk through which to understand the Bible and life in general. On the other hand, the Southern

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African approach to African biblical hermeneutics focuses on the theme of liberation as the starting point or lens in reading the Bible. However, these two categories are not exhaustive as the section 'Contours in African biblical hermeneutics' of this study shows. Instead, there are other interpretive lenses such as womanism with its links in feminism that has lauded the concerning of women through raising issues associated with the culture and economy within the African societies. In this study, after exploring the previous approaches, I propose that the African biblical hermeneutics should start with the cultural and interpersonal theme of interconnectedness embodied in *ubuntu* philosophy. Thus, I propose the embodied African biblical hermeneutics.

Contours in African biblical hermeneutics

The best summary to read concerning contours in African biblical hermeneutics is from the article by West (2000:29). Generally, African hermeneutics can be categorised between the East-western African with its focus on enculturation and Southern African with its focus on liberation. However, these categories are not watertight but only serve as discursive parameters for this topic. A representative voice of the enculturation hermeneutics is Justin Ukpong who argues that the Western missionaries did not take seriously the culture and worldview of the African people in their propagation of the gospel. Instead, coming from the Western binary of 'us versus them', the missionaries regarded the locals as sinners whose culture harbours demonic elements (Ukpong 1995:3). Besides Ukpong, other scholars such as Mbiti (2015), Magesa (2014) and Mugambi (1989) have written on this subject. From this perspective, enculturation takes seriously the African worldview – its belief systems and culture as the comparative material in reading the Bible. The argument is not that African culture is similar to the cultures reflected in the Bible, rather through culture, the African reader is able to appropriate the message of the Bible. Gerald West remarks that the African reader is able to understand the message of the Bible through the process of appropriation – that is, making meaning of the biblical message from their own context (West 2000:29).

The comparative or enculturation paradigm has made a significant contribution in our approach to the Bible, from seeing the Bible as a foreign text only to be understood through specialised historical critical tools to relate the Bible to the African worldview and thought (Oduyoye 1995:77). For example, discussions about the celebration of the Holy Communion symbols such as waffles can now be replaced by local food staffs such as mealie-meal or cassava. In addition, for a long time in some churches, African marriage was regarded as less significant compared to the Western celebration that is accompanied by a cake and white dress. In short, there is a call to revive the African thought forms and practices in our practice of Christianity such that the individual is an African Christian and not an African who became a Christian (Droogers 1977:443; Ilogu 1974; Kalu 2013). Instead of denigrating and

shunning away from culture, the African Christian should be proud of his culture and regard it as a powerful expression of his or her identity.

The other main approach that is mostly associated with the Southern part of Africa is the black theology of liberation approach which has its affinity in liberation theology. At the heart of liberation, theology is the central question of human dignity through questioning economic, political and social injustices within society (Vellem 2007, 2014:1, 2015:1). Starting from the premise concerning the justice of God, black theology of liberation questions the practices and discourses that cause oppression and segregation. One of the recent and prominent voices in black theology – Vuyani Vellem argues that racism is a product of economic arrangement that seeks to subjugate a majority of poor people, especially black people and thus denying them the equal right of existence. In this regard, globalisation and neo-imperialism are overarching practices whose intention is oppression. For him, the task of black theology of liberation is to critique knowledge production, especially through theology, that perpetuates injustice. Vellem (2015) aptly captures the task of black theology of liberations, saying:

> Black Theology is a theology of life derives from a particular understanding of the word or concept 'life'. Life is understood as the starting point of ethics, a precondition of all ethical claims or systems. God is thus understood as God of life and this understanding of life is not an abstract but material, bodily life. (p. 6)

Citing Gustavo Gutierrez, Vellem (2015) further remarks saying:

> [*R*]esurrection is the victory of life over death, while poverty means simply death. We need to turn this around. There is a sense in which resurrection is rebellion and in the struggles for life, the nonperson rebels against the life killing sprit of Empire. Rebellion against death is to live in the context of Empire without the ideals and notions of Empire. Rebellion against death is to deny victory to torture and starvation in the context of the militarisation of life by Empire. Rebellion against death is bodily resurrection. The symbiosis between neoliberal capitalism and racism is at its core life killing, but both the philosophy of liberation and its theology posit life itself as a 'sovereign' starting point and a precondition of any claims and systems in the world. (p. 6)

In addition to the above, the womanist feminist perspective arose to question the injustices and the lack of empowerment of women across the African societies. African feminists or womanist perspective argues that the traditional Western feminist perspective does not answer their existential experiences of patriarchy and economic disfranchisement suffered by the African women. Among the leading voices are Oduyoye and Kanyoro (2005) who both raised the issue that, in addition to racism suffered by the black people, the African women suffer oppression from fellow white women and from black men. Thus, benefitting from being within the oppressive white system, the fellow white women cannot fully represent or articulate the experiences of the black women who work as domestic workers and as wives within a patriarchal system (Oduyoye & Kanyoro 2005). Kanyoro and Oduyoye further argued

that, instead of being a place of liberation, the church is a site where patriarchy is sharpened through teachings that teach women to endure oppression as God's design. Similar concerns about the church as a site where patriarchal discourses are taught and practices are found in the writings of Nadar and Potgieter (2010:141) and Phiri and Nadar (2012). Concerning this, Nadar has written about the seemingly Reformed masculinity that is practiced with African Pentecostalism, which teaches that it is God's ordained creation order to have a man as head of family and a woman as 'deputy' to men. She went further to critique the teachings regarding the 'transformed manhood' as another form of hyper-masculinity that does not see equality between men and women.

The locus of African biblical interpretation

As noted, scholars who take the African culture as the starting point for biblical hermeneutics seriously considers the African culture and the experiences of the people as raw material or appropriation point in understanding the Bible. Similarly, as noted, black theology of liberation raises the question of local experiences of oppression and life-denying practices as a starting point in doing theology.

Missing in this discussion is the African philosophy of *ubuntu* as a hermeneutical point of appropriation. African philosophy focuses on the sacrality of life and this is captured in the concept of *ubuntu* which simply means 'I am because we are' (Mabovula 2011:38). *Ubuntu* starts with the idea that the creator gives life in its various forms and he preserves life through daily interactions and rituals with the living. The divine being is not separate from his creation; instead, the divine manifests itself through the various sacred places – the rivers, mountains and forest. The divine is all and in all. Taking this perspective, no life is more important than the other. The rituals that punctuate stages or rites of passage in life are mere stages in life in the long chain of existence from birth, puberty, marriage, death and ancestorhood (Turner, Abrahams & Harris 2017).

At the core of *ubuntu* philosophy is the unreducible essence of life that needs to be valued because of its mere existence – its being. This has repercussions towards how existence should be conducted. *Ubuntu* teaches that life crisis such as living with a disability or being poor does not reduce the value of life endowed by an individual. The being of an individual cannot be reduced to material equivalent of money. To explain this, various African cultures have proverbs that constantly remind people concerning the value of life. For example, among the Bantu tribes, they share a proverb that says, a human being is human and should not be laughed at (*munhu*; *haasekwi*). Noticeable in this proverb is the fact that the phrase 'human being' is repeated twice which captures both the form and the essence of being. The physical

being that defines an individual's morphology in his or her habitus does not increase or reduce the essence of being. The other proverb says, a poor person is a human being (*murombo munhu*), hence emphasising the idea that one's social status does not define being. In this proverb, poverty as a social condition can be understood as a metaphor for any other undesirable condition and does not reduce the value of being inherent within a person.

An important aspect about *ubuntu* as a philosophy is the relational aspect of being. In the *ubuntu* philosophy, the being is not individualistic or disconnected from the rest of society. Given that God is the creator of being, humanity is akin to a large family on earth. Concerning this subject, there is literature that deals with the subject of the ethical dimension of *ubuntu*. For example, Julius Gathogo writes about the hospitality dimension of *ubuntu*. At the heart of *ubuntu* is the idea that being a family, people should take care of each other through reciprocity and charitable deeds. As a large human race, survival is not based on individual success but communal sharing (Gathogo 2008:39). Ramose adds by seeing *ubuntu* as those daily ethical virtues that increase life vitality through sharing life (Ramose 2014:240). Thus, taking from Gathogo's viewpoint, sharing and hospitality go beyond material reciprocity of gifts to sharing life. Through sharing, one's life journey becomes better in the company of others.

Due to its ethical implication, studies have surfaced that apply *ubuntu* ethics to think about the questions of leadership across the African continent. For example, Ncube argues that the *ubuntu* philosophy can assist in thinking about transformational leadership through valuing others within a society (Ncube 2010:77). Similarly, Ramose talks about the value of *ubuntu* in curbing all forms of violence and killing across various African communities (Ramose 2014:240). The assumption of his argument is that if being is irreducible and connected, then killing another being is akin to killing oneself and denying one's vitality of being.

Towards embodied biblical hermeneutics

Building on enculturation, black liberation and womanist hermeneutical approaches, this study argues that the African philosophy of *ubuntu* is a plausible hermeneutical starting point in understanding Christian theology and praxis. Embodied biblical hermeneutics are concerned with exploring the value and interconnectedness of being to the universe, fellow human beings and creation. The following hermeneutical principles undergird the embodied hermeneutics:

Firstly, within embodied biblical hermeneutics, God is not an abstract being or a deistic entity far removed from people. Instead, God is the creator who shares his being with people. Here the image or metaphor of a parent assists in explaining both the existence of God and his relationship with his creation.

Given this, human beings in their various habitus are God's creation and our relationship towards him is through the very act of creation.

Secondly, embodied hermeneutics is the interpersonal relationship of people as a human family. The basis of the social relationship of embodied hermeneutics is the 'I' that is reflected in the being of others. Here we can elaborate by contrasting the views of the France existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre to those of Gabriel Marcel. In short, existentialism is a philosophy associated with names such as Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger and it is concerned with the nature and meaning of existence (Sartre & Dieckmann 1947). For Sartre, the being exists without essence and the supposedly function is subjectively imputed by society (Sartre 2001). However, for Marcel, being contains essence because to deny essence in objects and people is denying one's own very existence (Marcel 1964). In his book *Mystery of Being*, Marcel dialogues with Paul Sartre arguing that things do not exist outside our perception which, indirectly, speaks to one's own existence. Marcel calls this the mystery of being which captures the intersubjective existence of nature. The important aspect that we draw from Christian existentialist philosophers such as Marcel is the interconnectedness of being.

The idea of interconnectedness of being from a hermeneutical perspective can be applied to various aspects of life issues. Human beings are intrinsically connected in essence, and that essence can be the image of God or common creation. However, what is important is the irreducible essence. Given this, an epistemology that starts from the perspective of a God whom people seek and invite into their lives is likely to generate a disconnect between God, people and creation. It has likely implications of generating fragmented ideas of anthropology that feed into racism and ethnicity. For example, Charles Darwin's concept of evolution produces ideas of anthropology that are separate and distinct (Marks 2012:95).

Thirdly, embodied hermeneutics agrees with Vuyani Vellem's life-affirming theology as the task of African hermeneutics. Concerning this, hermeneutics is the task of extracting life-affirming practices into the public space. Practices of charity, hospitality, love and care as explained by Mogobe Ramose are not mere ethical obligations. Instead, from embodied hermeneutics perspective, good virtues are expressions of sharing life. They are practical voices that say, 'the life in me should be lived in you and vice verse'. Underpinning this notion is the metaphor of family and God as the progenitor. Equally social ills such as violence, wars and corruption are expressions that deny one's own existence through others. Existence that is embodied starts with the pronoun 'we' and not 'I', meaning that to exist is through others.

Fourthly, embodied hermeneutics can be understood as a critique against fallacious anthropologies that substitute the majority, the community or

village with the 'I'. Such anthropologies are found in globalisation, colonialism and imperialism whose anthropological assumption is the individual or a particular groups/race's gratification at the expense of the rest. One can go further in arguing that the embodied hermeneutics revisits the idea of creation as starting with a family, a community and not an individual. Given this, any action that maximises pleasure at the expense of the other fails to realise the fundamental order of existence that existence is shared.

Illustrating embodied hermeneutics as a reading lens

As a New Testament scholar, I come from the perspective of textual studies and, therefore, it is necessary to illustrate the plausibility of embodied hermeneutics as a reading lens. In this case, the gospel narrative of Mark provides some of the easily accessible narratives where the embodied hermeneutics can be illustrated.

The story of the woman with the condition of haemorrhage (Mk 5:21–42)

The story of the woman with a condition of haemorrhage is placed alongside that of Jairus's daughter and both have comparative aspects – they are about conditions related to women, both women are presented as critical and both are healed from their point of death (Boring 2006:80). Recent perspectives to the story focus on the existing healthcare systems reflected through the story. For example, the Jewish healthcare system with its focus on wholeness and holiness would dismiss the woman as cursed and therefore her condition is a result of demonic attachment or punishment from God. In addition, the story gives a glimpse of information about the Hippocratic healthcare system practiced by trained healers who charge fees for their practice (Mk 5:23) (Dube 2020a:139). Using body metaphor within the field of disability, Candida Moss reveals comparative aspects of the bleeding female body and that of Jesus that, seemingly, became porous and also physiologically weak (Moss 2010:507).

An embodied approach focuses on (1) attitudes that reduce being (2) actions of interconnectedness of being and (3) restoration of life and critique of discourse that kills life. Concerning the attitudes that reduce being, the story is located within a Jewish healthcare system where sickness was regarded as a curse from God. In addition, the female body was seen as physiological weak compared to that of males (Boring 2006:159). More importantly, by not mentioning the female by name of family, it is plausible that, due to her illness, she had lost her gender role as a mother or daughter.

Thus by being in the street unaccompanied by a male figure, she was an outcast (Dube 2020b:11). The reaction of the crowd and that of the disciple to her condition further reveals the cultural attitudes that reduce being. Her condition had reduced her from her social position as a mother, daughter or neighbour to being a lonely figure in the dusty streets of Capernaum. Her action of touching Jesus' garment out of faith was reported by the disciples who brushes her action as of no value and that Jesus should continue with his trip. Mark reported the disciples, saying, 'And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, "Who touched me?"' (Mk 5:32). Somehow, the disciple's remark made Jesus' question ridiculous (Guelich 1989:298). The dismissive remark by the disciples is telling about their perception of her as a sick, cursed and insignificant woman. Boring's (2006) aptly remarks, saying:

> The jostling crowds do not know, and the disciples not only stand with the imperceptive crowds but their protestation sounds very much like the mocking crowds at the house of Jairus (v. 40). In contrast, Jesus addressed the woman as 'daughter' which is not condescending, but includes her in the people of God and family of believers. (p. 161)

What are the actions and gestures of interconnectedness within the story? Seeing her actions, Jesus said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace and be healed of your disease' (Mk 5:34). Boring's remark concerning Jesus addressing the woman as a daughter is a change of her identity from being reduced to being an outcast to being given a household title as a daughter. In ancient society, woman derive their honour from being household members under the paterfamilias and those without a household were viewed with shame.

Finally, this story critiques cultural discourses that kill life. Her condition of being an outcast from having the flow of blood makes her a subject of shame. However, upon seeing her, Jesus greeted her with *shalom* – peace – which is a Jewish greeting that explains the balance between God and society. This is a drastic change of identity from being a non-entity that stealthy touched Jesus to being accorded life and peace from God and society. Taking the perspective of embodied hermeneutics, this story deconstructs and critiques cultural discourses that deny life. Unlike the crowd and the disciples that did not recognise her, Jesus regarded her as a daughter and shared with her peace.

Conclusion

Using *ubuntu* philosophy and Christian existentialism of Gabriel Marcel, this chapter builds on existing hermeneutical perspectives of liberation, enculturation and womanism by suggesting embodied hermeneutics. The study defines hermeneutics from the perspective of embodied hermeneutics as interconnectedness of being based on the irreducible essence of being.

From this perspective, life is a shared platform that starts with the pronoun ‘we’ which produces life-affirming praxis. Since existence is affirming the life in others, embodied hermeneutics can be viewed as a critique against self-gratification, selfish categorisation of people based on their social status, race or condition. To exist is to acknowledge the ‘us’ in others.

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Index

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When it comes to hermeneutics, we normally distinguish between historical-critical, synchronic and reader-response approaches that can be used to interpret ancient texts. This collection follows a different approach, focusing on hermeneutical traditions on the basis of either their influence, discursive power, or novelty within the South African context. The collection therefore focuses on approaches such as Pentecostal hermeneutics, a hermeneutics of suspicion, hermeneutics of liberation theology, postcolonial hermeneutics, eco-feminist hermeneutics, and embodied biblical hermeneutics, all through the lens of a Reformist hermeneutics. Theologians, religious study scholars and pastors will benefit in reading the different chapters that make up this book.

Prof. Ernest van Eck, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

In a rapidly changing world and 'notoriously' religious context like Africa, Christian hermeneutics are critical since they are 'characterised by a plethora of approaches to Scripture'. The collection of chapters in this book brings the theme out very well as the diversity of the reader is critically discussed. This collection comes at the right time, when the African theological academia and Christian community is affected by numerous components and challenges. Chapters attempt to address these components and challenges by approaching biblical hermeneutics in connection to the context and realities of the reader, thereby empowering the reader to understand the text within their specific socio-cultural context. Each chapter has made a significant argument in highlighting that the science of Biblical interpretation is never an end in itself, because the world is constantly changing.

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