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NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION AND AFRICAN CULTURE:  
SELECTIONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS AS A TEST CASE

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# NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION AND AFRICAN CULTURE: SELECTIONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS AS A TEST CASE

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### *1.1 Focus*

A study of this nature demands a clear focus from the researcher. A wrong or even an ambiguous focus can lead to misdirected effort and counter-production. To avoid misdirection of effort and counter-production, my focus will be towards the following objectives:

- To determine the effect on Biblical<sup>1</sup> interpretation where culture in both the world of the reader and the world of the text is taken seriously.
- To determine whether a reading from the perspective of the African culture does not allow greater understanding of the text than from dominant readings from Western perspectives.
- To apply the previous perspectives to a reading of selections from the First Letter to the Corinthians for enhanced understanding of the book.

### *1.2 Problem Statement*

- Though a lot has been done in New Testament interpretation, one area still remains under investigation and this area concerns the rightful role of the category "culture". The thesis of this study is that the culture/ world of the reader - and specifically the African culture is of utmost importance in the reading process of the Bible in the African context and that it needs re-examination because in actual fact this culture enhances New Testament interpretation.
- That even if during the introduction of Christianity on African soil by the Western Missionaries, many African cultures were treated as pagan, against Christianity, and therefore, against the Bible; there are greater correspondences between the African cultural world and the Ancient Mediterranean Culture than has been

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'Bible', 'Biblical' and 'Word' will in this study take on capital letters unless where they are being quoted and where the source of the quotation used them in small letters.

recognised before in biblical scholarship.

- Consideration of both the worlds/cultures and the conscious rightful positioning thereof can contribute to a better understanding of the Biblical text - specifically the First Letter to the Corinthians and can lead to a vibrant and realistic spirituality that can revitalise the Church of modern times.

### ***1.3 Methodology***

In terms of methodology, I will basically approach this study as an interdisciplinary study. It means that the study will consist of:

- Combinations of hermeneutic theory, New Testament methodological theory, and cultural anthropology
- Combination of literature study and fieldwork.

This study will pursue its task first of all by carrying out an overview of the category “culture” in New Testament Interpretation and will establish whether or not culture played any role in the New Testament text itself and subsequently in New Testament hermeneutics/interpretation or the *Wirkungsgeschichte*<sup>2</sup> thereof. An investigation of culture in African Biblical Interpretation will receive attention in order to assess the role that it has played. This will be followed by a critical survey of First Corinthians and Culture. The guiding question of the section “First Corinthians and Culture” is: What role did culture play in the text formation and subsequent interpretations of the same Corinthian text. African perspectives on First Corinthians and interpretation of specific selected pericopes will follow this section. The rationale behind such a move is to provide an opportunity for the practical application of African culture to selections from First Corinthians and the justification thereof. Finally the study will conclude the task and establish the one who holds the prerogative of determining what the “rightful role of the category culture” is in New Testament interpretation.

My conviction is that with the aspects and insights that this thesis will provide, a contribution will have been made to the quest for reading and interpreting the Bible

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<sup>2</sup> History of interpretation.

from an African perspective which has great benefits to the African context in which Christianity is gaining more and more ground than is the case in the Western world.

#### *1.4 Working definition of the category culture*

One logical question to begin with is a question: “What is culture”? It is a recognised fact that there are many diverse notions of culture. For the purposes of this study, “culture” will be treated in a close relationship with “world.” The terminology “world” does not carry herein the mere sense of  $\text{שָׁמַיִם}$  *shaw-mah'-yim* -meaning: heaven, heavens, sky, visible heavens, as abode of the stars or the visible universe and  $\text{אֶרֶץ}$  *erets*; the land, earth, whole earth as opposed to heaven, country, territory (Genesis 1: 1,7) as the Biblical connotation does. In other words, “world” does not in this study refer to the physical firmament. It carries more of the connotation of  $\text{κόσμος}$ ,<sup>3</sup> *cosmos* - meaning: an appropriate and neighbourly arrangement or constitution, way in which people order or govern, the manifestation or visible essence of inhabitants of the earth, wo/men of a given community or indeed, the human race as a broader category. Such a meaning of  $\text{κόσμος}$  does not only negatively refer to the ungodly multitude; the whole mass of men alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ as Paul uses it in (1 Corinthians 4: 9). It also positively refers to a manifestation, window or entrance into the people’s being. This is the sense in which the terminologies culture/world will be used for the reason that culture is the core of people’s living. In this sense of meaning and connotation, the upbuilding or destruction of people stands or falls with culture. Therefore, culture is a complex human phenomenon describing such aspects of human life as:

- Manner of perceiving, organising, ordering and articulating reality or lens of perception.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf Martin 1998.

- Attitudes and beliefs that safeguard the identity and values of a particular people or nation. Among such attitudes and beliefs operative in many
- African cultures is the upholding of taboos and proverbs with a view to regulate certain aspects of African life ranging from social relationships, sexuality and the conservation of nature and environment.
- An axis of diverse cultures in set-ups where a cosmopolitan way of life is adopted as a compromise or response to cultural changes and challenges.

Culture ought to be defined in consideration of many factors because it is complex. As Van der Watt (2001: 24) correctly argues, culture does not concern itself with mere intellectual and artistic aspects. Indeed culture:

... is not something "sublime" or disconnected from, but includes our ordinary attitudes, customs, behaviour, values, beliefs, institutions, etcetera, It is not necessarily acquired by (formal) education and reserved for a section of the population. Every human being is a cultural being-prisoners and the poor included! Culture is our "frame of reference" for human thought and conduct. We are hardly aware of it. It is like the air we breathe; like water in which fish lives; we are 'programmed' by our own culture. We only become aware of our culture when something goes awry or when we encounter people of other culture

On a similar note of culture and what it entails Simpfendförför argues (1993: 397f) that:

My conscience has been formed by my culture. ... Becoming aware of my cultural limits is both a painful and liberating process. It means accepting the fragmentary character of my life, responding to the challenge of cultural transformation through intercultural dialogue rather than by way of what Paulo Freire called "cultural inversion"

Furthermore, Malina argues (1986: 2) concerning communication that:

What the reader reads are spellings (words) and what the hearer hears are sounds.... Spellings and sounds are wordings through which meaning is expressed. ... All forms of communication encode

and transmit information from the *social system*<sup>4</sup>. Such forms of communication includes consumption, cohabitation and collaboration as well as command and conversation. ... Communication takes place through “a hidden load of shared assumption, a collective and shared set of interpretations of reality that make up the culture of a particular group

African culture will (in this study) refer to the Chewa culture and related cultures of the COMESA<sup>5</sup> region. On the one hand, the COMESA region is chosen as a broader cultural context in order to avoid the error of regarding this study as a local Chewa document exclusively beneficial to readers who know something about the Chewa people or the Chewa people themselves. On the other hand the Chewa culture is chosen in order to avoid another error, but this time it is the error of generalisation. Courage is gathered to approach the category “culture” in this study like this because to many Africans if not all, it is a well-known fact beyond debate that on the one hand, the culture of every people or tribe is so unique that no culture is a replica of another. On the other hand, the African cultures are so interrelated to each other that there is a sense in which one can view African cultures as culture in a singular form. This can explain why in many parts of Africa, it is only the artificial political borders and custom procedures that indicate that one is crossing between one country and another and not necessarily the attitude and approach to life of the people. In some cases, even language does not change at all. Yes, it is not an overstatement to point out that an African can live among different other Africans without so much of a feeling of a loss of identity, as he would in a Western World even after many years of staying there.

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<sup>4</sup> Inserted italics.

<sup>5</sup> COMESA stands for the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa. It is an arrangement of member nations in which such countries relax immigration and custom rules and regulations in order to encourage their peoples to do cross-border trade. As people pursue their trade and economic interests, they do not leave their cultures and they do not wear protection and immunity against possible influences from the cultures of the people that they trade with in the other country. For instance, a Chewa young woman who attains puberty and becomes mature is prohibited from talking with strangers especially those of the opposite sex. As Makumbi (1975: 14) tells us: *Namwali wa mkazi amauzidwa kuti ukakomana ndi munthu osayamba kulankhula naye mpaka atakupatsa mkanda; ukakomana ndi mfumu uzigona pansu mpaka iye atapyola* (A girl who attains puberty and becomes mature is instructed that ‘when you meet a person do not speak to him until he gives you beads; when you meet the chief, lie down until he passes’). Committed to her culture as she may be, if she must trade in whatever items, she is compelled to compromise her cultural stance, otherwise she will fail to comply with immigration and customs rules and regulations and if she did, she would not secure customers for her merchandise in silence.

The relationship between “African culture” (singular form) and “African cultures” (plural form), can also be detected from Mbiti’s (1991: 8) description of the African “cultural heritage” where he argues that:

Each African people has its own cultural heritage. Some aspects of our cultures are fairly similar over large areas of our continent. There are also many differences, which add to the variety of African culture in general. For example, in many parts of Africa one finds round houses, the keeping of cattle, sheep and goats, and the growing of bananas, millet, or yams as staple food. The custom of a husband having more than one wife exists in practically every African society. These are only a few examples of cultural similarities in Africa, which make it possible to speak of African culture (in the singular) remembering, however, that there are many varieties of it. Stories, proverbs, riddles, myths and legends are found in large numbers among all African peoples. They have been handed down orally

The above explanation does not intend to function as an antithesis of Western culture whose advocates may portray otherwise, but merely qualifying why in this study, it has been deemed suitable to think and discuss in terms of both African “cultures” and “culture” without any contradiction. The quotation from Mbiti, signifies that such an approach is recognised by some of the well-known African scholars and theologians.

Having briefly provided some perspectives on culture in relation to the African context, it is important to examine now the same but in relation to the Bible so as to continue our investigation.

## CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CATEGORY “CULTURE” IN NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION

The category “culture” is discussed herein in relation to interpretation as the subject refers. Since when dealing with culture, one deals with the reader of the Bible, it is necessary to deal briefly with hermeneutics and examine some of the trends.

### *2.1 Shifts in Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutics like any other discipline of theology is not static but dynamic. It grows with time and circumstances to meet the demands of an ever-changing context. The context of hermeneutics, which is constitutive of the three publics of theology namely the Church, the Academy and Society is affected by advancements of other equally important facets of human endeavour, such as science, technology and culture, to mention but a few. The subject “shifts in hermeneutics” is an attempt to indicate how hermeneutics always grapples with the question of relevance.

To begin with, it is very important to remind ourselves what hermeneutics is all about. The obvious question to be answered then is: what is hermeneutics?<sup>6</sup> In order to answer this question, perhaps it is necessary to point out that hermeneutics can be defined in a number of ways as can be demonstrated by the following scholars:

According to Tate (1997: ix), “interpretation is defined as the task of explaining or drawing out implications of that (i.e exegesis - DTB)<sup>7</sup> for contemporary readers and hearers”. A liberation theologian by the name of Gnanavaram (1998: 1-6) understands hermeneutics as “a science of interpreting texts, especially of past history, whose original meaning is no longer immediately available to the present readers in the light of their present experience”.

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<sup>6</sup> Hermeneutics here is discussed in an ordinary sense without limiting it to one aspect like the Bible. To state the obvious, hermeneutics is applied in many fields. Human beings apply hermeneutics in various aspects of life. To share jokes, stories, communicate with the authorities like traditional chiefs and headmen or their councillors (*Nduna - in Chewa*), or the political leaders like presidents, members of parliament etc, calls for a unique literary type suitable for each occasion and that demands unique hermeneutical approaches. Administration of justice would be impossible without the application of hermeneutics on state law and constitution. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to state that hermeneutics is applied in all aspects of human endeavour.

In this case hermeneutics is said to have “two eyes” - one behind and another in front. This definition views the hermeneutic task as a task guided by two sets of questions:

- Questions designed to investigate the circumstances of the context, history and people who formed the original text.<sup>8</sup>
- Questions designed to analyse the current realities of the context of the reader, which include socio-economic, religio-cultural, political and psychological connotation.

Another interesting definition of hermeneutics is provided by Smit (1998: 275) who describes the technical term “hermeneutics” with reference to “Hermes” (the messenger of the Greek gods in Greek mythology). The task of Hermes was to explain decisions of the gods to human beings.

In view of the above-mentioned definitions it is hereby argued that hermeneutics can be well understood if it is derived from the Greek term ἑρμηνεία, (interpretation) (cf 1Cor. 12: 10, 14: 26). This term may refer to: “interpretation or explanation of principles of understanding texts, bringing a message to a reader from a text” (Bruce 1982: 478). It can also be derived from the Greek verb ἑρμηνεύω which, translates interpret, explain or proclaim some message to someone. The task of the “hermeneut” or “interpreter” is to make intelligible what cannot otherwise be grasped (Mudge 1983: 249f). This means that at the core of hermeneutics is the understanding of a certain message from some source, and then proclamation or explanation of the said message that has been understood to another unique and specific audience.

Hence, we can conclude that interpretation is an art of decoding meaning from a given source and explaining it or passing it on to other contexts<sup>9</sup>. Such a source can be a person, an event or a substance while the recipient in most cases is a person or an

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<sup>7</sup> Tate defines exegesis as the process of examining a text to ascertain what its first readers would have understood it to mean.

<sup>8</sup> Even if Gnanavaram focuses on the Biblical text, people investigate various texts apart from the Biblical text, which is not the only text.

<sup>9</sup> Here we should think of contexts (in plural) rather than the 'context' (singular) because it is not only one context that is involved. Apart from the various contexts for which it is interpreted (modern audiences), there are also the contexts of the text and of the interpreter.

audience. The hermeneut<sup>10</sup>/ interpreter can be one person or more persons. In other words, the principle remains the same no matter whether the source and the hermeneut are singular or plural.

Having discussed hermeneutics as a general concept, the obvious outstanding questions related to our subject that the hermeneut has to answer are among others the following: What is Biblical hermeneutics? How does Biblical hermeneutics relate to hermeneutics in a general sense?

As the hermeneut grapples with the questions raised above, the first discovery is that the same Greek term ἑρμηνεία, (“interpretation”) is used in the Biblical text (1Cor. 12: 10, 14: 26).<sup>11</sup> In the pericopes in which Paul uses the term, it is in relation to the gift of speaking in tongues. In both contexts, the term carries connotations of understanding a message from a source that is a tongue speaker, using what is not intelligible to the audience, and making the message intelligible to the audience such that they can be edified. In other words, someone within the audience should use his or her gift to explain the meaning of what they had heard as meaningless utterances. The task of understanding a message from a source (in this case of tongue) and explaining the same to an audience is exactly what we have described as interpretation (cf. §2.1: 6).

It should be emphasised at the outset that the basis for Biblical hermeneutics goes much beyond the singling out of terms such as ἑρμηνεία in the Biblical text. Something does not become Biblical simply because it is found in the Bible. Biblical hermeneutics is based on the role and place that the Bible is accorded. As people who reflect on issues confronting us in our context, the question concerning the role and significance of the Bible for concrete decisions to make arises. Christian theology<sup>12</sup> acknowledges the Bible/Scripture as the Word of God. By Word of God is meant that the Biblical text is the rule of faith and the way for salvation. It is strongly believed

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<sup>10</sup> The term hermeneut is treated as a synonym of interpreter just as hermeneutics and interpretation receive the same treatment. At this point I am in full agreement with Tate in his description of the two terms.

<sup>11</sup> This note is based on the Nestle Aland text, 1983 26<sup>th</sup> Edition *Greek New Testament Morphological Edition*.

that God's salvific plan for a new creation/world and humanity is mediated through Scripture. In this sense, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work".<sup>13</sup> (2 Timothy 3: 16-17). In this case, Scripture is central in the life of both the individual and the Church.

To confess Scripture as the Word of God and the rule for faith, as that which has power to change people<sup>14</sup>, calls for recognition that specific considerations have to be made in order to discern God's will in people's lives today in the diversities of not only contexts but also Scripture. Each part of the Bible is the Word of God that was addressed in the first place to the concrete context of the original audience. In other words, the Bible is the Word of God to us today because concretely, it was the Word of God to the ancient author and audience. If we as the people of the third millennium have to seek the power and light of the Biblical text to affect and shape our lives in a concrete way, it does not mean that we directly and uncritically transfer and take over ancient words and concepts and apply them. The task before the Christian Church, academy and society is to seek the significance of the Word of God in the diversities of the modern and post-modern contexts of our human endeavours.

The questions that arise in relation to such a daunting task form the domain of "Biblical Hermeneutics/Interpretation". The Biblical text must be interpreted as it applies to the people other than those of the ancient context to which it was intended. Such a task has to seriously take into account historical and social-historical, economic, political, religious, cultural and scientific developments and changes.

Furthermore, we argue that the entire Bible is the Word of God yet not every portion of the Bible conveys a message to be applied.

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<sup>12</sup> Christian Theology as presented here and from the perspective of the author operates within the African Church, Academy and Society.

<sup>13</sup>Quotation from: New Revised Standard Version. 1996, c1989.

<sup>14</sup> In the actual sense, the Christian faith is not faith in the book as such. The change under discussion here comes from the Triune God in whom we as Christians believe. In the case, "faith in the Bible" exists only in the secondary sense. By secondary sense is meant that we believe in the Bible as a written witness to God's dealings with his people including us (cf. John 5:39).

The Bible is in this sense subject to interpretation and the hermeneuts should use all sources and means at their disposal to discern God's will from the Biblical text which they should in turn share and proclaim to their own audiences. By "subject to interpretation" we do not refer to the authority of Scripture and we do not mean that interpretation should dominate the Bible and that Bible should be at the mercy of the interpreter who should determine its fate. Over against any possible misunderstanding, "subject to interpretation" means that responsible interpretation is necessary for the Biblical text to be appreciated. Disregard for such responsible hermeneutics manifests ignorance and may lead to destruction (cf. 2 Peter 3: 16).

Therefore, responsible Biblical hermeneutics is the application of hermeneutic principles and the utilisation of hermeneutic tools as one interprets a given Biblical text thereby making it part and parcel of hermeneutics in a broader sense.

Having discussed hermeneutics in a broader sense and Biblical hermeneutics in a particular sense, what can be said concerning the status of the New Testament in relation to the same? From the perspective of hermeneutics as discussed above, we can say that the New Testament documents and indeed all Biblical writings are communication documents and in a sense they are in themselves interpretations. The Biblical authors and their audiences were the first interpreters. Confronted by crucial contextual issues that demanded their attention and perspective, Biblical authors drew from sources available to them and addressed their specific local communities. In turn the local communities applied what was proclaimed to them in terms of their social cultural terms and either obeyed or disobeyed the messengers.

Now that we have defined interpretation, what can we say then hermeneutical shifts is all about? Shifts in hermeneutics depict the endless efforts by scholars to keep Biblical hermeneutics in step with contemporary situations. Continuous interpretation is quite difficult due to the changes in circumstances and the fact that hermeneutics is not mere repetition of the ancient text, but restating the very text in the light of new and diverse circumstances. For the purposes of this study, a decision is taken among all options to carry out an overview of these "hermeneutical shifts" through three categories which in a functional order would reflect the following:

### **2.1.1 Category I: Author focused Reading**

During the early phases of the critical studies of the New Testament in the 1940s, Bible readers or interpreters devoted much of their efforts to focusing on the author and his “world”. Good interpretation was assumed to be that which sought the author’s intention for his correspondence to a given audience. The common formulation was mostly in “terms of social, political, cultural and ideological matrix of the author”(Tate 1997: xx). Meaning was then viewed to be like the treasure buried in the ground that could only be discovered by digging through the earth until it is discovered. The interpreter’s task is to dig through to the core intention, which was viewed to lie in the original setting. In this approach, hermeneutics gets linked to rigorously study of circumstances surrounding the author and his ancient artefacts because these lead to the author’s intention. There is indeed some merit even today that can help the modern interpreter in his or her task. The problem however, comes when this category is over-emphasised over against the other equally important categories to which we shall turn soon.

When all effort is exhausted on this category and little or nothing more remains to pursue with the same effort, then it becomes a meaningless endeavour. In other words, “the catch is not worth the hunting” because after all, who can really penetrate the author’s mind when the author is not available for verification? This shortfall of the author focused reading (when done in isolation from other aspects) is evident in the fact that it did not take long before the “new criticism” arose which disqualified the seeking of meaning in the author’s intention as not important (Tate 1997: xxiii).

However, when search for the authorial intention is pursued as part of a well-rounded hermeneutical methodology, then it is a very important aspect.

### **2.1.2 Category II: Text focused Reading**

This was a noticeable shift that came up following the author focused reading in the 1950s. Structuralism that sought meaning in the text itself was part of this development. In structuralism, the text is viewed as autonomous whose autonomy functions as the springboard for theories of meaning (Tate 1997: xxii). This text focused reading developed further into literary critical methods of biblical

interpretation which mainly come as a consequence of Schleiermacher's and Bultmann's demand that the Bible be treated like any other piece of literature (Jeanrond 1992: 442). Even at this level of development, the focus remains on the text. A good analysis of the text focused reading should lead to recognition of some merit. It is a fact the text has what one can call "limited autonomy"<sup>15</sup>. According to Schneiders (1991: 167) the text presents a reader with a world of possible alternative reality and invites the reader to enter into this world. It is correct to uphold that the text directs the reader towards a new living possibility of the world in front of the text.

This potential of the text to invite the reader and do something to him or her should correctly be attributed to the aforesaid limited or qualified autonomy. One can trace the text-focused emphasis as further back into the history of New Testament interpretation itself. It was this qualified autonomy that formed a basis for the Reformation slogan of *sola scriptura* (Barton 1995: 62). One would be very unfair to think that by this slogan the Reformers meant that both the Biblical authors and the readers (Reformers themselves included) were unimportant. Furthermore, one shouldn't miss the truth that on the one hand the Bible is indeed the Word of God, and on the other hand, it is human literature. The latter implies that, some of the rules and principles applicable to the study of literature in general should be used in handling the Bible. But it should also be recognised that as the Word of God, the Bible is not mere human literature. Recognising it as literature do not in this case affect or question its being inspired. It was in this context that "Biblical theology", which is a later development, came on the scene as a method of interpretation. This was both a further response to the author focused readings but with a strong emphasis on the unity of the Bible and as a kind of corrective method towards safeguarding canonicity.

One observation is that the modern reader of the Bible cannot go about his or her business without noticing that positivistic and historical approaches, domination of biblical interpretation reactions have emerged from scholars who courageously defended the significance of the Biblical canon (Jeanrond 1992: 442). Following this, is the renewed interest to treat the Bible, including the New Testament, as a

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<sup>15</sup> This is my own formulation of the autonomy of the text, which to my mind is not divorced from the author and cannot therefore be absolute.

theological and canonical unit. The point advanced by the proponents of this category claims that meaning rests not in the author's intention but in the text itself and a reader should dig more into the linguistic literary forms and the intertextual settings of the text. It is interesting that even as a later development, Biblical theology still continued with text focused reading approaches in attempting to bring about an alternative reading method to the author focused reading that we have discussed above by stressing the text itself.

In concluding the text-focused approach, it is necessary to contend that the importance of written communication does not and should not supersede the *author* nor the *reader*. The quest for meaning in most cases includes circumstances of both the *author* and his or her *audience* on one hand and the nature or *form of the media of communication* (in this case the *text*) on the other hand. The biblical text as a means of communication is no exception to this rule. Of course, the extremes of treating Scriptures like newspapers, novels or secular literature should be guarded against. A certain attitude that upholds the Bible as inspired Word of God that can be restated or applied even in the third millennium ought to go with any attempt to interpreting the Bible. This contention does not in any way presuppose that the hermeneut is licensed to make uncritical direct transfers from the text to the modern audience. Both the contexts of the text and the reader should receive due attention so that the Word of God that was preached in some cases more than 2000 years ago can be restated and preached today in terms and images intelligible to the modern context.

We can thus conclude that the text focused reading becomes a meaningful event and worth spending energy on, when it is in proportion to the author focused reading and to the reader focused reading to which we shall turn now; otherwise likewise, as we have contended "the catch is not worth the hunting".

### **2.1.3 Category III: Reader focused Reading**

The reader focused reading is what has dominated hermeneutics the last ten years or so. As the subject indicates, this approach emphasises the reader or hearer and his or her circumstances. In contemporary communication disciplines there is a common expression that claims that "Meanings are in people". According to Tate, (1997: xxiii)

the reader brings to the text a vast world of experience, presuppositions, interest, and competencies. The reader must actualise the meaning that is only potential in the text. Most reader-oriented theories hold that a text means nothing until someone means something by it.

Schneiders and Robbins have also made quite significant contributions in this category. In her model, Schneiders discusses interpretation from the perspectives which can be summarised as “three worlds” namely: - the world

- *behind the text,*
- *of the text, and*
- *in front of the text.*

*The world behind the text* deals with the historical context: politics, socio-economic factors, culture, geography and demographical issues. The history of composition phases, are as well dealt with here. *The world of the text* deals with language, word meaning and literary-type factors. *The world in front of the text* is the imagined world inclusive of the history of interpretation.

Dealing with the *world in front of the text* Schneiders (1991: 112) indicates that the text confronts us with a new conceptual and reality framework that can alternate with our own (as readers - DTB).

Thus, we can agree that the New Testament themes and genres and even authors bring up certain “worlds” that the interpreter should enter. These “worlds” are so interwoven that they should be viewed as an important aspect of one whole process of interpretation.

Schneiders’s model is refined further by Robbins. Robbins’s model, that he discusses in his book entitled *Exploring the texture of the texts*, is actually a socio-rhetorical interpretation that integrates all dimensions of the text. In a way Robbins carries the hermeneutic problem a step further than what Schneiders addressed in his model. According to Robbins (1996: 2-3) the text is to be approached “as though it were a thickly textured tapestry” containing complex patterns and images. He correctly

argues that:

Looked at only one way, a text exhibits a very limited range of its texture. By changing the interpreter's angle a number of times, the method enables the interpreter to bring multiple textures of the text into view.

Robbins thus identifies five different angles in order to explore multiple textures within texts: *Inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture.*

For the purposes of this study, these angles are not discussed in detail but rather we take serious note thereof. In this case we take a particular to note that what Robbins describes as "Social and Cultural Intertexture" and "Ideological Texture". Concerning the Social And Cultural Intertexture, a text is viewed as intricately woven and containing complex patterns and images. The social and cultural texture of a text emerges in specific social topics, common social and cultural topics and final cultural categories. Topics in the text reflect responses to the world in its discourse and the context in which people live in the World.

From *Social And Cultural Intertexture*, Robbins moves to the *Ideological Texture*. Here he rightly says the primary subject of ideological texture is *people* in relation to their biases, opinion, preferences, and dispositions (Robbins 1996: 95). He states that "The interpreter's adoption of a certain method is a reflection of his/her ideology" (Robbins 1996: 106).

What Robbins discusses under the two selected categories, summarised above, is a very valuable insight concerning the reader focused reading. Its value however, is only retained when the reader, hearer or hermeneut is not granted absolute autonomy such that he or she imposes anything he desires upon the text. Over-estimating the reader at the expense of the author and the text leads to the same conclusion that the endeavour becomes nothing more than a misdirection of effort and an unworthy task.

The task of the hermeneut is to attempt to understand and apply the message of the New Testament and the entire Bible in an interdisciplinary climate. The extreme historical critical methods and perspectives only cause holes in interpretation, which

will be unfilled until integrated - orientated methods are applied.

#### **2.1.4 Conclusion**

Having briefly surveyed the *Shifts in Hermeneutics*, the following observations can be made:

- Valid interpretation should keep the three categories in balance. The same respect and honour should be accorded to *the author, the text and reader with his or her audience*.
- These shifts should be positively appreciated as indicative of the fact that interpretation continues to be a task that is unfinished.

Against the background that the world of the reader and his or her audience is to be equally respected, the category culture requires attention. The reason why attention should be devoted to culture is because it is difficult (if not impossible) to discuss the world of the reader apart from culture. Culture as a core of human existence, is already part of the reader as he or she approaches the text or as he or she is approached by the text. Hence, in pursuit of this unfinished task let us briefly discuss closely related approaches that in turn relate to the shifts and culture.

### ***2.2 The Cultural and Socio-Scientific Interpretations***

#### **2.2.1 The Cultural Interpretation**

The question concerning the cultural interpretation emerges out of a particular understanding of what the Bible is. This understanding views the Bible as both the Word of God and the words of humankind. The Bible is not imagined to be a document that perhaps magically fell from Heavens. It is understood and appreciated as the Word of God that developed in the Eastern Mediterranean and Greco-Roman context (cf. Asher 2001: 102; Meeks 1983: 10; Neyrey 1990: 13). The Eastern Mediterranean society in a true sense socio-historically, socio-politically and socio-culturally conditioned the biblical text, which was the context of origin. What does

such a statement mean? It means a realisation that the Contextuality<sup>16</sup> of the Bible is very important.

This is because to affirm that the Biblical text developed in context entails accepting that the authors were not mechanical instruments like robots that perform according to the manner in which they were programmed with no input from themselves at all. They were real people who utilised their own personal skills and interests, literary skills, historical circumstances, socio-cultural settings etc, as they wrote the scriptures (Ladd 1978: 35).

The other validation of the “cultural interpretation talk”<sup>17</sup> is the issue of language. Language is a very essential aspect of culture which is transmitted from one generation to another by communicating or passing on ideas, emotions, dreams and desires through language (Haviland 1990: 52). Though it is from a reader-focused perspective, Malina (1986: 1) points out the importance of language first of all by indicating that when a reader approaches a text, what s/he reads are “spellings” and what the hearer hears are “sounds.” These spellings and sounds are wordings that convey meaning. Language is thus an important facet of communication. Interestingly, Malina (1986: 2) observes the following about communication:

All forms of communication encode and transmit information from the social system. Such forms of communication include consumption, cohabitation and collaboration as well as command and conversation. .... Language is one form of communication (though it is a very significant and common means of such communication -DTB)<sup>18</sup>. Communication takes place through a hidden load of shared assumptions, a collective and shared set of interpretations of reality that make up the culture of a particular group. To interpret any piece of language requires adequate ability to interpret the social system that expresses it.

From this quotation, one clearly sees the proximity shared by the concepts- *communication, language and culture*. Any meaningful communication takes place in

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<sup>16</sup> Contextuality here refers to all circumstances that prevailed as the Bible came into being throughout the oral, source collection and compilation, redaction and canonisation phases.

<sup>17</sup> My own formulation of the whole preoccupation with culture in relation to interpretation whether it is on the level of thinking, speech etc.

<sup>18</sup> The insertion is mine in order to create emphasis.

a context, which always includes culture. The mention of culture should always involve a sense of realisation that the concept is a complex phenomenon. Culture consists of integrated aspects that combine in order to function. It functions by achieving “approximated harmony”, and “satisfaction of the biological needs of its members,” it also provides sense of continuity and most importantly culture sets regulatory boundaries among its members (cf. Haviland 1990: 52).

If we argue that language is a communicational and cultural phenomenon, it means that as the New Testament authors spoke and wrote in Greek and Aramaic (cf. Meeks 1983: 15), they were communicating through terms and symbols conditioned by the Greek, Aramaic and Jewish cultures. Meeks (1983: 15) further argues that:

It is no accident that all the documents of the New Testament and virtually all other extant writings from the first two centuries of Christianity were written in Greek. Yet, in the villages of Galilee, Aramaic was presumably still the dominant language. When Christianity in its new, urban forms eventually penetrated village cultures, the Greek documents had to be translated into indigenous languages, including, ironically, Aramaic, now in the dialect spoken in the Syrian countryside.

Translating the Greek New Testament documents with a few to “penetrating village cultures” as Meeks puts it, means that the cultures of both the translators and the villagers were operative in the process. Culture in this case may be understood as a complex phenomenon<sup>19</sup> with a complex set of values, beliefs, skills and perceptions of the world and reality, that determine peoples’ conduct,<sup>20</sup> and are reflected in peoples’ conduct and approach to life. As Malina (1986: 9) says: “culture refers to a system of collectively shared interpretations of persons, things, events, endowing them with distinctive functions and statuses, and situating them within specific time and space frames.” When these shared cultural elements are acted upon, they yield behaviour considered accepted within that society (Haviland 1990: 29).

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<sup>19</sup> See my working definition of the category culture (§1.4).

<sup>20</sup> Such conduct can be deemed normal or abnormal according to the manner the particular society judges. According to Hatch (1983: 3), cultures differ from place to place and there are no absolutes because the principles that may be used in judging behaviour or anything else are to a large extent relative to the culture in which people are raised. Here, I have inserted my own views into Hatch’s statement, because his views appear to be too radical in favour of cultural and moral relativity. Regrettably, Hatch takes the route of extreme cultural relativism, which at its best leads to escapism from greater responsibility.

This means that the very fact that we acknowledge that the Biblical text did not develop in a vacuum but in context, we actually mean that the means of communication adopted by the authors were understandable by the authors themselves and their immediate audiences.

The people of God were either deemed obedient or disobedient because the word of God through the authors reached them in images, symbols, codes, language and cultural framework that they understood and either obeyed or disobeyed. In this case, Malina (1986: 4) is correct when he indicates that Biblical writings should not be judged to be “perennially contemporary” otherwise their authors “might be considered thoroughly inconsiderate”. What Malina suggests is that Biblical writings must not be handled as if they have just been written for the distant reader. Acknowledging the writings as the Word of God should not lead to the direct and uncritical application of them to the contemporary setting. Direct taking over the ancient Biblical texts and applying them to the distant reader’s context renders the Biblical authors inconsiderate (of which they are not) and robs them of true humanity. Of course, this statement is correct in so far as reference is being made to the Biblical writings as documents and not necessarily referring to the content thereof. In other words, the content of Biblical writings may be applied whenever the context justifies.

### **2.2.2 Conclusion**

We can sum up this section by affirming that the category “ Cultural Interpretation”, is a valid and necessary quest for the role of culture in Biblical interpretation because the category culture is already part and parcel of the New Testament text as a contextual text. Cultural interpretation as discussed herein is a hermeneutical approach that is culturally sensitive and responsive. It does not seek to dominate the entire process of interpretation, but rather calls for serious consideration and integration of culture in order to achieve a responsible interpretation. The basis for cultural interpretation is the fact that when the Biblical authors were communicating what God revealed to them to their audiences, history did come to an end. Many events, some of which influenced the formation of the New Testament, occurred. In fact these were Christian documents that were written by Christians for Christians. The authors of the New Testament certainly used ideas, attitudes and culturally

acceptable methods of interpreting Scriptures that were, for instance, drawn from the Jewish background and mindset which obviously influenced these documents of communication (cf. Banda 1999: 3-5). Each writing manifests its own socio-historical, socio-political and socio-cultural relativity which the modern reader should as a matter of responsibility attempt to understand in order to assess *what was* said and then *what can* be said through the historical witness (Hopper 1987: 161). In this whole process culture continues to play a significant role as a provider of values, beliefs and framework of interpretation which forms a vantage point from which experiences and new data is perceived, processed and ordered to create meaning (cf. Haviland 1990: 30). However, it is equally important to state that cultural interpretation is part of the process of interpretation. It does not attempt to replace other approaches that exist because it is not in itself a specific approach. In fact, it is closely related to other approaches such as the socio-scientific interpretation to which we shall now turn.

### **2.2.3 The Socio - Scientific Interpretation**

New Testament as a field of study has during the previous two decades seen a lot of interest and massive investigations concerning the socio-life of the early church or “early Christian movement” as it is sometimes called. These studies have drawn attention towards the contemporary world of the early church/ Christian movement. Publications about women, households, social groupings and classes, religious groupings, political and economic conditions and other phenomena have been presented as important components of the interpretation task (cf. Holmberg 1990: 2).

As part of this process the socio-scientific interpretation emerged, which utilises socio-science resources and historical-critical analysis<sup>21</sup> to interpret the Scripture. Historical - criticism and the scientific-critical approaches that emphasised scientific readings were responses to the traditional view of the Biblical writings. The traditional view regarded the Biblical writings, more especially the Gospels, as

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<sup>21</sup> Hopper discusses the historical - critical approaches to the New Testament in detail. Even if his focus is on the Gospels, what he observes can be applicable to other genres of the Bible too. According to Van Eck (2001: 593-595), historical -critical analysis focuses interest on the reconstructing of the social context from which a text genetically and mechanically originated. Historical-criticism regards the text analytically as a phenomenon consisting of parts building up a whole.

objective historical accounts based on eyewitnesses (cf. Hopper 1987: 128). The historical-critical approaches were mostly applied on the Gospel genre in response to the above-mentioned view and to find solutions to issues like the synoptic problem. This followed the realisation that a Biblical text contains a diversity of reflections and responses of its total or comprehensive context.

Most scholars regard the 1970s as a period when the sociological and socio-scientific approaches to Biblical interpretation began and took shape<sup>22</sup> (cf. Elliot 1993: 17-18, Holmberg 1990: 4 and Robbins 1995: 274).

Socio-scientific<sup>23</sup> interpretation, which is our subject matter, does not replace the historical critical methods. It asks extra questions and thus probes other dimensions of the text. In other words, socio-scientific studies in their current state are “adaptations” and not “replacements” of other interpretation studies that have been and that there are (cf. Van Eck 2001: 593). This makes more sense than beginning to think that these approaches are disciplinary<sup>24</sup> by nature as others may argue (cf. Robbins 1995: 275).

The question to begin with is: what is socio-scientific interpretation? Socio-scientific interpretation is an interpretation performed and practised on the basis and utilisation of socio-scientific criticism. A definition that correctly embraces socio-scientific criticism is well outlined by Elliot. He views socio-scientific criticism of the Bible as a phase of the exegetical task which analyses the social and cultural dimensions of the text and its environmental context through the utilisation of the perspectives, theory,

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<sup>22</sup> A good example is Holmberg (1990: 4) who with concern for how sociology has been used in New Testament studies wrote: “In 1973 there was held an organising meeting in Chicago of the study group then called The Social Description of Early Christianity and Jonathan Smith delivered a working paper to map out some possible directions for the group’s study. This paper was published in September 1975”. As Robbins (1995: 274) argues in favour of his interdisciplinary model, he writes: “The twentieth century prior to 1970s was disciplinary”. Elliot (1993: 17-18) introduces his subtitle (The recent Emergence of Social-Scientific Criticism by writing: “In this period prior to the 1970s, the work of Biblical scholars .... showed some awareness of the relevance of the social sciences then in vogue for the issues confronted by exegetes and ancient historians.” All these scholars view the 1970s as the time when socio-scientific methods emerged.

<sup>23</sup> In this thesis, the terms “social-scientific” and “socio-scientific” will be treated as synonymous.

<sup>24</sup> A model that is “disciplinary” by nature is well described by Robbins as: “A disciplinary approach is a power structure, and its inherent nature is hierarchical. ... The boundaries of disciplinary model not only create a power structure; they evoke a purity system for interpreters whereby any mixing of approaches, practices or methods creates ‘impurities’ (Robbins 1996: 275). In other words, a disciplinary model/ approach views itself as the good one and it excludes others or ‘explains them away’.

models and research of the social sciences (Elliot 1993: 7).

The socio scientific reading then, investigates the Biblical text in terms of the social behaviour, social-groupings, social institutions, social systems, patterns and codes (Van Eck 2001: 595). In other words, aspects like regular, recurrent, routinised behaviour, common properties, relations, and structured patterns of behaviour, belief systems and ideologies are treated as part of the hermeneutic agenda. It probes the Biblical text in its context as a meaningful configuration of language towards communication between “composers” (authors) and “audiences” (original recipients of a particular text) (Elliot 1993: 7).

A closer examination of the socio-scientific interpretation from the perspective alluded to above, indicates that such an interpretation or design thereof, invites the hermeneut into an understanding that the text contains the interplay of influences. One influence is exerted by the author who either knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, interpreted and expressed what God inspired him or her to state in terms of his or her total context, while the other influence is exerted by the socio-cultural settings which actually gave shape to the text that the author wrote. The nature of the interplay is such that, on the one hand (as aforesaid), the authors of the New Testament certainly used ideas, attitudes and culturally acceptable methods of interpreting Scriptures that were, for instance, drawn from the Jewish background and mindset. These obviously influenced these documents of communication (cf. Banda 1999: 3-5). On the other hand, the text as a communicative device is “both a reflection of and a response to a specific and cultural context; how it was designed to serve as an effective vehicle of social interaction and an instrument of special as well as literary and theological consequence” as Elliot (1993: 7) says. In this case, the authors would not have expressed their messages in terms that were culturally offensive and in fact, they must have even avoided phraseologies that could have either confused or scared their listeners. In this regard, socio scientific criticism is not a total replacement of other criticisms but rather complementing, or “adaptations”(cf. Van Eck 2001: 594-595; Ladd 1978: 37).

Socio-scientific criticism remains part and parcel of the task of investigating and

interpreting the Biblical text and is related to studies such as source criticism<sup>25</sup>, literary criticism<sup>26</sup>, form criticism<sup>27</sup>, redaction criticism<sup>28</sup>, rhetorical criticism<sup>29</sup> and theological criticism<sup>30</sup> (Elliot 1993: 7-8). In terms of the hermeneutical shifts discussed earlier (cf. §2.1: 4-11) the reader focused reading and the socio-scientific interpretation play a complementary role so that other aspects of the Biblical text that do not receive adequate attention can be catered for. In fact it is important to remember that some reading models fit well with certain, specific genres as can be the case with narratology which suits well for one who is interpreting the Gospel genre (Du Rand 1990: 368; Van Eck 2001: 597). Du Rand (1990: 368) who applies this method on the fourth Gospel, attests to the suitability of narratology for the Gospel genre by stating:

John 13: 1-38 should be read in the real sense of the Word. S. Brown (1988) distinguishes three different ways of reading the Gospel narrative when the meaning is actually generated by the reading rather than residing in the intention of the author: *historical* readings are reconstructive; *doctrinal* readings lead to a projection onto the text and *literary* readings concentrate on an 'altruistic' interest in the text; not to use it to reconstruct something outside the text; not to manipulate it in accordance with one or other conviction.<sup>31</sup>

However, when the same interpreter approaches a text from the apocalyptic genre, perhaps he or she will have either to make a combination of models or heavily depend on the rhetorical model. Through the rhetorical method, the text will be approached with questions concerning constituent elements such as: rhetorical situation, rhetorical aim and rhetorical strategy, which the biblical author used with a strong view to persuading his audience (cf. Fiorenza 1991: 20ff).

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<sup>25</sup> Examines and attempts to establish the sources that were available and used by the authors.

<sup>26</sup> Examines the features of the document as a literary (aesthetic) product shaped by both contemporary literary transmutation and the genius of its particular author or authors.

<sup>27</sup> Examines the text as comprising of particular forms and sources of communication with a history preceding that of the larger text in which they are incorporated.

<sup>28</sup> Analyses the text as a creative combination and editing of previous traditions.

<sup>29</sup> Treats the text as a composition and arrangement with a view to creating a persuasive effect on its intended audience.

<sup>30</sup> Treats the text as an articulation of faith/belief in God, the sacred, space, time, ... good and evil, the human condition and the origin, nature and goal of life. Elliot (1993) and Collins (1983) provide detailed and systematic discussions of terminologies described in the above footnotes.

<sup>31</sup> Du Rand also provides a long list of important works to qualify his narratology method on John (Du Rand 1990: 368).

In combination with the above methods, the role of the socio scientific interpretation is to uncover the social networks and connotations that underpin the text.

Through it the interpreter is enabled to discover social relations (Jews/Gentles, Male/Female, Slave/Free), social organisations (Pharisees, Sadducees)<sup>32</sup>, disciples, Pauline and Petrine groups, social institutions and events (taxation<sup>33</sup>, census, temple, sacrificial systems, family and kinship lineage) and socio-political dominant reign (Caesar<sup>34</sup>, Augustus, Tiberius, Herod, Governors, chief Priests, etc). These are frequently referred to in the New Testament text and unless the reader has at least some understanding of such network and organisational background, interpretation of Biblical texts containing references to such would be unachievable or if imposed, would be shallow and too general.

It is the above observation that qualifies the need and importance of socio-scientific criticism and interpretation. As already mentioned earlier on, the content of texts reflect social patterns of behaviour and environmental realities that themselves are shaped by socio-economic, socio-political and societal structural processes. As Elliot says: "in their language, content, structure, strategies and meaning, these texts presuppose, encode and communicate information about social systems in which they were produced and to which they were a response" (Elliot 1993: 10). Having said that, it is important to indicate that the intention of the Biblical text is not to manifest such information about social systems of the context of their origin. Biblical authors cannot satisfy historical and sociological anxieties in a modern sense. The Biblical texts remain faith documents. Yet the above-mentioned environmental realities form the vehicle through which these faith documents were conveyed. As such the modern reader can understand the message contained in a given Biblical text only when s/he acquires adequate skills and knowledge with which to discern, appreciate and reconstruct the presuppositions contained in the ancient text (cf. Malina 1986: 4; Elliot 1993: 11).

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Nolland 1998 for details.

<sup>33</sup> See Hagner 1998 for details.

<sup>34</sup> For instance Matthew quotes Jesus as having said: "*They said to him: "Caesar's." Then he said to them: Give the things that are Caesar's to Caesar and the things that are God's to God. (Mat.22: 15-22).*

To achieve this, the critical socio-scientific oriented models are very helpful<sup>35</sup> and indispensable. To state that the socio-scientific approaches are helpful and indispensable does not compromise the status of the Biblical texts as inspired documents in any way. It is a realistic and honest acknowledgement that through these approaches the reader manages to question herself or himself whether or not the exegetical or expository conclusions come any close to ancient patterns, whenever, the reader proclaims: "My Bible says"<sup>36</sup>

As already alluded to, the emergence of socio-scientific critical readings of the Bible became fashionable and drew scholarly attention since the 70s (cf. footnote 13, Elliot 1993: 17). Since then, these readings have continued to grow and develop into methodological designs. The value of social sciences and anthropology in Biblical interpretation has been realised more and more. Interpreters are no longer solely preoccupied with literary and formal features of the text. It is appreciated that the meaning of a Biblical text cannot just be read off from the text; it is also created out of an encounter or engagement of the reader, the text and the author (cf. Barton 1995: 73). Such an engagement counts the cost of the factual situation in the contexts of the Biblical writings. These writings took shape in the Christian communities which in turn took shape in broader society and under the same principles of sociological advancements, yet striving to remain theologically critical in situations that mostly were unfriendly to the intended responses to the ideals propagated by Biblical authors (cf. Barrett 1987: 8-12).

Having analysed the socio-scientific criticism, what fair evaluation can one give? In essence, it is important to acknowledge that there are strengths in the socio-scientific oriented interpretations as repeatedly indicated above. Some of these are:

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<sup>35</sup> Here, helpfulness is used in a typical African (Chewa-Nsenga) sense where whenever members of society help a clan or cousin clan (Anungwe) as they call them, those who help do not overthrow the helped. In other words, a helper never takes over the show as the Chewa say "Ndeu ya eni sabvulira jekete" which would be translated as "He who helps stop a fight does not remove the jacket to take over the fight" lest the village elders ask: Was it your fight? Applying this to our subject matter entails realising that even the social scientific methods should not be applied as "the methods" that must be applied to every passage. They have not appeared to dominate but to broaden the hermeneutic horizon. As such their role should be helping by addressing aspects that are left out by other models.

<sup>36</sup> This is a common new style advocated by charismatic tel-evangelists/preachers. They actually paraphrase the prophetic formula "Thus says the Lord GOD" (cf. Ezekiel 6: 3, 11, Isaiah 55: 8).

investigation of social groups, institutions and occupations that depict life in the ancient Mediterranean society, penetration into the socio-economic, socio-political phenomena that provides insights necessary for meaningful understanding, and the massive scholarly effort<sup>37</sup>.

We should not despise these strengths but acknowledge that each model has its limitations if it is used where it is unsuitable. These models help in substantiating truth claims in texts and proclamation. Never should these models imprison the Biblical text even by fact that the text is revealed as a document that has had historical relevance. The acknowledgement of a Biblical text as a document with historical relevance does not stretch to the extent of subjecting it to historical verification. It only points to the valuable insight that enables the Biblical hermeneut not to hesitate or feel awkward to utilise sociology, culture, anthropological and psychological findings when handling a text within the acceptable framework (Barton 1995: 67). Furthermore, the fact that other methods such as the rhetorical methods and the socio scientific methods emerged after it, is an indication that the method did not address all aspects of a Biblical text just like any other model.

Similarly, socio scientific oriented readings risk the danger of leading the reader into applying the appealing “scientific” findings from the third millennium context into the ancient Mediterranean context as if one context was a type or shadow of the other. Such a direct transfer from one unique context to another would compromise the uniqueness, distinctiveness and integrity of the ancient settings, events and even people who functioned in the original context. According to Barton, there is even another danger that the “too much claims” (by some proponents of these readings), reduce historical religious phenomena to “ its purported sociological determinant” (Barton 1995: 67), thereby becoming prone to claim to be absolute methods to which every model must be subjected. Furthermore, two things are very important here:

When the modern reader claims: “ The Bible says” or “my Bible says”, if s/he is a good reader, s/he will not pretend that the Bible is saying it to her/him in this third

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<sup>37</sup> Elliot provides quite an elaborate list of renowned scholars who have either worked or are working on studies concerned with what he calls “social matters” (cf. Elliot: 1993: 18-19).

millennium alone. The Bible *says now*, because *it said in its ancient context*<sup>38</sup>. Perhaps it is necessary to contend once again that Biblical writings are the Word of God communicated to humankind and not neutral writings. As Hogan (1999: 16) correctly observes:

The Word of God is communicated to humans, mediated by, and in, language, culture, and history. The paradigm of this communication is the incarnation. As Tom Long points out, "There is a scandalous fleshiness to preaching, and while sermons may be 'pure' theology all the way through Saturday night, on Sunday morning they are inescapably embodied and thus rhetorical.

Though Hogan writes the above from a perspective of preaching and slants towards the rhetorical method of interpretation, we note that the Biblical writings are presented as communication devices that authors use to address unique audiences in context. Indeed, at times these authors wrote in very difficult circumstances which are reflected in the text itself. An example to qualify this point can be drawn from Paul's letters to the Corinthians (Witherington 1994: 36, 78). Addressing his audience, Paul likens himself to a "fool" as he communicates with the Corinthians.<sup>39</sup> He even states: "I am speaking as a fool."<sup>40</sup> One can see that through the tone of his address, Paul is interpreting his audience and addresses them in terms that will produce an effect on his letters. We cannot say that Paul was a self-confessed fool. We can, however, say that Paul addressed his audience in terms that they understood in relation to some tension between Paul and the claims of his opponents. Many authors if not all use expectant language. This means that as we have contended, Biblical texts are in themselves contextual interpretations. The authors wrote because they believed that the readers would do what was expected in time. Equally, the readers received the messages from the authors because they had expectations that what the authors brought would meet their needs.

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<sup>38</sup> On this point Barrett (1987: 14) and Malina (1986: 4-6) basically state the same principle though it is from different perspectives (Tradition in interpretation and Language respectively).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 4: 10 and what is commonly called a "Fool's Speech" in 2 Cor 11: 21b, 23, continued into 12:11.

<sup>40</sup> He continues his role-playing as ἄφρων, -in relation to verses 21b-28 "Fool's Discourse," Witherington III (1994: 450-451) offers a detailed discussion on this.

The expectations could only be met when both the author and the audience interpreted the Biblical texts that reached them at the given times. This would agree with Holmberg (cf. 1990: 10) who in responding to the use of sociology in New Testament, argued that:

Most of the texts do not treat social phenomena at all, and can only be made to yield information about such matters through various processes of inferential reading and interpretation. ...This means that there are few data that are not modern interpretation of ancient texts. So the New Testament data we have on which to apply sociological interpretations are themselves interpretations, not hard (precise, measurable) data, which could be assembled again and verified through other sources or procedures.

Against the above background, a few observations are necessary. Firstly, this factual situation that texts address and are a form of interpretation in themselves, is what empowers the Bible reader to approach a Biblical text with confidence and expectation because it is the Word of God addressing humanity in need. Therefore, it means that whether or not these authors and their audiences knew big terminologies like context, encode, decode, socio, web, scientific<sup>41</sup> and/or any other that there are, is immaterial. The fact that can hardly be denied is that these authors were the first interpreters whose efforts complement our quest for meaning in respect of our changed circumstances and vice-versa. As Malina (1986: 2) says, "Biblical writings are the word of God not only for us but for the author and his audience too.

#### **2.2.4 Conclusion**

What can we conclude then, about the socio-scientific approaches to Biblical interpretation? Briefly, two things emerge as very important concerning these approaches in accordance with the above discussion. Firstly, it may not be far-fetched to confirm that the emergence of socio scientific criticism and all its related hermeneutic approaches is a good development and a major step in the right direction. Once again, extra questions that are not raised through other methods are raised with these approaches. The clear example is the whole emphasis on anthropological and sociological dimensions of a Biblical text as tools or mechanisms of communication.

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<sup>41</sup> Here I am playing with terms that people use frequently in relation to communication and technology.

Secondly, the fact that these socio scientific approaches were developed in secular spheres for non-Biblical text interpretation purposes means that we should continue to use them with caution lest we are taken overboard and it becomes too late to realise our predicament. In relation to this point, Barton (1995: 76) makes a very valid observation when he expresses his reservation by quoting Gager as having asked this question: "*Shall we marry our enemies?*". This remains a very important question coming from a scholar who himself applied three theories from social sciences to the New Testament in his study *Kingdom and Community* (Holmberg 1990: 5). No responsible Biblical interpreter or scholar would think that the final product would always justify the means. The end product must be as justified and credible as the means by which it was produced because after all what one says matters as much as how s/he says it. This is the major reason why we can justify efforts towards the study of contextual issues surrounding the Biblical text. Therefore, socio-scientific criticism should be used in Biblical interpretation on the condition that it is used with caution. The hermeneut should use the socio-scientific oriented methods not as master models that dominate interpretation, but as complimentary adaptations of other existing models.

The above evaluation concerning the social-scientific interpretation equally applies to the social-historical interpretation. This is for the reason that though the two methods are different, they are closely related to each other. The two methods of interpretations are derived from the social-scientific and social-historical studies respectively. It is the recent study of Van Eck (2001: 594-596) that clarifies the distinction between the two. According to him, the most significant way in which a social study of texts differs from its 'predecessor' (historical criticism) is that the social sciences focus on the sociology of the narrative worlds, rather than on what he calls "historical worlds" and moves beyond social description and sociological analysis. He continues further by pointing out that on the one hand the social-historical analysis tends to focus on what he calls "individual, extraordinary, distinctive and personal." On the other hand social-scientific or sociological analysis (Van Eck 2001: 594) tends to focus on "social groupings, regular, recurrent, ... 'routinised' behaviour, common properties, systematic relations and structural patterns of behaviour." His conclusion is that whereas historical criticism thus, searches out what is unique and particular, the social sciences are a generalising

discipline (Van Eck 2001: 596). The above distinction helps the reader to check the level at which she or he operates. The challenge that comes is that of ensuring that the study goes beyond social description but utilising all aspects of social scientific studies in such a way that the reading of the text is enhanced.

The above scenario makes it evident that the hermeneutic quest is a continual activity. It is for this reason that theology, which is served by interpretation, is a living reality in contexts that are not fixed but ever dynamic. For this reason it is important that we examine another equally important approach to interpretation that have emerged on the interpretation scene before we conclude this overview.

### ***2.3 Culture in African Biblical and Postcolonial interpretations***

#### **2.3.1 African Biblical Interpretation: State of scholarship**

What is called African Biblical interpretation is the interpretation of the Biblical text from the perspective of the African realities. As aforementioned, it does not really matter whether such interpretation or Bible reading deemed "African" is pursued by indigenous Africans living on the continent, Africans living in the 'Diaspora'<sup>42</sup> or that the pursuant is non-African but who is sympathetic to the plight of Africa and Africans (cf. § 2.4). It is Biblical interpretation that is inseparable from the understanding and interpretation of all other aspects of African life and realities. The common features of the said 'aspects of African life' among many, are: colonialism, neo-colonialism double oppression, exploitation and intense poverty. It is called 'double' because in many places, a clique of rich and power hungry Africans oppress and exploit their own people even more than the colonial master. There is a common outcry in many African states after the removal of either a dictator or the perceived oppressive regime from political power that suggests that what one dictator left is usually consumed and embezzled by a group of dictators.

The events in Zambia since 1991 when the Country turned to multiparty democracy,

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<sup>42</sup> This term refers to Europe, Asia and America where some African scholars are living either as political exiles, self-exiles or have gone in search of better working conditions that they could not get in their own 'mother/fatherlands'.

what has happened in Malawi after change of government, what has been happening in Angola and the 'Democratic Republic of Congo'<sup>43</sup> and the current events in Zimbabwe indicate how hard the African realities are.

No attempt is made here to indicate that democracy is an enemy of the people. Rather, the contention is that in these neighbouring countries, and much the same in many African countries, life leaves much to be desired. Many people eat one meal a day and they choose whether that meal be breakfast, lunch or dinner. Unemployment is ever increasing when political leaders continue to talk about 'Government's commitment to job creation'<sup>44</sup>. Yet these are the people who fill up churches and seminaries to hear what the Word of God must say to them. C du Toit (1998: 373) depicts the premise of African Biblical interpretation when he states that:

"Perceptions of God, religious experience, self-esteem, worldview and the like are all vitally determined by one's basic living conditions.

The category culture becomes part of the subject because the above-mentioned perceptions or images of God, life experience, and basic conditions are all experienced within the perspective. African Biblical interpretation is related to Western scholarship, it is of a specific kind as it is concerned with the meaningful engagement between the Biblical text and the realities of the African context (cf. Ukpong 1999: 313). It involves the African culture, worldview, the African histories and religions as a premise of interpretation (cf. C du Toit 1998: 274).

With regards to its history of development, African Biblical interpretation has a long history in Africa. Taking it as an important aspect of African Theology (cf. C du Toit 1998: 275), African Biblical interpretation can be linked to many centuries ago. Ukpong traces the history of development as far back as early Christianity at the Alexandrian school where the allegorical method of interpretation was invented. It served the Church and the academy until the 17<sup>th</sup> century when it was replaced by the historical-critical methods, followed by the literary approaches of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf.

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<sup>43</sup> The Democratic Republic that was not founded democratically.

<sup>44</sup> Common phrase by government officials especially in Zambia. On radio one frequently hears "My government is committed to job creation in this country according to our party manifesto".

Ukpong 1999: 313). Up to now, the allegorical interpretation is still being used in many Churches in Africa particularly by the non-trained preachers in spite of its aforementioned replacement in the academy.

A quick look at the way the Bible is being used in many parts of Africa, one experiences a lot of shifts. For a long time, professionally trained African interpreters who passed through seminaries, theological colleges, Bible schools and church owned universities enjoyed the monopoly of interpreting the Bible particularly after missionaries in many such cases left Churches to the local people. In many African languages, the title given to people in this profession, carry connotations of respect, honour and responsibility<sup>45</sup>. Today, the challenges are more. Many people especially the youths would want to read the Bible and apply it in the face of some realities in life. When they encounter demon possession, without any knowledge of background information of the text, they apply the Bible, especially the Gospels and the book of Acts, and perform exorcism even if those who brought and translated the Bible would ignore such. The yearning for hearing and applying the Biblical message within an African context, which requires an African way of interpreting the Bible, has always been the dream of African people. Those Africans who have been privileged to receive good education and form part of not only the African academy but also the world academy, seem to have heard the challenges which are on the increase day by day. According to Mbiti (1998: 142),

...African theologians live in a rapidly changing world, with many social, political and economic challenges. Some of the contemporary events are devastating, such as the ethnic war which took place in Rwanda during 1994 and cost the lives of an estimated one million people. Most of these people were killed in brutal ways, including thousands who had taken refuge in Churches. Since political independence from colonial rule started from 1955, many military coups, civil wars and dictatorial regimes have shaken our continent (including Madagascar and other Islands) and have resulted in the deaths of thousands of children, women and men, as well as producing millions of refugees.

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<sup>45</sup> M'busa – Chewa (Shepherd) Mliska – Tumbuka (Shepherd), Shimapepo – Bemba etc. In the Chewa culture, when a cow or an ox is slaughtered, the head which is an organ of honour in a cow, is usually reserved for "mwana wa ng'ombe" "Ciweta"/M'busa *of the head of cattle* and that is a big honour. In the olden days, around a fire, grandparents would tell of how some people in the villages would refuse to go to school or to urban areas and preferred their trade of looking after cattle and enjoy their work as Abusa.

In many places, human rights are broken daily and in Sudan, Africans are enslaved by the Arab immigrants. Natural catastrophes like drought, famine and epidemics still rage with costly devastation on human life.

Even if the above scenario is depressing enough, unfortunately, the list can be expanded. Some of the happenings that one can add are the following: the brutal treatment of the alleged 1998 coup suspects in Zambia where many of the accused politicians and soldiers have been acquitted because the state could not provide enough evidence. Other events are the killings and land seizures in Zimbabwe during the years 2000-2001. And killing even of civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo to mention but a few.

Against the above-mentioned background, many voices have emerged. Though there is no consensus on even on the epithet "African" to the extent that there are allegations of "abuse" of the term (cf. Punt 1999a: 1), all efforts are directed towards relating the Word of God not only to "Church life" but to all facets of African life. Ukpong (1999: 314) locates the development as far back as 1930s. He puts the history of development in terms of the following categories:

PHASE I:	1930s → 70s	Reactive and apologetic; focused on legitimising African religion and culture; dominated by comparative methods.
PHASE II:	1970s → 90s	Reactive-proactive; use of African context as resource for biblical interpretation; dominated by Africa-in-the-Bible approach, inculturation-evaluative methods and liberation hermeneutics (Black Theology).
PHASE II:	1990s →	Proactive; recognition of the ordinary reader; African context as subject of biblical interpretation; dominated liberation and holistic inculturation methodologies.

What is interesting to note in Ukpong's "phases", is that they are not closed phases totally isolated from each other. Rather, they overlap into each other. The starting point of one phase is in the other one.

In view of the above, the state of scholarship of culture in African Biblical interpretation is at a stage where so much is being done. It appears there are so many

approaches leading to quite a variety of terms but all struggling with the same problem and to achieve the same goal.

Terms like: African Theology (Mbiti); African Hermeneutics (C Du Toit); Inculturation and liberation hermeneutics (Ukpong); Black hermeneutics (Kigora) or Afrocentrism<sup>46</sup> as against Eurocentrism<sup>47</sup> (Punt 1999b) and many more all depict the efforts towards finding a solution that can enable Africans like any other people, read the Biblical text and apply it to the African holistic life. The issue of culture is just one of the attempts and therefore, will in no way claim to be the final solution that has been sought for centuries. It is part of the continual efforts to address the African reality with the Word of God by showing and suggesting the position that should be accorded to culture. African culture is a core of existence for the African peoples in their diversities and ever changing circumstances which, are both slowly and rapidly. We argue that culture is a core of existence as aforesaid, because the concept culture, covers many aspects of people's life such as:

... the way people live, behave and act, and their physical as well as their intellectual achievements. Culture shows itself in art and literature, dance, music and drama, in styles of building houses and of people's clothing, in social organisation and political systems, in religion, ethics, morals and philosophy, in the customs and institutions of the people, in their values and laws, and in their economic life. All these cultural expressions influence and shape the life of each individual in his society, and in turn the individual makes a cultural contribution to his community through participating in its life and in some cases through creative work (Mbiti 1992: 7-8).

The above description of culture is crucial for Biblical interpretation. If the Church has to redefine herself and make an everlasting and meaningful impact in Africa, then the interpretation of Scripture upon which the Church depends, has no option but to recognise and integrate it in its endeavour. Language which operates as a vehicle of communication, ought to be understood and appreciated as only one aspect of the whole enterprise because the fact is that communication among humans is not limited

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<sup>46</sup> Afrocentrism is defined as re-establishing Africa and its descendants as centres of value, without in any way demeaning other people and their historic contribution to World religion. It is the idea that Africa and persons of African descent must be seen as proactive subjects within history rather than as passive objects of Western history (Punt 1999: 216, quoting Yorke).

<sup>47</sup> Eurocentrism is defined as an approach that depicts the dominance and self imposed superiority of Western cultures in theology and other avenues since the time of enlightenment. (See Punt 1999: 313).

to language alone (cf. Malina 1986: 1-2).

The quest for a reading of the Biblical text from the African perspective which has currently occupies African scholarly effort still remains a noble one.

Many Africans approach the Bible as a Word of God through which, people's lives are transformed when and where people read, understand and apply the message thereof. In this endeavour, interpretation is crucial and many readers realise that the Bible is not as simple and clear as is often assumed. In this respect, the African Bible readers join that fellow African described in the New Testament as the "Ethiopian eunuch"<sup>48</sup> when they read the Bible and honestly ask each other whether or not they do understand what they read. The question which is still haunting each one of them remains: "*How can I unless someone guides me?*"<sup>49</sup>. Since, the question has not been resolved yet, attempts still continue and one of such, is the postcolonial<sup>50</sup> reading of the Bible or postcolonial Bible interpretation which is part and parcel of African Biblical interpretation to which we now turn.

### 2.3.2 Postcolonial Interpretation

The postcolonial interpretations, as far as African Theology is concerned, emerged as a development after the era of colonialism. In the present developmental phase of postcolonial African theology, African culture, worldview and thought pattern have increasingly received or demanded to receive greater attention and emphasis in theology perceived as African<sup>51</sup> and in the academic study of the Bible associated with Africa (Punt 1999a: 1). Thus, postcolonial interpretation is not practised in

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<sup>48</sup> *Ethiopian Eunuch*. A high official (*dynastēs*), royal treasurer in the court of ETHIOPIA's Queen CANDACE, converted under Philip's ministry (Acts 8: 26-40). It was not unusual in antiquity for EUNUCHS, who were customarily harem attendants, to rise to positions of influence. Barred from active participation in the Jewish rites by his race and his emasculation (Dt. 23:1), he was most probably a 'God-fearer.'

<sup>49</sup> International standard version New Testament: Version 1.1. 2000 (Ac 8: 30-31). Yorba Linda, CA: The Learning Foundation.

<sup>50</sup> Though this reading has been classified as part and parcel of African Biblical interpretation, it is with full knowledge that this approach is not exclusively African. It is as well applicable to any "Third World context" where colonialism has had effect regardless of whether such context is African, Asian, Latin American, etc.

<sup>51</sup> Here, it does not really matter whether such theology or Bible reading deemed "African" is pursued by indigenous Africans living on the continent, Africans living in the 'Diaspora' or that the pursuant is non-African but who is sympathetic to the plight of Africa and Africans.

Africa alone as aforementioned. One gets in contact with this undertaking in contexts that were colonised as well such as Latin America, India and Asia. Its genesis is in a scene where and when former victims of colonialism or those who are sympathetic to the former victims start thinking and acting in ways that seek to reverse the trend.

No longer are the colonialists and the perpetrators thereof allowed to design the ground rules for practising theology and interpretation for fear that by so doing, the status quo may be perpetuated.

Postcolonial interpretation seeks to bridge the chasm between the coloniser and the colonised by “going beyond the binary notions of colonised and coloniser and laying weighty emphasis on critical exchanges and mutual transformation between the two” (Sugirtharajah 1999: 3). It is not a means by which the third world Christians and academicians would want to revenge and oppress the former oppressors. In this case Sugirtharajah’s perspective on postcolonial interpretation clarifies the matter.

He (1999: 3) correctly puts it in his own words as quoted below:

Postcolonial interpretation goes beyond mere pacification of the formerly colonised as innocent and in good standing and only pointing out the former colonisers, the neo-colonisers and their descendants as the guilty and responsible ones who must now take responsibility to repair the damage. Postcolonial theory offers a space for the once colonised. It is an interpretative act of the descendants of the once colonised. It is the resurrection of the marginal, the indigene and the subaltern.

In light of Sugirtharajah’s view, postcolonial interpretation is an attempt by the formerly colonised to redeem integrity and seek redress of all colonial and neo-colonial attitudes and tendencies. It is a quest for dialogue with the former “masters” involving all concerned parties to the problem. The reality is that colonialism as a political reality is long gone and would never again be experienced in most of (if not the whole) African continent. The paradox however, is that the effects of colonialism, neo-colonialism and dominance are far from over to a great extent. One still experiences academic insolence in the attitudes of some of the so-called “First World” practitioners (cf. Beker 1984: x). The fact that the outcry still goes on even after many years since colonialism was abolished is best testimony that inequalities do exist.

The important observation and clarification about postcolonial interpretation of the Bible, that it is not a specific interpretative design in the sense of a *method*, which, would just add to abundant hermeneutical methods some of which even compete. It is rather an integration of existing methods but used for a specific focus and function.

In this case the focus and function involve all efforts to make the Bible address in a relevant way contemporary settings and concerns within the African thought, worldview and culture. This means that postcolonial Biblical criticism is not about adding to the proliferation of hermeneutical/exegetical methods, since it utilises a variety of different methodologies, although some methods are excluded because of their theoretical positions and imperialist stances. It is surely about a different focus and purpose, rather than a different hermeneutical method (cf Punt 1999a: 1). Postcolonial Biblical criticism indeed ought to enhance contextual Biblical hermeneutics in every way possible rather than promoting colonial hermeneutic abuses such as “Eurocentric” and “Individualistic” (Punt 1999b: 314-315) methods interpretation that served much more as tool of race supremacy than the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps it is necessary as well to account for the usage of concepts that are being used over and over again in this section. To begin with, what justifies the discussion about these concepts: colonial, neo-colonial and postcolonial, in a theological discussion? How are these concepts linked to culture and Biblical interpretation? In order to address these questions it is necessary to recognise and point out that the above-mentioned concepts are in their primary sense and connotation indeed political. Colonial, neo-colonial and postcolonial activities always carry more political than cultural or Biblical interpretation connotations. Nevertheless, the use of these concepts in a theological discussion is normal and justified. Its justification is based on many reasons, among which are the following: Colonialism as a apolitical reality did not only affect people politically. Other aspects of life were equally affected. For example, among the Chewa people, up to this millennium, when the old people in Katete and Chadiza districts of the Zambian Eastern Province are asked to narrate

what they remember about the British and Portuguese colonialist,<sup>52</sup> most of the stories that they tell contain the following sentiments:

The Europeans brought the Bible and Christianity that replaced *Cipembedzo ca makolo*<sup>53</sup>

They Europeans brought guns that replaced *uta*<sup>54</sup>

They brought taxation and anyone who could not pay for his *citupa*<sup>55</sup> had to run away and hide in *jerejere*<sup>56</sup>

What is interesting for the purposes of our discussion is a combination of the Bible and Christianity on the one hand, and the gun on the other hand. This implies that as far as the Chewa experience is concerned and probably many other Africans too, there was no clear distinction between the missionary and the coloniser. Opposition to the colonial master would be devilish. It is such a combination that made colonialism affect Church life. For this reason postcolonial endeavours are also a concern for theology and Biblical interpretation.

When colonialism and Christianity came to Africa, it came through the cultural garments of the colonial masters and missionaries. African cultures were perceived as pagan and condemned without any alternative to fill up the vacuum that was created by the condemnation and ban of cultural life activities. A simple example of such condemnation concerned names. In the Chewa culture like in many other African cultures, a name is very important. When a child is born senior members of the family have to discuss and the deserving name is given. Once in a while, a ceremony called *kutulutsa maina* (renaming) would be held to give names of some senior members of the clan or family who died to well-behaved young men and women. Most of the times the names had meanings even if some of such names sounded strange and were

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<sup>52</sup> Zambia was a British colony while Mozambique was a Portuguese colony. Katete and Chadiza district are along the boarder of the two countries. Some villages have one side in Zambia and another side in Mozambique. The Chewa people had contact with these Europeans, and later on Arabs. The Arabs made little impact and are not well known except for traces of their religion and a few reports of slave trade found here and there at least in these districts.

<sup>53</sup> *Cipembedzo ca makolo* literally means the traditional worship of our ancestors.

<sup>54</sup> *Uta* is "a bow and arrow" which is a traditional weapon of the Chewa people.

<sup>55</sup> Tax card.

<sup>56</sup> *Jerejere* is a flower plant that grows naturally and causes a very thick bush covering a wide area but with clear and open space beneath. This was where those who could not afford tax ran for refuge.

difficult to pronounce particularly for non-Africans<sup>57</sup>. When colonial masters and missionaries came, Africans who worked for them or became Christians were given European names that could not reflect African reality easy to pronounce as they were.

As a result people had one name at work places or at Church and another one at the village. Those courageous Africans who went for a compromise ended up having a chain of names.

Another example concerns marriage. Both Christian marriage and African traditional marriages regarded and still regards the wedding ceremony as important for marriage. Unfortunately weddings took more European forms and became so expensive that fewer, privileged Africans continued to prefer weddings while the rest avoided it. As a result, in most Churches in Africa, the common sin is adultery or *Kudzikwatitsa*<sup>58</sup>. Of course in some cases it really is adultery. In other cases, it is simply because one married the African way but only by-passed Church procedure which in many cases means bypassing European wedding procedure. These examples confirm that postcolonial responses and effects as defined above, also have a cultural bearing to a great extent. A postcolonial reading would demand suspicion and critical questioning of European tendencies fused with Christianity around marriage practice and deinculturate them when they have to apply to the African context. In the light of our perception of culture, European culture should be inseparable from European Christianity because Europeans have appropriated and can only articulate the Christian faith in terms of their culture. When Christianity crosses over to the African context, it must equally be appropriated and articulated in terms of African culture otherwise, people will be "Europeanised Christians" during the weekends while they are at Church and live non-Christian lives during the rest of the week where life is at its fullness. In terms of the marriage example, Africans will be bearing children in matrimonial relationships sanctioned by their families but hidden from the Church.

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<sup>57</sup> Among such names are names like: *Tatheranji* (why have we finished dying -where many members of the family have died and they suspect some cause), *Masautso*, (suffering , agony - were probably a mother suffered a lot during her pregnancy), *Dzikolatha* (The World is ending - convey one shock over change that destroys culture) and *Sekerani* (Rejoice - where the family was for a long time childless and worried) to mention but a few.

<sup>58</sup> *Kudzikwatitsa* is a Chewa term for marriage (to a spouse) without the Church's legitimisation. People who marry in this way are disciplined and suspended from sacraments and some Church activities.

Such a way of life would be a contradiction of principles of African life that is consistent and holistic, as we will see later on.

### **2.3.3 Conclusion**

Postcolonial criticism is a task that focuses on re-evaluating colonial and neo-colonial ideological tendencies that portray Africa in negative terms. It is a task that focuses on making the voice of the voiceless and marginalised to have an equal opportunity for being heard. When postcolonial criticism is applied to Biblical interpretation, it pursues its task by engaging in a constructive reading and re-reading the Bible with the eyes that are sensitive to the postcolonial concerns (Sugirtharajah 1999: 5). When it empowers readers to re-read the Bible in such a way that they question oppressive trends that for many years were taken for granted, then it becomes an honourable endeavour. The coming to the scene of liberative theologies and their subsequent hermeneutics such as: Black theology, Liberation theology and Feminist theology to mention but a few, have helped the African Church and academy to become sensitive and ready to address issues that affect broader society.

The above-pointed out theological developments can be attributed to postcolonial rethinking whose efforts may not be regretted. However, to fulfil its endeavour, there is need for postcolonial interpretation to be ever self-critical so as to avoid becoming hypercritical of the so “perceived oppressor” who unfortunately can no longer be physically identified and thus is difficult to deal with. Within the African context which is characterised by social evils such as fragmentation, economic deterioration, cultural impoverishment, natural disasters and pandemic diseases like HIV/Aids, landlessness, civil and regional wars, hermeneutics should interpret the Word of God and proclaim a message of hope in terms and symbols that appeal to the wholeness of Africans. Ukpong (1995: 4) contends that:

Trained as they<sup>59</sup> have been in the tradition of Western biblical scholarship, they read the Bible through an interpretative grid developed in Western culture, and seek to apply the result in their own context”

This remark should be taken as a challenge. The fact that it is realised puts the African scholar at an advantage because as the saying goes “Those who are forewarned are forearmed”. The African scholar should courageously face what Ukpong portrays as the impossible. Even if the way in which this must be done has not been found yet, it seems postcolonial initiatives are a good starting point if they are honourably pursued. African scholarship should employ all means at its disposal, and continue the quest through an interdisciplinary approach utilising some of the existing tools and methods since, we have argued that postcolonial interpretation is not a specific method of interpretation.

After all the above survey, the remaining question concerns the helpful opinion that one forms in view of the same. The brief remarks that follow consist of an attempt towards such an opinion.

#### **2.3.4 Concluding Remarks**

The brief literature survey carried out above (cf. § 2.1-2.3) indicates a number of important issues in relation to culture and New Testament interpretation or Biblical interpretation as a whole. To begin with, the shifts from the author-oriented readings, to text oriented readings and to the reader-oriented readings indicate issues important for this investigation. The first is that culture should receive its appropriate place in Biblical interpretation. It can hardly be denied that as far the African context is concerned, most hermeneuts read very competently the *Biblical* and *theological worlds* but lamentably fail to read their *own world/culture* with the same competence, thereby forgetting that ‘their world’ or culture forms their reading framework. The manifestation of this can be observed from a good number of African scholars who accord a very positive picture of the African Independent Churches and African Traditional Religions. The thrust of the argument of such scholars is that African

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<sup>59</sup> African Christians and scholars belonging to what Ukpong calls ‘mainline Churches who give old answers to even new questions ’ (Ukpong 1995: 3-4).

Independent Churches and African Traditional Religions bring the Bible closer to African realities (cf. Mbiti 1998: 141; Punt 1999: 321). The two are singled out because of some of the meaningful attempts to integrate African culture in their struggle for relevance.

Probably it suffices to point out that both African Independent Churches and African Traditional Religions have their own problems and limitations toward African Christianity that for the purposes of this study are not to be discussed. However, in order to be firm and fair, it is important to observe that if the absolute resolve to contextual African Christian living lay with either one of the two, the quest would have been over many decades ago. In fact, the two do not carry the same stigma in all parts of Africa. To illustrate this point, we can take the issue of African Traditional religion. If someone investigated it in Zambia and Zimbabwe, even if the two countries cited as examples are neighbouring countries and were for some years one country known as *Rhodesia*<sup>60</sup>, African Traditional Religion in terms of ancestral worship would have more resources in Zimbabwe and very scarce resources in Zambia. This is despite the proximity shared between the cultures of the peoples of the two countries from colonial times to the present times.

The second issue is that the shifts in hermeneutics present us with an opportunity to re-examine our understanding of what hermeneutics is all about. Hermeneutics is not a rigid scope of knowledge with which to dominate others who must accept it like an article of faith in the creeds and confessions that can never be altered. Over against such misperception, the shifts have revealed what hermeneutics is truly all about, namely it is a set of principles of interpretation in context.

Hermeneutics at this level exhibits two characteristics: firstly it operates in continuity with acceptable principles, procedures and standards in broader context. This enables hermeneutics to exercise critical assessments of some interpretations while at the same time exercising responsibility as they themselves interpret the Bible so that they do

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<sup>60</sup> In colonial times, the British Government formed a federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. For interest's sake, Rhodesia was made up of modern Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia), Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) and Malawi (then Nyasaland). The federation was founded on the basis of three factors: A safe place to live in (Southern Rhodesia), mineral resources (Northern Rhodesia) and cheap labour (Nyasaland).

not fall prey to what they had deemed wanting in the course of the critical assessments. Secondly, hermeneutics operates within a unique context thereby leaving way for discontinuities of some of the principles, procedures and set standards at the universal level but that may be unsuitable for a particular unique local settings. In other words, hermeneutics retains relevance through its universal and unique qualities. For example, the universal hermeneutic principle may state that the hermeneut has to start with the Biblical text and move to the audience during interpretation in order to honour the text. Movement from the Biblical text to the audience (and not vice-versa), safeguards the hermeneut from forcing the text to say what suits the audience so one can argue.

Agreeably, the idea of honouring the text may not be disputed by any responsible interpreter. However, the liberation hermeneut will take a parallel route in relation to the starting point. For him or her, the contextual demand leads to the selection of a suitable text that has to be interpreted and even the method that has to be used in order to achieve liberation is related to the contextual needs. This is not unique to liberation hermeneuts only. Any occasional preaching be it funeral, wedding or celebration preaching calls upon the hermeneut to go to the text with an agenda and come back from the text with a message. Even in this case the text must still be honoured otherwise, the audience would not be adequately met. Once again, the above qualifies the claim that contextual hermeneutics both continues and discontinues with universal or standardised hermeneutics.

Thirdly, the emergence of historical-critical approaches and later on the socio-scientific approaches should be viewed as a step in the right direction and a suitable response towards relevance in terms of the demands of the dynamic local context. This is the only rationale that can justify some overlaps and modifications of certain aspects of the various approaches to interpretation.

Fourthly, since hermeneutics operates within the framework of both the universal or broader and unique local contexts, it is required of African hermeneuts to conform to both of these contexts that in most cases may not always require an either or choice.

The paradox however, is that it remains necessary to get rid of any hermeneutic tutelage from any “isms”<sup>61</sup>, whether that be Eurocentrism or Afrocentrism (Punt 1999: 315). It may not really make much difference whether African hermeneuts function proactively, or reactively in approaches. What is important is to avoid all extremes. Given a choice, however, one should at all costs avoid adopting reactive approaches which most of the times tend to be hypercritical and revolutionary thereby just creating replacements without necessarily offering an alternative to the problem.

This is the challenge that faces the African hermeneuts themselves because reading the Bible as an observer, as non Africans do, is something quite different from reading it from the point of view of one committed to historical change and conditions (cf. Kiogora 1998: 340).

On the current African scholarly scene, no one can be more committed to the African historical change and conditions related to the interpretation of the Biblical text than Africans themselves.

Attention should also be drawn to two other factors that are important here:

The first factor that makes the task difficult is the multiplicity of cultures in proportion to the large number of tribes in this large continent<sup>62</sup> (Punt 1999: 5). These cultures are constantly affected by change (Williams 1982: xvi) just like other human conditions. This means that what is meant by “African” must always be subjected to

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<sup>61</sup> “isms” usually go with excessives. In this case Afrocentrism may not resolve the problem but merely give it another face as other “isms” have done in the world history.

<sup>62</sup> According to Punt (1999:5), who quotes Pobee; “Africa is a vast continent with an area of ... 28,497.409 (sic) sq. kilometres, offering great diversities and differences of geography, vegetation, temperaments, cultures, politics, orientation etc. ... therefore, ‘African’ is a ‘nebulous term’ expected to infest implementation of it in the religious sphere. 700 languages are found on the continent. The languages and tribes have changed. The latest according to Mbiti is that there are 2000 languages spoken on the African continent excluding dialects. Since there are no known tribes that have more than one language, we can conclude that there more than 2000 tribes or nations on the continent including the Asian, Arab etc Africans. Unfortunately Pobee and Mbiti do not come up with one figure of African languages. One reason could be attributed to Mbiti’s inclusion of Africans of Asian, Arab and European descent. The safe way is to say the African continent has more than 1350 tribes on average. In any case figure or no figures, the point is that there are many tribes in Africa that make African culture a more complex phenomenon.

reassessment just as other aspects of epithet "African"<sup>63</sup> (Kiogora 1998: 342). African culture should involve treating a specific culture in relation to other African cultures. As aforesaid, the reference to "African culture (singular) and "African cultures" (plural) should not cause tension because the two form a symbiosis and there is a sense that each one is applicable and both are correct (cf. Mbiti 1992: 8-10). The challenge is to come to terms with concerns to effectively manage the functional movement from the specific to the general concept of culture.

This will enable the hermeneut to discover the uniqueness of the particular culture on the one hand, while on the other hand, not isolating the specific from the broader context because the two are related. There are many cultural aspects that bind African peoples throughout the continent so that they share life and problems in a common way. For instance, the problems of dictatorships, oppressive regimes violation of human rights and interfering or attempts to interfere with the electoral processes by the power-hungry political leaders are common to all African countries the continent over.

The second factor to consider is a definition problem. It is very important to define and make clear what the problem is and what must be done. What exactly do we want to achieve with the "culture talk"? Is it to develop from nothingness a cultural reading that will undo other readings? Is it a cultural battle or indeed is it a question of cultural superiority or inferiority?

It would be immaterial to struggle towards re-inventing the wheel. The important thing is, however, the value that there is in reshaping the wheel to make it big or small as long as it suits our needs that we ourselves understand better than an outsider. What is required to achieve this honourable task of interpreting the Bible in Africa, is a cultural-critical approach. An approach that will ask questions that compel the hermeneut to rediscover and come to terms with her or his own cultural text with which she or he approaches the Biblical text.

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<sup>63</sup> A lesson can be drawn from the way 'Black' in Black Hermeneutics is described. Here, "Blackness" is extended to include all the oppressed and only people who are literary black or dark skinned (Kiogora 1998: 342).

In full respect for the circumstances of the Biblical author and his audience, of the text and of the reader himself or herself, the task should be striving towards determining what cultural elements<sup>64</sup> enhance or hinder understanding and interpretation of the Biblical text. This means that a cultural-critical approach though not being a method itself, would embark and call on a process with two eyes. One eye we can call “inculturation” (Ukpong 1995: 325) and the other eye “deinculturation” (Witherington 1995: 8). This is what this study will attempt to do in the following chapters.

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<sup>64</sup> Elements of culture in reference are customs, rituals, rites, cosmology, beliefs, etc (See Ngulube 1997:23, Neyrey 1990:15).

## CHAPTER 3: FIRST CORINTHIANS AND CULTURE

### *3.1 General State of Scholarship on 1 Corinthians*

An informed overview of 1 Corinthians leads to a discovery that this letter is among the New Testament writings that continue to receive scholarly attention since the past two decades. Scholarly interest in this letter ranges from the focus on examining specific issues within the letter itself such as linguistics and style (Perriman 1989: 512, Asher 2001: 101), to the focus on Paul's perception of issues like the law in 1 Corinthians (Tomson 1990: 1). Other scholars use 1 Corinthians to demonstrate either the core of Paul's life and thought (Beker 1984: 135) or a specific reading model like the cultural anthropological model (Neyrey 1990: 11,102). Other works focus more on issues that are doctrinal in nature such as resurrection and faith in selected sections of first Corinthians (Vorster 1989: 287), and baptism in relation to the dead (White 1997: 487-499) to mention but a few. Of course, works like those of Vorster and White may fall in both categories that focus attention on some specific issue within the Corinthian text but also very significant for the broader context. Generally Pauline scholarship has indeed attracted diverse attention as one scholar writes:

Pauline research from the middle of the twentieth century has encompassed a number of dead ends and some advances; new views on Paul's theology, debates about the identity of Paul's opponents, controversies over the integrity or lack thereof of various Pauline letters, fresh study of the letter genre in antiquity, openness to the rhetorical dimensions of the letters, and recognition of the relevance of a knowledge of these Hellenistic moralists for a study of Paul (Talbert 2001: 117).

Although Talbert's focus in the above quotation is Pauline scholarship in general, his insights can directly apply to 1 Corinthians. He uses the terms and raises issues that are critical and applicable to the study of 1 Corinthians.

For the purposes of our investigation, the categorisation of the state of scholarship on 1 Corinthians into the concentration on the letter itself on the one hand on Paul himself on the other hand still stands. However, it must be pointed out that such categorisation creates a problem for our current study.

The problem concerns the entry point. Are we going to investigate the category culture in interpreting 1 Corinthians as a test case for the New Testament by focusing on Paul or on the letter itself? It seems best to avoid an either or choice. In other words, it is not just a matter of choice between either Paul or the letter as if the two were unrelated. Therefore, we will pursue our subject matter by paying attention to circumstances surrounding both Paul and the letter itself. To do this, we shall treat Paul's background and the general character of Pauline letters.

### **3.1.1 Paul and Culture**

With a view to justifying the suitability of the cultural anthropological reading of Paul's letters, Neyrey (1990: 13) made this observation:

We use cultural anthropology for reasons negative and positive. Krister Stendahl's article "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" persuasively argued that modern readers do in fact examine Paul as though he belonged to our modern culture... We regularly imagine that Paul viewed the world as post-industrial, urban, individualistic Westerners do and that he consequently behaved as they do. But he lived in the first century, in the Eastern Mediterranean, in a group-oriented society.

The problem that Neyrey describes does not only affect the Western readers but also African readers. Many readers mislead themselves into believing that the Bible is so clear that one needs only to depend on the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul the man of God. The whole imaginary picture views Paul as an objective writer who just wrote according to the inspiration. Such an approach is nothing but a distortion of reality. Indeed, Paul was very much inspired, yet, that inspiration did not find him nor use him in a vacuum but in concrete life settings. In fact, treating Paul in a 'pure objective' manner and uprooting him from his first century Eastern Mediterranean living context does not only rob Paul of his humanity but it also violates the principle of objectivity. According to modern science, the optimum of objective observation requires continuous integration of the observer's own position and motion (Tomson 1990: 6). Hence, it is necessary to discuss Paul with at least a good knowledge of the historical circumstances in which he lived and operated because detached objectivity is mere pretence and always leads to temporary satisfaction that disappears in no time.

The logical question to grapple with at this moment then, is what was Paul's historical background? Unfortunately, this question is easier asked than answered. This is because the sources available for such a task are scarce.

Pauline scholarship concerning the apostle's background is as well problematic. Attempts to resolve the problem concerning which sources ought to be used in order to understand Paul have been along the following assumptions:

The book of Acts is the primary source because that is where his calling and missionary activities are recorded (cf. Acts 9: 1-19, 22: 3-16, 26: 9-18)

Paul's own letters are a primary source because letters reflect the inner disposition of his calling and self-understanding.

Contemporaneous Jewish sources inclusive of Rabbinical literature are primary because these sources constitute an important element of Paul's cultural background<sup>65</sup> and Paul was a Jew.

Hellenistic sources are primary because Paul was a Roman citizen, and therefore a Hellenistic.

Unfortunately, none of these assumptions provides conclusive solutions to the problem surrounding Paul's background. The truth of the matter is that each of these assumptions gives essential entry points in investigating the problem under review. The book of Acts is not a pure historical account, and its author, Luke, does not indicate the provision of Paul's biography as one of his aims. The accounts that signal Paul's calling, the beginning of his missionary activities as quoted above, differ in content though in essence they refer to his encounter with the risen Lord while on the way to Damascus. The reason is that at least two of the accounts are narrated in the context where Paul was required to give a defence of some kind (Acts 22: 3-16, 26: 9-18). Therefore, using them as sources for understanding the apostle is certainly deficient. The category that advocates Pauline letters as a resource for understanding Paul himself is attractive, but not without its own problems. It is correct that letters reflect the author's inner disposition, and this claim can be deduced from Malina.

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<sup>65</sup> This position is very much advocated by Tomson who contends that there is no evidence to suggest that Paul's upbringing in Hellenistic Judaism was shed off when he became a Christian (Tomson 1990: 34).

From a different perspective concerning written and oral communication, he argues that: "...good and poor style (of communication - DTB) are indications of the writer's ability in this task and of one's considerateness of discourse" (Malina 1986: 6). In other words, it is once again correct to acknowledge that from a piece of writing something of the author is told. Applying this principle to the Pauline letters is however, still problematic. The problem rests on two levels:

Firstly, none of the letters attributed to Paul gives evidence that it was written to provide his pure biographical data. In fact, the little information that we find in his letters concerning his own personal life he gives it either proactively or reactively.

Paul makes references to himself and his calling when he is compelled by circumstances in polemical contexts. Perhaps it is important to look at some of these pericopes where Paul makes direct reference to himself. Let us take these examples from 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Philippians.

- 1Cor 15: 8-11

8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

- Gal 1: 15-17.

15 But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

- Phil 3: 5-11

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.<sup>7</sup> Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup> I



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want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.<sup>66</sup>

As already indicated above, in all these three pericopes, never does Paul refer to himself as an example of personal piety for the reason that he was very conscious of his authority and apostolate (Beker 1984: 4). The nature of his argument can enable the reader to reconstruct the causative circumstances which, seem to have had to do with his status as an apostle. Therefore, to use these pericopes as sources for understanding Paul is equally deficient because the apostle does not write to give his personal biographical data.

Secondly, there is another major problem concerning what are commonly known as Pauline letters. Not all these letters attributed to him are genuinely his as we will see later on. If his letters are categorised into genuine and pseudo-Pauline letters, then, what is the implication of that and which ones will be primary or secondary sources? In this case, we need to acknowledge and contend that Pauline letters indeed give us a good deal of insight towards understanding the apostle. In them we have access to his self-understanding. Although he does not give some kind of self-disclosure for the sake of it as we have argued above, it is an undeniable fact that his self-understanding can be “detected”. This can be demonstrated by observing sentiments such as these: Every Christian is “called” (κλητοῖς ἁγίοις – called saints/holy ones [Rom 1: 7]), while Paul introduces himself as a δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος – a slave of Christ Jesus, a “called apostle” or “called to be an apostle”<sup>67</sup> (Rom 1: 1). Although the word κλητὸς is used both to refer ‘every Christian’ and ‘Paul’, here he views himself as a direct mediator of the gospel and as the authoritative interpreter. He has a genuine call that “send him out”(ἀποστολήν) to the ἀκροβυστίας - uncircumcised, the ἔθνη,-the nations, or gentiles in contrast with Peter whose mission is to the περιτομῆς,-circumcision or circumcised which refers directly to Israel (Gal 2: 7-8)<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup>All these quotations are taken from *The New Revised Standard Version*, 1989.

<sup>67</sup> My own translation of the text based on the Nestle-Aland 1983 *Greek New Testament* version. κλητὸς called, implies relationship and/or task. It can refer to the invitation of a Christian by God to participate in the Kingdom (cf. Rom 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28; 1 Cor 1:1, 2, 24; Jude 1; Rev 17:14; Mt 20:16; Mt 22:14.).

<sup>68</sup> Translation and emphasis are mine.

Paul ascribes to himself the credentials of an apostle to the Gentiles whose mission however, extends to all nations (Rom 1: 16-17, 11: 13, Gal 1: 15-16) Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι- first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Rom 1: 16). In other words, from these few examples we are able to detect that Paul understood himself as one who is entrusted with a mission to the gentiles but also with the concern of the Jews at heart. He seems to have understood his mission to the gentiles not as a replacement of the Jews; but to make gentiles co-recipients with Jews of the promises of God.

Nevertheless, to claim that this insight can give us full access to the understanding of Paul seems to be far-fetched. Each of these sentiments have specific functions to perform that can only be appreciated by reading each of them in its own context. Once again, it is difficult (if not impossible) to find even one pericope that serves to provide pure biographical data. In other words, we can use the Pauline letters as sources for understanding him only to a limited extent.

This leaves us with the option of Judaic-Rabbinical and Hellenistic sources whose proponents emphasise the Jewishness or non-Jewishness of Paul. The debate concerning these categories seems to be characterised by polemic factors that strengthen arguments for or against a particular position that one advocates. For instance in contrasting Paul and Philo, Tomson (1990: 52-53) evaluates Schweitzer by writing:

Despite the contrast with Philo, we have to assess the significance of Paul's 'Hellenism.' Schweitzer's emphasis may serve to open our eyes to the importance of Palestinian Judaism, but should not induce us to support his one-sidedness. Paul was a hellenising Jew to the extent that he lived among Greek speaking communities of Jews and gentiles, wrote letters to them in Greek, and in doing so employed both Hellenistic literary conventions and motifs from popular Stoic and Cynic wisdom. This is only remotely reminiscent of Philo. Scholars agree that apart from such minor and superficial parallels Paul shows no interest in Greek philosophy as such. On the other hand elements from popular Hellenistic and especially Stoic-Cynic tradition are found in Rabbinical literature; but again no interest in philosophy. When the amounts of the authentic and the foreign are weighed up one sees that as far as these Hellenistic motifs are concerned Paul is rather much at one with Palestinian, Pharisaic-Rabbinical Judaism.

In this passage, Tomson is critical of Schweitzer who does not emphasise enough the Jewishness of Paul and the value of Jewish-Rabbinical sources for understanding Paul. Schweitzer is furthermore accused of one-sidedness for his alleged failure to indicate in close terms that Paul had closer affinity with Palestinian Jewry than Philo while opting for Jewish apocalyptic tradition as Paul's background (Tomson 1990: 11, 52). The weak stress or emphasis on the Jewishness of Paul is viewed as a contributing factor of the Christian suppression of Judaism and the Jewish people (Tomson 1990: 34). In this case, the Jewish-Rabbinical sources are advocated not for the sake of the value that they have, but polemically as a basis upon which to call for better relations between Christianity and Judaism. Whether or not these sources can provide full knowledge of Paul is another unanswered question that still remains.

Therefore, it would appear that the helpful thing to do as one seeks to understand Paul, is to approach him from the perspectives that combine all these aspects. Paul was a product of three influences. These are Jewish-Rabbinical culture, Hellenistic culture and his conversion to Christianity. The convergence of these three sources provides an entrance into the venture to understand him. Throughout his entire life and ministry, Paul was a product of influences of Jewish-Rabbinical culture, Hellenistic culture and Christianity to which he was converted. Given a choice, perhaps one should treat the Jewish-Rabbinical sources and his letters and primary sources for the reason that these two probably modelled him the most. It is interesting and crucial to note that there is no conclusive evidence even in the Pauline letters themselves to suggest that his upbringing in Hellenic- Judaism was absolutely shed off when he became a Christian and eventually an apostle. Hellenism influenced both Judaism and Christianity in the first century into which Paul was brought up. As such he drew sources from his rich Hellenistic and Jewish cultural background and utilised them to advance the course of the gospel. It cannot be denied that he was a Hellenised Jew, who lived among the Greek-speaking communities of Jews and Gentiles, in the context in which letters were written mostly in Greek and Aramaic using both Hellenistic literary conventions and motifs from popular Stoic-Cynic wisdom (cf. Tomson 1990: 52).

Nevertheless, in some of his writings, he used language which reflects that he perceived himself as a first century Jew in the Eastern Mediterranean society as can be demonstrated by the passage below:

4 even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Phil 3: 4-6) (cf Neyrey 1990: 11).

Furthermore, the announcement of his intention to celebrate the Pentecost feast in Ephesus (1 Cor 16: 8) indicates that he still remained committed to Jewish festivals even after becoming a Christian and an apostle. He did not completely break off from his Jewishness and Jewish counterparts (1 Cor 16: 19, Rom 16: 3ff). Therefore, in view of the above, it is not excessive to resolve that the *category culture* was operative in the person and ministry of Paul which is reflected in his letters to which we now turn.

### 3.1.2 The Character of the Pauline Letters

Out of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, thirteen are attributed to Paul. A number of factors distinguish each of these letters from the other and the rest of the New Testament, yet these books can be viewed under one category of Pauline letters. For the purposes of our study, it is sufficient to examine the nature or character of these documents.

New Testament scholarship traditionally categorises letters attributed to Paul into *authentic* and *non-authentic* Pauline letters. The following letters are regarded as authentic: *Romans*, *1 Corinthians*, *2 Corinthians*, *Galatians*, *Philippians*, *1 Thessalonians* and *Philemon* while *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, *2 Thessalonians*, *1 Timothy*, *2 Timothy* and *Titus* are viewed as non-authentic or pseudepigraphical writings that contain or transmit Pauline traditions (cf. Beker 1984: 3; Dunn 1998: 13).

Most of these letters with the exception of Galatians<sup>69</sup> follow a Greek traditional pattern with elements that basically can be outlined as follows: *Author, Recipient, Greetings, Thanksgiving, Body, Conclusion and Closing with epistolary greetings and remarks.*

These Pauline letters were written to both congregations that Paul founded and those that he did not. Each letter manifests a different content from the other letters thereby providing a reader with a wide range of theological and practical issues that were addressed in different prevailing circumstances.

One feature of the Pauline scholarship has been the quest for the centre of Paul's thought which would lead to a good understanding of Paul and his theology. This has led to more questions than answers as no one has really brought about conclusive evidence to the effect. Instead, only valuable insights can be recognised from the efforts to locate the centre of his thought. Generally, there have been claims and attempts to regard Romans as a letter that offers a balanced presentation of Paul's thought. The main reason is that the doctrine of *justification by faith alone (-sola fide)*, which was a nerve centre for the Reformation, is mainly based on this letter to the Romans and Galatians. Paul's gospel presented to both Jews and Greeks as contained in Romans (Rom 1: 16-17), is interpreted in terms of doctrinal themes.

In the Post-Reformation era, the thematic approach to Pauline letters and indeed any other New Testament document has faced a valid criticism that it has a disadvantage of reading these documents as if they were successive chapters of systematic theology. Indeed the thematic approach, which is a hangover from the Reformation, sacrifices the contextuality of each of these letters. These letters display more homiletic and pastoral motifs than systematic theology. They were written as ad hoc communication documents to various communities facing diverse situational needs (cf. Tomson 1990: 56). Situations in various community and house congregations were not only theological, but also involved practical and cultural issues affecting life in its fullness.

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<sup>69</sup> Galatians is the only exception where the thanksgiving is omitted perhaps for reasons within the circumstances in which the letter was written.

In other words, Paul's *conversion story* stated in the New Testament documents proclaims the *Christ-event* as a transforming event that would address people in various situations. Transformation by the gospel or the Christ-event is so real that Paul has himself experienced it as a reversal of a life paradigm. He has been transformed from a Pharisaic persecutor to an apostle, or from a destroyer to a builder of faith (Gal 1: 23). He is in these letters not preoccupied with his own individualism and religious experience, because the righteousness of God that has dawned in the Christ-event must be conveyed to all people as God's liberating act for his creation (cf. Beker 1984: 7).

A brief survey of Pauline correspondence leads to the discovery of (among other issues) catchwords and phrases such as:

My little children... I wish I were present with you now ... I am perplexed about you (Gal 4: 19f)  
So I write ... while I am away ... when I come, I may not have to be severe (2 Cor 13: 10).  
For though absent in body, ... I have already pronounced judgement (1 Cor 5: 3).

Catchwords and phrases of this nature, display the character of Pauline correspondences. These correspondences were written in a context of relationships shared by Paul and Christians of various communities. Through them, Paul responded to and addressed concerns and practical circumstances surrounding his audiences in various locations. It is evident that these correspondences were written to make up for or substitute his absence. Certainly, by their nature, these letters display characteristics of personal communications, not "dispassionate theological dissertations". Through these documents, the apostle discusses issues of fundamental significance, which he considered crucial for his audience (Dunn 1998: 8,12). In other words, the letters were intended to substitute his personal presence (Tomson 1990: 54). Things that Paul could have done in person like seeing his congregation "... face to face" (1 Thess 2: 17-3: 10), retaining good relationships (2 Cor 6: 11-13, 7: 2-3), apologising for unfulfilled promises (2 Cor 1: 15-2: 11) or preparing for a visit (Rom 15: 14-29), he intended to achieve through these writings. Paul beautifully states this principle in his own words to the Corinthian audience as we can observe below:

I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters. For they say,  
"His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present” (2 Cor 10: 9ff).

The claim that these letters were responsive correspondences can be justified on the basis of statements that indicate that he was orally informed of circumstances:

For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters (1Cor 1: 11).

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father’s wife (1Cor 5: 1)

For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it (1Cor 11: 18).

The other evidence can be detected from the *περὶ δὲ*- “Now about” or “Now concerning” formula (1 Cor 7: 1, 7: 25, 8: 1, 12: 1, 16: 1, and 16: 12) to cite but a few. It would be a linguistic violation to start addressing issues with this formula when one is encountering the issues for the first time and is addressing an audience that is new to him or her. Furthermore, there is nothing that suggests that a well-educated apostle of Paul’s calibre (Acts 22: 1-5), would flout grammatical rules. In this case, he communicated in the manner he did because there was a relationship not only with the people to whom he wrote, but also a common link to the issues of concern.

Pauline letters have paranetical sections, which contain practical instructions following an elaborate cardinal thesis in each letter. In the history of Pauline scholarship, scholars have recognised such sections as decisive in determining or reconstructing the background of each letter thereby making these paranetic sections crucial for any attempt to interpret the Pauline texts (cf. Tomson 1990: 57).

In concluding the character of the Pauline letters, (both authentic and inauthentic) we note that Paul who wrote, or in whose tradition<sup>70</sup> these letters were written, was neither a rationalistic dogmatist nor mishnaic traditionalist. He was neither an opportunistic compromising fellow nor was he a thoughtless charismatic.

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<sup>70</sup> Deutero-Pauline letters that were probably written by disciples or adherents to the Pauline School can be considered in this sense as having been written in the Pauline tradition.

As Beker (cf. 1984: 12) observes, he was rather able to make the gospel “a word on target” for the particular needs of his congregations. Paul addressed the needs of the congregation without either compromising the gospel’s basic content or reducing it to a petrified conceptuality. Time and again he incorporated some of his Jewish cultural and religious beliefs in conveying the gospel. For instance, in his discussion concerning food offered to idols (1 Cor 8: 1), his argument is structured in terms of his cultural and ancestral monotheistic view of God over against Gentile polytheism:

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.”(1 Cor 8: 4)

Confessing God in monotheistic terms: “God is one” as Paul also does elsewhere (Rom 3: 30, Gal 3: 30), reminds any religious Jewish person of the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone” (Deut 6: 4).<sup>71</sup> Dunn (1998: 33) makes a good observation when he persuasively states that:

Paul’s antipathy to idolatry is equally clear and expressed with characteristic Jewish fear, dismay, and scorn. Luke portrays Paul in Athens as “deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17.16) and as quick to denounce idolatry (Acts 17: 29). The picture is borne out by Paul’s own recollection of how his Thessalonian readers had “turned to God from idols” (1 Thess 1: 9). In contrast to dead idols God is “the living and true God” (1 Thess 1: .9). In Romans the first charge he brings against human impiety (1: 18) takes for granted God’s invisibility (1.20) and follows closely the traditional Jewish condemnation of idolatry: “they changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the mere likeness of corruptible humanity, birds, beasts and reptiles” (1: 23). And elsewhere Paul’s condemnation of idolatry is as forthright as that of any of his Jewish predecessors: “flee from idolatry” (1 Cor.10: 14).

In the above quotation, once again Paul utilises Jewish cultural and ancestral concepts to address specific issues of concern. If Paul used his Jewishness to address particular congregational needs, it means that the thematic approach puts the reader at the risk of minimising the value of the individual context.

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<sup>71</sup> There are various ways in which Deuteronomy 6:4 can be translated: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD, or The LORD is one, or The LORD is our God, the LORD is one*

Though we can understand the context of the early Church in confrontation with Judaism, and Reformers in confrontation with the Roman Catholic Church, the doctrinal reading of Pauline letters should be noted as falling short of proper interpretation and therefore discouraged vehemently.

The Pauline letters are not successive paragraphs of dogmatics. They are real letters written to various communities in different contexts. Each one is a unique response to issues of concern which, in many cases, were brought to the attention of the apostle by sources from these communities of faith themselves. In terms of content, each letter has a combination of theological and ethical or practical instructions. Most of these correspondences were written to audiences which were predominantly gentile. The basis for such an assumption are reflections such as these: "You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak"(1 Cor 12: 2) and the discussion concerning the consumption of idol food (1 Cor 8-10). It is very unlikely that Paul would refer to origins of a Jewish audience as "pagan" and that such an audience would need to be instructed on food in relation to idols. In his communication to the Galatians and Thessalonians respectively he addresses his recipients by reminding them of their former ways of life. He challenges them: "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods" (Gal 4: 8). And "how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess 1: 9). He further cautions his recipients against: "... dogs, ... evil workers,... Those who mutilate the flesh!"(Phil 3: 2-5). In these Scriptures, Paul disclaims or deinculturates his audiences from obligatory circumcision for Gentile believers.

On a pastoral note, he encourages them (Col 1: 27) and shares with them aspects of salvation in terms of the concept of the "fullness of life in Christ" and warns them against false teachers (Col 2: 11ff).

From the Biblical texts cited above, there is a clear impression that these letters were targeting audiences that were predominantly gentile. The apostle took the trouble to caution against compulsory observances of some of the Jewish customs and rites where he perceived them as a contradiction of the gospel.

Paul's commitment to predominantly gentile congregations makes him faithful to his claim to the Galatians where he stated that:

7 On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised 8 for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles (Gal 2: 7f).

In this regard, we should agree with Tomson (cf.1990: 59ff) who persuasively states that Paul wrote these letters within the confines of his specific mission to the gentile world while Peter preoccupied himself with the mission to the Jewish communities.

However, within the same Pauline letters there are strong indications that when he carried out duties of his ministry, he did not exclude the Jewish people. He hoped that some of them might be saved through the proclamation of the gospel. Such notions surface more in Romans:

13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry 14 in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them.”(Rom 11: 13).

He went on to state that:

...Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (Rom 1: 4c-6).

In Romans, Paul emphasises that the gospel that he preaches is for “everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1: 16, cf. 2: 9f, 3: 29, 9: 24), and in this respect it did not matter whether one was a Jew or Gentile (Rom 3: 22, 10: 4). The depicted audience appears to consist of both the “circumcised” and the ‘uncircumcised whom the apostle categorises as those who are “physically uncircumcised but keep the law” and those who are “circumcision but break the law.” (Rom 2: 27). The letter also confronts those who accuse Paul of antinomism (Rom 3: 8).

The discussion of life under the Law (Rom 7: 7-12) depicts an audience that is familiar with Jewish heritage while the discussion of the election of Israel in comparison with the calling of the Church (Rom 9-11) suggests an audience encompassing both Gentile and Jewish Christians.

Moreover, Paul organised a collection in Macedonia and Asia for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem of which his hopes were that the gift was going to be accepted and appreciated by the saints (Rom 15: 25-30). When Paul refers to the sharing of “spiritual” and “material” blessings (Rom 15: 27) it is another indicator of the Jewish presence in Paul’s intended audience. As aforementioned, Paul did not break his ties with his Jewish counterparts. He still remembered and included them in greetings (Rom 16: 7, 11, 21; 1Cor 16: 19-24). We can, therefore, observe that while Paul maintained his mission to the Gentile world, he retained a special place for the Jews. This comes to the fore very strongly in Romans, 1 Corinthians and Galatians, with Romans as the clearest of the three in which Paul wrote:

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! <sup>16</sup> If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy (11: 13-16).

Once again, Pauline correspondences were real letters addressed to local congregations that were predominantly Gentile, but that did not exclude the Jewish population. Within the letters themselves, Paul restates several times the inclusive nature of the demand that the gospel entrusted to him (Rom 1: 16f) and through the  $\pi\alpha\nu\tau\iota$  <sup>72</sup> formula. Paul declares that the righteousness of God is for *every one who believes* (3: 22). The patriarch Abraham is the father of *every one who believes* (4: 11) and Christ is the end of the law as regards to righteousness for *every one who believes* (10: 11), to cite but a few (Dunn 1998: 372).

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<sup>72</sup>  $\pi\alpha\nu\tau\iota$  is a masculine, singular dative form of  $\pi\alpha\varsigma$  and can be translated either as *every* or *all*. Here we will translate it as *every*.

Pauline letters targeted specific problems within these individual congregations. In this case, an adequate approach is that which reads each document in its *Sitz im Leben* and against the background of specific practical problems presented by its situation. As Tomson (1990: 62) puts it: "Priority should be given to the specific significance which recurring concepts and rules have in any particular context: apriori generalisation from one letter to another should be avoided."

On another note, the Pauline letters are a paradox. Even if we have emphasised the particularity of each individual letter, it must be understood against the perspective of this study. The thematic or doctrinal approach is treated herein as unsatisfactory because it greatly exposes the reader to the danger of reading the letters as if they were successive chapters of dogmatics. In so doing they are uprooted from their own contexts. The reader becomes and so preoccupied with the theme of interest that the socio-political, socio-economic, socio-cultural settings are downplayed which are indispensable aspects of any informed reading.

Having said that, perhaps it is important to clarify issues at this moment. The contextuality of individual letters of Paul does not mean that Paul was an ambivalent character who kept changing from situation to situation. He was not the type of apostle who would contradict the gospel he preached in one local congregation by the preaching in another. Using the creative Jewish midrash as an interpretative framework, Paul could interpret and apply the gospel according to new contextual demands. A good example is his content of justification in Romans, which carries a different connotation from that in Galatians. The question is how did he manage to maintain consistence?

At this moment, the quest for the centre of Pauline theology and thought is important though the solution is not yet found. Certainly, there should be some kind of underpinnings or fundamental features that keep Pauline letters together.

The discussion has been going on for quite some time though as stated above the results seem not to be conclusive and we can justify our claim by citing three positions:

Firstly, the Reformation theologians located this centre of Paul's thought in doctrine. In this case the doctrine of *justification by faith alone*, was viewed as characteristic of Pauline theology based on Romans and Galatians. This approach was prevalent since the Reformation and in the post-reformation period other Christian theologians used it in antijudaistic debates (cf Beker 1984: 13), perceived in the Biblical texts like:

"Yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.' (Gal 2: 16).

Evangelical scholars, also advocated such a position that seeks Paul's centre in the doctrine of justification. For instance, Dunn (1998: 372) puts up a strong argument in favour of the doctrine of justification by faith alone as fundamental feature of Pauline theology and thought. The quotation that follows underpins this observation.

To make the point clear beyond any doubt Paul repeats it another two times: "and we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (quoting Gal 2: 16 - DTB). The repeated antithesis is sharp enough in itself to warrant the title to this section: justification by faith alone. ...we have one of the most intensive affirmations that "faith" is of the essence of the gospel ever penned (Galatians 3). The issue was of such importance for Paul that the whole case was carefully and fully restated in the subsequent major formulation of Paul's gospel, which is Romans (Romans 3-4). ...Paul expounds justification by faith in a way, which not only addresses the argument over the terms of Gentile acceptance, but also presses beyond to provide a fundamental statement of human dependence on God.

In the above quotation, Dunn correctly stresses the subject of justification by faith as contained in the pericopes cited which as a matter of interest come basically from Romans and Galatians. It may be argued that, as he correctly puts in perspective, in both contexts of Romans and Galatians Paul's main thesis is that works of the law in accordance with Israel's conception of righteousness, actually prevents Israel's attainment of the same. Faith is the means by which people can become righteous and as such gentiles have attained that righteousness that Israel wrongly pursued. However, whether justification by faith is really the centre or fundamental feature of the entire Pauline Corpus is questionable. According to our classification of the

Pauline writings above, they are categorised into *seven authentic* and *six non-authentic* Pauline letters.<sup>73</sup>

If the above classification into *authentic* and *non-authentic* is deemed sound, as most scholars do despite debates on which category certain letters should fall in, especially Ephesians and Colossians, the crucial question is: on what basis is the centre of Pauline thought determined? It may not be excessive to state that determining the fundamental feature of an author of thirteen letters (if we include the pseudepigraphical ones) or even seven letters (if we consider the authentic ones only) on the basis of mainly two letters is certainly awkward. The letters used as such a basis would be viewed as a core of the letters while the rest appear to be peripheral.

Secondly, we can examine the position advocated by Schweitzer who attempted to locate the centre of Pauline thought in “eschatological mysticism.” He rejected Paul’s doctrine of *Justification by faith* as a central core as upheld since the Reformation. Instead, Schweitzer advocates a two-centre scheme in which *eschatological mysticism* on the one hand was posited against *rabbinic-juridical* thought on the other hand. He argues that Paul used the two thought forms as a weapon against Judaism, thereby providing a centre into his very thought (cf. Beker 1984: 13).

Though various terms have been used to describe Paul’s thought pattern, among them terms like: “kerygma,” “essence” “Paulinism” “mysticism” “coherent thought,” the recognition that Pauline thought cannot be grasped in terms of some systematic doctrinal core is not to be ignored. It seems Pauline scholarship has recognised this undeniable fact and the manifestation of the recognition is the shift of scholarship from the pursuit of the narrow conceptual definition of the apostle’s thought to a broader, more encompassing framework in which false and unwanted dichotomies are overcome (cf. Beker 1984: 15). Such a broader framework calls for examining all necessary aspects of the total context of Paul’s background. In this case language and symbols are understood not as centres but as aspects of human life affected by the full impact of the gospel.

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<sup>73</sup> cf § 3.1.2, Dunn 1998:13.

These symbols and images are drawn from various life experiences. By symbols and images, are meant concepts like: *righteousness, justification, reconciliation, freedom, adoption, being in Christ, being with Christ, crown, glory*. On the one hand these symbols do not seek to provide a central feature depicting Paul's thought as such, but reflects the apostle's language limitation as he grappled with the meaning of salvation and as stated above, the full impact of the gospel. On the other hand the symbols in their totality form Paul's symbolic structure whose constituent elements reflect the variety of needs in particular settings (cf. Beker 1984: 16).

The third and final position attempts to reconstruct a kind of fundamental structure, which seems to permeate through all these symbols and the contexts that they reflect. In other words, treating Pauline correspondences as real letters that were addressed to local congregations in different needs, and maintaining that these letters were meant to substitute his presence, means that the focus moves towards the axis on which the theological and practical instructions revolve.

A reflection on the Pauline writings seems to indicate an imaginary or reconstructed fundamental feature that revolves on two axes. Tomson identifies these axes as: *Continuous reference to Scripture* and *Consistent concern for the actual situation* of his audience (Tomson 1990: 58), while Beker describes the same axes on which this fundamental feature revolves as: *Coherence* and *Contingency* (Beker 1984: x, 11-16). He further argues that Paul's *coherent centre* is a symbolic structure with a "deep" structure of Christian apocalyptic structure informed by the Christ-event and a surface structure of a variety of symbols that reflect the *contingent interpretation* and application of his<sup>74</sup> Christian apocalypse into a particular context (cf. Beker 1984: 17). In other words, the coherent centre is Paul's resource and the contingent centre is the context that stimulates him to share and that gives form to the message of the Gospel entrusted to him.

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<sup>74</sup> This possessive pronoun refers to Paul. This paragraph is my interpretation of Beker's views and I have added an emphasis.

Beker identifies the coherent core of Paul's thought permeating through all his correspondences as the Triumph of God. For the purposes of our study, we have no need to discuss Beker's view in any detail.

What is important from his coherence-contingency approach, and Tomson's continuous reference-consistent concern principle, is the clear recognition and indication by both scholars that Pauline writings are not neutral writings. They are communicative correspondence that has a source (Scripture) and a specific need (each Pauline congregation). In this case communication and meaning involve the dialogue between coherence and contingency. There should be interaction between the coherent core and contingent diversity.

In view of the above discussion, we can observe that Pauline local congregations were full human habitations whose living cultural conditions formed part and parcel of the communication system that the apostle utilised. Language and symbols that form the contingent diversity, which interacts with the coherence core, are cultural phenomena.

Therefore, the category culture is, once again operative in Pauline letters and any meaningful attempt to interpret any text from these writings must be culturally sensitive and responsive. In order to qualify this resolve further, let us examine the background of the New Testament and one of the Pauline congregations.

### ***3.2 Culture in the New Testament World and Pauline congregations***

#### **3.2.1 The Nature of the New Testament**

The twenty-seven books of the Second or New Testament share a very unique history in the Bible as a collection of sixty-six books. The term New "Testament" is much older than the documents now identified as such. It can be linked to God's special dealings with humankind.

By the term "New Testament" or "New Covenant", reference is made to God's covenant by which God undertook a commitment to biblical personalities such as: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses to mention but a few to whom God promised help and blessings (cf Exod 19: 5, 34: 10: 27).

According to the prophecy of Jeremiah, God continued to keep the promise: *The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah* (Jer 31: 31). About 600 years later, Jesus gave the “New Testament/Covenant” a sacramental connotation by relating it to his own body and blood:

22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” 23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”(Mk 14: 22-25).

Christians have since then believed that God’s renewed covenant developed into a new dimension that was extended to include the non-Jewish people. Believing that God renewed, extended and fulfilled his covenant in Christ Jesus, during the second century, Christians began to apply the term “New Testament/Covenant” to describe their own writings which they viewed as Scripture alongside the Pentateuch, Prophetic books and the Wisdom writings (the Old Testament) (Brown 1997: 4). Perhaps the reason may be due to the fact that Christians saw the *Christ-event* through which the new covenant became accessible to them as the thrust of these writings. However, it should be noted that even if the term “New Testament” refers to the twenty-seven books as a collection, these books were written over a long period of time as it has been pointed out in the tentative chronology below. Their authors aimed at communicating with people in their concrete historical settings. According to Theissen (1982: 69),

... primitive Christianity was a movement within the lower strata. The New Testament was not a product of colourless refinement of an upper class. ... On the contrary, it was, humanly speaking, a product of the force that came, unimpaired and strengthened by the Divine Presence, from the lower class (Matt 11: 25ff; 1 Cor 1: 26-31). This reason alone enabled it to become a book of all mankind.

In the passage cited above, Theissen describes the makeup of early Christianity at Corinth. His remarks concerning primitive Christianity in terms of its sociology cannot be limited to Corinth alone. The observation is equally applicable to the rest of

the New Testament writings if not to the writings of the entire Bible. In other words, the passage serves to confirm that the New Testament writings did not develop in a vacuum but within human living socio-cultural and socio-historical conditions which, according to the above description, was within the lower strata.

Although the books of the New Testament appear to have adopted a particular order from the Gospel according to *Matthew* to the book of *Revelation*, they were not chronologically written in the order in which they appear in the New Testament. Biblical scholarship regards the Pauline writings as the first written documents of the New Testament. These were compiled in the fifties of the first century, with 1 Thessalonians dated AD 50/51 as the oldest preserved document not only among the Pauline writings but also in the entire New Testament (Brown 1997: 457, Meeks 1983: 7).

To state the obvious, every New Testament interpreter should always recall that it took decades for the books of the New Testament writings to take the form in which we find them today. They were all written from resurrection and Easter perspectives many years after the events that they allude to. Modern research and writing facilities that enable the author to write down immediately the information for the subject of interest that he or she accesses, were not available, or if they were, they were not employed in the formation of the New Testament. As stated above, it took many decades for the oral culture to turn into a written culture. Therefore, a chronology of these writings can only be tentative and a product of reconstruction rather than data with precision. In this regard, a good overview of the New Testament World would lead to a tentative chronology<sup>75</sup> like this that follows:

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<sup>75</sup> This chronology is formulated on the basis of various introductions to the New Testament. There is no unanimity of these introductions on the dating of some of the individual books (cf Brown 1997, A B du Toit 1993 and Kümmel 1972).

## DECADE      SPECIFIC NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS/WRITINGS

50-60 AD	1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philemon, Philippians
60-70 AD	The Gospel of Mark
70-80 AD	2 Thessalonians, <sup>76</sup> Colossians
80-90 AD	Ephesians, the Gospel of Matthew, Hebrews
90-100 AD	The Gospel of Luke, Acts and John, James, 1 Peter, Jude, (2 Peter,) 1, 2 & 3 John, and Revelation
90-125 AD	1 & 2 Timothy, Titus
130-140 AD	(2 Peter)

The above tentative chronology serves to confirm that the portraits of the *Christ-event* which form a coherent centre of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, were written decades after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus. It may not be an exaggeration to contend that many authors of these writings may never have seen Jesus during his earthly ministry. The factual situation is that we do not have pure or exact reports composed from the lifetime of Jesus by those whom Jesus brought close to himself. As Brown (1997: viii-ix) persuasively argues:

Rather, what we are given pertinent to the life and ministry of Jesus comes to us in a language other than the one that he regularly spoke and in the form of different distillations from years of proclamation and teaching about him.

Furthermore, as it has been mentioned over and over again, during the above indicated decades, history did not stop to wait for the formation of these inspired documents. Many events, some of which certainly influenced the formation of the entire New Testament, occurred thereby making these writings as *Christian writings* that were *written by Christians for Christians* in specific contexts.

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<sup>76</sup> 2 Thessalonians is one of the letters whose Pauline authenticity is doubted. It would have been dated AD 50/51 if it is viewed as Pauline and assumed to have been written shortly after 1 Thessalonians. Many scholars assign this letter to Colossians, Ephesians and the pastoral (1&2 Timothy and Titus). This category of letters is dated around AD 70-100 or much later after the death of Paul about AD 64. (Brown 1997: xxxvii-3, 6, 590) and this is the position taken by this study. This explains why it has not been aligned with the first category.

The authors of the New Testament certainly used ideas, attitudes and methods of interpreting Scriptures that were drawn from the Palestine Jewish and Greco-Roman background and mindset which obviously influenced these documents of communication (cf Neyrey 1990: 12-14). The writings served to meet specific issues of concern within their own time until the time when they were collected and compiled as canon. In this case inquiry into the distant Christian society within which each of the writings arose becomes an inevitable component of any effort to understand and interpret them. The importance of the inquiry into the original contexts of the New Testament writings serves to contend further that in attempting to understand these texts, we are compelled as hermeneuts, to ensure that we expand our "referential framework" regarding the socio-cultural world of the New Testament. This should be done in such a way that it will approximate or connect either implicitly or explicitly in the closest possible way to the "milieu" in which an informed contemporary hermeneut and his or her audience would have received these documents (cf. A.B du Toit 1998: 5). If we as third millennium hermeneuts claim to understand these writings when actually we pay little or no attention to their "world," then we are deceiving ourselves.

Once again we cannot afford to continue misapplying the principle of objectivity by reading these life transforming texts as if they were neutral objective documents with no context of origin. The fact that we are ourselves people in context, demands that we recognise the authors and original recipients as such. It is a fact of life that every observation that humans make entails some point of view and a set of connections. As Meeks (cf 1983: 5) noted, *the pure objective observer or empiricist shall always drown into the sea of meaningless impressions*. He seems very correct when he observes that even so simple a task as translating a sentence from an ancient language document into our own requires some sense of the social matrices of both the *original utterances* and *ourselves*.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Emphasis is mine.

Though it is not the intention of this study to discuss the details of either the history or the chronology of the New Testament, the significance thereof can hardly be ignored. Suffice it to state that the value we attach to the above chronological data is based on the fact that the claim for the importance of the “world” of these documents or the “matrices of the original utterances” and ourselves demands realisation that the category culture is indispensable. The world of the New Testament cannot be perceived in a cultural vacuum because the communication that was achieved through these documents was culturally conditioned just like any other communication. Once again, the category culture is already present in the texts of the New Testament documents themselves for the reason that it was the operative world of the authors and their intended audiences.

Therefore, any meaningful hermeneutic should not neglect the cultural world of the various New Testament documents but consider it seriously. The only way the hermeneut can practice meaningful hermeneutics is made possible where he or she has access to the complex body of knowledge made up *inter alia* of literary conventions, social and language codes that were operative in those cultures. Failure to take into serious consideration the fact that “all ideas, concepts and knowledge are (culturally - DTB) and or socially determined” (Van Eck 2001: 600).

Since our study pays special interest to the Pauline writings, the question that we should now address is whether or not the above observations in relation to the category culture holds for the Pauline writings as well. To do this, let us now examine them but, from the perspective of the communities to which Paul wrote.

### **3.2.2 Nature of Pauline Congregations**

As can be seen from the above tentative chronology, we may only restate the obvious fact that Pauline letters were the first Christian writings that are known. Like other New testament writings, they are responsive in nature as they were designed to respond to immediate, pressing problems and issues experienced within these communities until they were collected into the canon (Schutz 1982: 1). It was during the 50s of the first century when Paul produced the earliest surviving Christian

documents: 1 *Thessalonians*, *Galatians*, 1 & 2 *Corinthians*, *Romans*, *Philemon*, and *Philippians*. Each letter was unique contextual response that carried a different emphasis suitable for handling the corresponding context that Paul perceived as the need of that particular community at a particular time.

The important factor that serves our purpose is an indication that Pauline writings are a product of either Paul himself or disciples/adherents of the Pauline School who wrote these documents to specific communities. In case of the deuterio-Pauline letters, the authors were confronted by post-70 A.D circumstances and they drew from the Pauline tradition and authority the material they ordered to address their communities on the circumstances of concern. Therefore, the community becomes another important factor requiring the attention and serious consideration of the hermeneut if interpretation has to be sound and meaningful. To pay serious attention and take into account the world behind the New Testament text in this perspective means and demands investigation of these Pauline communities. The leading question that we should now address concerns the nature of communities to which Paul wrote.

Christianity as a whole begun like a new sect within Palestinian Judaism and was prominent among the village population. What we may call Pauline Christianity comprised the extended missionary and pastoral activities of Paul of Tarsus and a circle of his co-workers. Even if Paul should be understood from his Jewish and Pharisaic background (Neyrey 1990: 1), the congregations that he and his co-workers established were spread out across the ancient Mediterranean basin. Data from both the Pauline letters and the Acts of the Apostles reflect evidence that suggests that Pauline Christianity was not a product of one person but of an extended group of associates. It appears Pauline Christianity maintained a unique identity within early Christianity even after the apostle's death. There are some indications that at times Paul and his associates reached places that may be classified as rural or peri-urban; as reflected in the following passage from Acts 14: 8-20:

8 In Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and had never walked, for he had been crippled from birth. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, 10 said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And the man sprang up and began to walk. 11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" 12

Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates; he and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifice. 14 When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting, 15 "Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; 17 yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy." 18 Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them. 19 But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

Though the status of Iconium is not spelt out in clear terms, the identification of Barnabas and Paul as Zeus and Hermes respectively, reflects a rural set-up where the Lycaonian language was spoken and the belief in the Greek god Zeus and his messenger Hermes was still very strong. When the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice, Paul's response includes the description of God through attributes such as "creator" and "provider of rains, fruitful seasons and food". This depicts a rural or peri-urban agricultural community.

However, the growing edge of this Christian movement was the cities of the Roman Empire where greatest success was enjoyed until after the time of Constantine (cf. Meeks 1983: 8).

On the one hand the origins of Christianity can be associated with the Jewish Palestinian village life as can be detected from the nature of Jesus' Aramaic parables of the sower (Matt 13: 3-23, Mk 4: 3-25, 36-43 Lk 8: 5-15), seed's growth (Mk4: 25-29), wheat and weeds (Matt 13: 24-30, 36-43), mustard seed (Matt 13: 31-32, Mk 4: 30-32, Lk 13: 18-19), lost sheep (Matt 18: 10-14, Lk 15: 3-7), and tenants and the vineyard (Matt 21: 33-46, Mk 12: 1-6, Lk 20: 9-18).

On the other hand, however, Paul was an urban dweller as was confirmed by his own language. Pauline Christianity flourished in the cities and instead of illustrations

through parables, Paul used city facilities such as: the marketplace, the Areopagus, (Acts 17: 17,19-24), and used language such as “scum of the earth”, “refuse of the world” (1 Cor 4: 86-13).

The city was very important for Paul to survive with his tent ministry. Time and again Paul reminded his congregations that he did not claim his right for fear of being a burden in comparison with the “itinerant charismatic missionaries” (Theissen 1982: 28) of his time. This can be demonstrated by these Corinthian and Thessalonian pericopes respectively:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4 Do we not have the right to our food and drink? 5 Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7 Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk. 8 Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? 10 Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. 11 If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? 12 If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. 15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case. Indeed, I would rather die than that—no one will deprive me of my ground for boasting! (1 Cor 9: 1-15)

With a sense of pride and self-confidence Paul or perhaps his disciple<sup>78</sup> challenged the Thessalonian Christians in the following passage:

6 Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from

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<sup>78</sup> Here we indicate “Paul or his disciple” because we regard 2 Thessalonians as a deutero-Pauline letter and therefore as non-authentic.

believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, 8 and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. 9 This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 13 Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. 14 Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed. 15 Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as believers (2 Thessalonians 3: 6-15)..

The self-support reflected in the above-cited pericopes very much depended on Paul's trade. His life as an artisan distinguished him from farm labourers (both the slaves and the free) who were perhaps at the bottom of the social pyramid in antiquity and from the lucky few agriculturists (cf. Meeks 1983: 7).

Accepting Paul's ministry as predominantly urban provides some basis for understanding some of his claims such as those found in Romans 15: 14-19b, 23a.

... that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ (Rom 15: 19b) and

... with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you 24 when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while (15: 23f).

He planted Christian house-churches in scattered households in some of the strategic cities of the North-Eastern Mediterranean basin. These house Churches maintained relationships with each other, with Paul and his co-workers through visits and letters. When Christians travelled even for other business, they gave encouragement by means of encounter with local congregations.

As stated before, prior to Paul's conversion and calling, people believed in Jesus as the messiah. Although they were perceived as a sect within Judaism and operated in an unfriendly environment, they carried the message of their new religion into the Jewish communities of the Greco-Roman cities.

This portrayal of Christianity as a sect within Judaism was already identified many decades ago and is thus not new to Pauline scholarship. Although it is from the perspective of trying to locate the parallels between the Qumran sect and Pre-Pauline Christianity, David Flusser (1958: 227) persuasively argued that:

The early Church in Jerusalem was evidently organised as a separate Jewish sect, but the ideological basis for the concept of the Church was laid down, as far as we can see, in the later stratum of Christianity we call Pre-Pauline under the influence of ideas which led to similar consequences amongst the Qumran covenanters.

In other words, to state that early Christianity started to reach some cities is not in any way an exaggeration. After all it was their success in Damascus that aroused Saul's intended attack when he encountered the risen Lord (Acts 9.1-19, 22.6-16, 26.12-18).

When Paul begun his missionary activities, the cultural settings of each particular city congregation shaped his kerygma. He carefully selected terms and concepts from the cultural environment and filled them with the content of his kerygma. For this reason, let us now attempt to demonstrate this with 1 Corinthians.

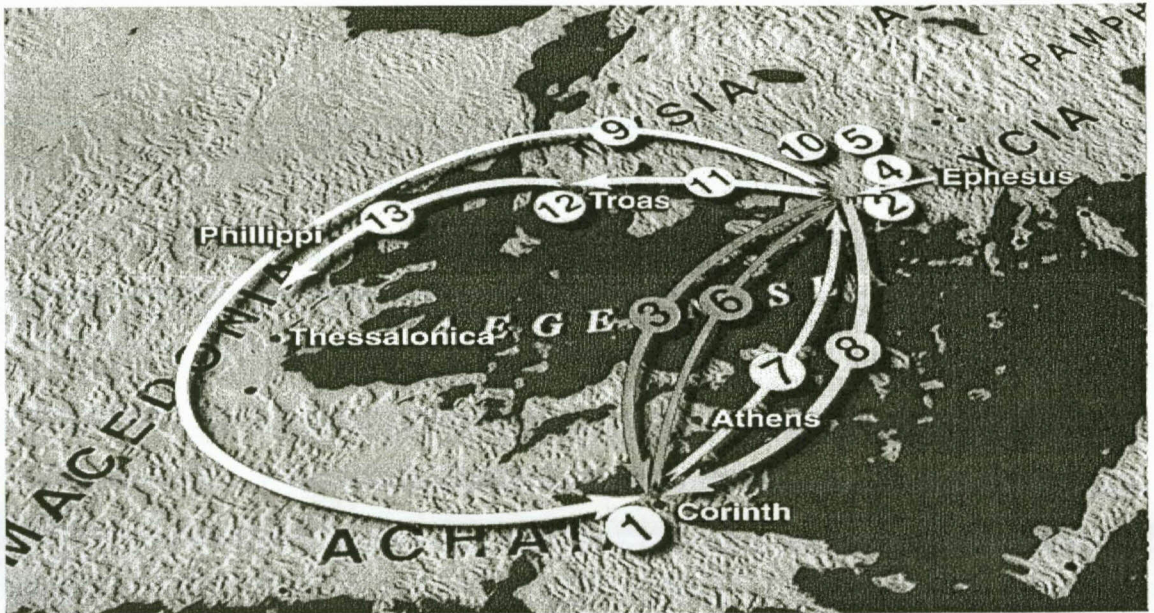
### ***3.3 Culture in New Testament Interpretation of 1 Corinthians***

In order for us who read Paul's letter to the Corinthians from the perspective of the third millennium and not the first century that was close to Paul himself, there are two things are of importance to us. Firstly, we need to make an attempt to return and visit the city where the recipients of the letter in our focus lived and find out major features of their life style. This will help us to make informed assumptions of the context and correlate it to ours as we interpret this epistle.

Secondly, since there is no interpretation that can claim absolute objectivity and all interpretation are done from some particular perspective, we are challenged at the outset to seek in context direct or indirect parallels with our perspective. This will help us to avoid forcing the text to address issues that are unrelated to the text and reduce the Biblical text to a magic answer resource. This section of our investigation will explore these two issues by surveying Corinth and the category culture, which is the hermeneutic framework of this study.

### 3.3.1 The City of Corinth

Corinth was one of the great ancient cities that were strategically situated in the province of Achaea. It was also one of the major urban centres of the ancient Mediterranean and a Greek city by location, the capital of Achaea.<sup>79</sup> Although Corinth was not particularly fertile, its location offered a number of advantages as it can be seen from the map<sup>80</sup> below.



Corinth as a city controlled the land routes between the North and South and acted as a crucial land link until the cutting of the Corinthian canal. The sea route between the East and West also passed through Corinth (cf. Barrett 1971: 1). The city's control of the portage of ships, a short land route across Greece must have inevitably made it a city of great tourist, political, military and commercial significance.

<sup>79</sup> This represents an area, which made up most of ancient Greece.

<sup>80</sup> This map which depicts Paul's missionary activities and the ancient cities which he visited and Christianised is based on *Logos Deluxe Map Set*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems (cf. Norris 1997).

This perspective on Corinth is supported by Barrett (1971: 2) who points out the significance of Corinth as he writes:

The plain in which Corinth is situated is dominated by the hill which served as acropolis to the city, Acrocorinth, rising to 1857 feet. Economic and military advantages combined in favour of Corinth, and it is not surprising that it reached a position of eminence in the ancient world; it is perhaps surprising that it never achieved pre-eminence. ... In 146 B.C a sharp line is drawn through the history of Corinth, when Rome brought the Achaean League to an end. After the decisive engagement at Leucopetra, on the Isthmus, and the consul Lucius Mummius was able to occupy Corinth without a blow. The citizens were killed, or sold into slavery; the city itself was levelled to the ground, and rebuilding was forbidden. ... The territory became public land of Rome and a part was given to the neighbouring state of Sicyon, on the understanding that henceforward Sicyon, in the place of Corinth would maintain the Isthmian games.

It seems the destroyed city of Corinth that Barrett describes above took long to rebuild. It was Julius Caesar who ordered the rebuilding and refounded the city of as a Roman colony hundred (100) years after desolation (1971: 2) The order to rebuild Corinth as a Roman colony was issued in 44 B.C. When it was rebuilt, some of Caesar's veterans colonised it but allowed some Greeks who were living in the ruins to settle into the new city as alien residents. The colonialists themselves and their descendants became citizens (Witherington 1995: 7). Since Paul visited Corinth in the early 50s, it means that he visited the new Roman Corinth that was still under construction and growing. The new city possessed the geographical and natural characteristics of the old one. However, it represented more ancient Roman imagery than the old Greek City and it was answerable to the Roman senate. Some of the discontinuities between the old and new city of Corinth can be observed from the works of Barrett (1971: 2), as quoted in part below:

But since the destruction of Corinth by the Romans and the disappearance of the ancient Corinthians the sacrifices are no longer performed by the colonists, nor do the children cut hair or wear black clothes. ... The new settlers, to whom the traditions of Corinth meant little, were drawn from various parts of the empire; many would be discharged soldiers. No doubt there were Greeks among them, but it is impossible to think of Corinth of Paul's day as in any way distinctively Greek.

Even if Barrett (1971: 2-3) correctly points out that the new, Roman Corinth was not distinctively Greek, it should be emphasised that it retained the cosmopolitan character of the old city.

The presence of the Jewish community in the new city is attested to by the presence of the synagogue of the "Hebrews" as it was called. Greek, Jewish and Roman cultures co-existed and Greek was spoken widely.

We may summarise our current investigation by repeating that the new city was resettled by Romans after its destruction. In the new city, Greek and Latin cultures coexisted and sometimes clashed. Its location on the Isthmus of Corinth, that safeguarded sailors and the voyages around the south of Greece, made it a prosperous mercantile community. Its mercantile character contributed to the presence of foreign religions and may have equally inflamed the level of sexual promiscuity and other social evils, although promiscuity was generally characteristic of Greek male dominant culture, which seems to have been carried over.<sup>81</sup>

Paul's ministry in Corinth was successful and many people were converted (1 Cor.12: 2). The first to be converted seem to have been the household of Stephanas (1 Cor.16: 15). Thereafter, Paul left Corinth but maintained contact with families like Chloe's family who informed Paul of some disturbing and sad development that had engulfed the Church. It appears to have been normal that people who were on other business, could meet believers in cities they went to and shared the Gospel and news from congregations. However, people like Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus seem to have acted as official representatives of the Church (cf. 1 Cor.16: 17f).

### **3.3.2 The Date and Significance of 1 Corinthians**

The Pauline authenticity of this Epistle is not doubted. On the basis of 1 Cor.16: 8 it is believed the Paul wrote this Epistle from Ephesus. The dating of this Epistle has been subject to scholarly debate with no unanimous resolution of the precise date. In our tentative dating, 1 Corinthians is within the same timeframe as 1 Thessalonians,

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81 (cf. Keener 1993a). This resource gives a very rich and interesting background information that we would not bring out since what has been sited satisfies our need.

Galatians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philemon and Philippians which are viewed to have been written between AD 50-60. It is Barrett's approach and dating that sounds convincing though we maintain as aforementioned that the dating of 1 Corinthians lacks precision. Basing his argument partly on Acts 18, he contends that:

It is reasonable to infer (though the dates may be a year or so out) that Paul reached Corinth in about March 50 and stayed there till about September 51. ... Paul left Corinth for Syria (18: 18) ... reached Ephesus with a promise to return (18: 19f). ... brought his so-called the close of the second journey (18: 22f). ... back in Ephesus (19: 1-20: 1) and stayed two years and three months (19: 8, 10; 20: 22). ... reached Ephesus again about late summer of AD 52.

Barrett (1971: 5) goes on to say:

Paul will have reached Ephesus again in the late summer of 52; the Pentecost he was anxious to spend in Jerusalem (20: 16) will have been that of 55; the Pentecost of (1 Cor.16: 8) ... that of 53 or more probably 54. The most probable date for 1 Corinthian is therefore in the early months of 54, or possibly towards the end of 53.

In view of the insights given by Barrett above and other Pauline scholars, this study adds a voice to the opinion that this Epistle was written between AD 54 and 55.

Having described Corinth, it is perhaps very important to explain the significance of 1 Corinthians in relation to the study of New Testament interpretation and African culture. It is herein suggested that this is a very important letter. To begin with, 1 Corinthians contains many notable features that the modern reader misses in other Pauline letters and many other New Testament writings. Only in this letter does Paul use Jewish cultural concepts like the law and circumcision in a more pronounced way than in Romans and Galatians where from different contexts he touches on the same (cf.1 Cor.17: 19; 9: 21, 25). Hafemann (1993: 1649) correctly observes that:

1 Corinthians provides the detailed most example within the Pauline corpus of the way in which Paul applies his theological convictions, especially his Christology and eschatology, to practical issues affecting the church.

The paranesis of 1 Corinthians in which Paul applies his theology that Hafemann alludes to in the above quotation is dominated by appeals to the Jewish law and tradition.

The emphasis on Paul's usage of Jewish cultural concepts does not in any way reduce the Epistle to a channel of Jewish propaganda. Instead, it qualifies 1 Corinthians as a real and contextual letter. This letter has enjoyed a place of pride in ancient tradition and it has been easily accepted as an authoritative letter. This can be attributed to the contextual character of the book. As Tomson (1990: 69-73) furthermore argues:

Other general features have special significance in this context. Pauline authorship of First Corinthians has never been disputed. Furthermore while today it is a rather inconspicuous Pauline letter, this has not always been the case. In ancient traditions First Corinthians enjoyed pride of place, ... Internal features support this observation. It is a letter involving hardly any polemics against rival preachers. Paul conveys practical instruction quietly and calmly on a number of crucial issues to a Church he himself founded and whose members he considers his own spiritual children. In short: First Corinthians is not only remarkable among Pauline letters for its 'legal' and 'Jewish' character, but it appears very much to reflect Paul's own thinking and was recognised as such in the early Church.

To summarise, 1 Corinthians is a real Pauline letter that was written to a congregation he founded and whose members he knew and maintained contact with. It was written from Ephesus after Paul had been informed of the sad development that had emerged in the Church but which were inconsistent with the identity of the Church and her membership in a complex, cosmopolitan community. He wrote it in a way that it would make up for his physical absence. In order to "quietly and calmly" (Tomson 1990: 69) respond to the critical issues that were brought to his attention, Paul utilised the Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian traditions or cultural aspects as we would prefer to call them, as a vehicle for his kerygma in context. This brief analysis makes 1 Corinthians significant and suitable for this scholarly investigation of New Testament Interpretation and African culture. Let us therefore explore some of these aforementioned cultural aspects in the Biblical text itself.

### 3.3.3 Aspects of Culture 1 Corinthians

Perhaps it is necessary to point out at the outset, that as a matter of scholarly choice, our study at this moment seeks to read the Biblical text of 1 Corinthians and bring out these aspects deemed 'cultural. Though what has been called the reading of the 'Biblical text of 1 Corinthians' entails interpretation, no detailed interpretation will be done here but behind the writing so that what comes out of the text should also be found within the same text. The detailed pursuit of some of the aspects of culture, will only be done later on as we continue with our investigation.

#### 3.3.3.1 Wisdom and Power

In ancient Greek society, there was a direct link between the wise and the powerful that were to assume leadership. This can be illustrated from Terry (1995: 22) who quotes Plato as having had Socrates say:

... either philosophers became kings in our states or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophical intelligence

This thought pattern in Corinth must have beyond reasonable doubt influenced the behaviour of Corinthian Christians who promoted splits along the apostles who worked among them in favour of the one apostle that each group took to be powerful and therefore, worthy of leading that particular group. Even if the culture tolerated this direct link, Paul combated the notion by advocating ascendancy to power in a different way which would even appear foolish according to the world (cf. 1 Cor.1: 18-2: 5, 3: 18-22). It is interesting to observe that in all this section, the source of Paul's authority is introduced by (καθὼς) γέγραπται ( just as it is written) (1: 19,31;2: 9,16). We can suggest that he draws from the Rabbinic tradition while the challenge to his readers that should follow the speaker as a mentor (4: 16) is as Tomson (1990: 75) puts it a "common device in Hellenistic rhetoric."

### 3.3.3.2 Illicit Sexuality

An investigation into the Greco-Roman world in relation to issues of fornication and incest reveals something that from our current perspective would be shocking. Prostitution was a recognised profession in Roman Corinth. According to Terry (1995: 23) “sexual licence was a rule rather than the exception in much of the ancient Mediterranean world”. Quoting Hauch and Schulz Terry (1995: 23) reveals further that:

The main cause of prostitution is the Greek view, which regards sexual intercourse as just natural, necessary and justifiable as eating and drinking. ... when inhabitants of the city of Corinth gathered to pray to Aphrodite in matters of grave importance, they would invite as many prostitutes as possible to join in their petitions, and these prostitutes (mostly women) would add their supplications to the goddess and later be present at sacrifices.

The above implies that the Greek culture did not perceive anything offensive in cultic prostitution. This is what led to the Corinthian relaxation over illicit sex because it was as we may say ‘culturally normal’. Most of the practical issues that preoccupied Paul in 1 Cor.5: 1-6: 20 are linked to πορνεία (forbidden sexual relationships, prostitution) that we term illicit sex, which had engulfed the Corinthian Church. It denotes not only the use of a harlot or prostitute, but it also signifies any form of sexual evil (cf. Morris 1958: 86). Paul was critical with the Corinthians and denounced them for the carrying over the cultural elements that were offensive to the gospel. The Corinthians had even gone beyond the pagan sexual prohibition by their tolerance of incest<sup>82</sup> (1 Cor. 5). It seems even among pagans incest or sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who were closely related was forbidden. According to Terry (cf.1995: 23) marriages between in-laws were forbidden and to qualify his claim, he quotes Gaius as having written (See Fee 1988: 200)

Again, I may not marry a woman who was previously my mother-in-law, or daughter-in-law or step-daughter-in-law or step-mother.

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<sup>82</sup> See 4.2.3

Conzelmann also adds weight to this point when he discloses that in Roman law, relatedness by adoption ruled out marriage between adoptive parents and children, even after the cancellation of the relationship. The same could not be tolerated either between step-relatives in direct line<sup>83</sup> (1975: 96).

### 3.3.3.3 Marriage and divorce issues

Chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians is mainly devoted to practical issues of Christian life in relation to marriage, divorce and celibacy. Though the opening section would suggest that the apostle was dealing with a new section, he was actually continuing his discussion in the previous section where issues connected with πορνεία (7: 2) were addressed. Marriage and divorce were in the ancient Mediterranean world as problematic as it is the case in modern times. The whole range of issues like marriage law, marital sexual intercourse, divorce, mixed marriage, celibacy and re-marriage are discussed. According to Tomson (1990: 77), this chapter reflects Paul's polemic (7: 17-24) which includes appeals to keeping the 'commandments of God' (7: 19) Tomson further argues that:

A fundamental rule is referred to which appears to be typical of Paul and has a halakhic edge (v17). In itself this is a digression of the sort found throughout First Corinthians.

In the quoted observation, Tomson correctly points out the Jewish halakhic law as part of Paul's authority. If one agrees with the observation, then it becomes logical to resolve that as Paul has done in other sections, here too he draws from his rich cultural world sources with which to address and meet his challenges. How about the issues themselves? Was there anything cultural in for instance divorce? These problems have roots in Greek culture, which was receptive to divorce. Evidence of this can be traced to the Greek sages some of whom wrote the following statements related to our subject matter:

Is there any shame at all for adultery for adultery now that matters have come to such a pass that no woman has any use for a husband except to inflame her paramour? Chastity is simply a proof of ugliness. ... Is there any woman that blushes at divorce now that certain illustrious and noble

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<sup>83</sup> For the full direct quotation see 4.2.3.

ladies reckon their years, not by the number of consuls, but by the number to be divorced (Terry 1995: 23f).

Indeed such a relaxed approach and tolerance towards adultery and divorce which both revolve around marriage in the broader context of Corinth, made the Corinthian Christians adopt the same attitudes in Church. In this we observe that both the Corinthians and Paul were culturally affected though in a different manner as indicated above. Another observation that supports this observation particularly in relation to Paul can be traced from his reference to the command of “the Lord” (1 Cor.7: 10-11) in order to stress that divorce is forbidden. Issues of divorce and remarriage have parallels in the Gospels (Matt.19: 6-9, 10: 11-12; Mk 10: 9-12). The source of the prohibition of divorce and remarriage contained in the Gospels is the Q tradition which according to Hollander (2000: 348) carries notions such as one briefly quoted below from the Gospel texts:

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman from her husband commits adultery (cf. Matt.5: 32; Lk.16: 18).

Paul must have been aware of some ideas, notions and sayings that were in circulation orally as authoritative sayings of the historical Jesus which Paul utilises (Hollander 2000: 349).

### **3.3.3.4 Idol food**

In chapters 8-10 Paul addresses the Corinthian Christians on issues that concern leftovers from food offered to idols. Again an investigation into the Greco-Roman culture reveals that feasting and worship of Greek gods were closely linked and common. Participants in the sacrifice shared with gods and friends by eating at feasts that were held either in the temple of a god or in the house of a devotee but in honour of some god. Terry (1995: 24f) gives interesting insights in this regard by quoting nine translated invitations to such cultic meals contained in the papyrus. Among such quotations are the following three that relate to this study:

(10) Antonius [son] of Ptolemaeus, asks you to dine with him at a table of the lord Sarapis in the [house] of Claudius Sarapion on the sixteenth from the ninth hour ...

(11) Sarapion, former gymnasiarch, asks you to dine at a table of the lord Sarapis in his own house

tomorrow, which is the fifteenth, from the eighth hour ...

(12) Dianysios asks you to dine on the twenty-first at a table of Helios, great Sarapis from the ninth hour at his father's house ...

A closer examination of the above, brings on the one hand, a reflection on Paul's discussion about a meal in an idol's temple (1 Cor.8: 10) and a meal at a devotee's home (1 Cor.10: 28). Probably the Corinthians were determined to carry on tendencies from broader society. On the other hand, however, it may be obvious that direct concern is with Jewish law and the validity thereof. As Paul pursues the dialogue with his audience, he challenges them to emulate him (cf. 9: 19-23; 10: 31-11: 1). It can be stated that Paul appeals to his apostolic tradition as an authority base. Other bases of his authority are the 'Law' (9: 8) and the 'Jesus tradition'<sup>84</sup> (9: 14) (cf. Tomson: 1990: 77). It is in such a sense in which we see cultural circumstances influencing both the Corinthians negatively and Paul positively.

### 3.3.3.5 Head covering

This issue is one of the controversial subjects among Pauline scholars, particularly those who read with gender intent. In chapter 11: 3-16 Paul advocates the 'head covering' of women as they pray or prophesy in a congregation. He sounds negative of the head covering of men as he appeals probably to the oral Torah tradition of authority. Then he proceeds to matters of the 'Holy Communion' or Eucharist in 11: 17-34. According to Tomson (1990: 78), Paul engages in Jewish-Christian traditions with halachic implication and Paul appeals to three sources of authority which are: Apostolic tradition including the Jesus tradition, reason and evidence of nature and implicitly the Torah. It seems these issues can equally be traced in the broader context. Head covering was not new in Roman Corinth. Already we see ideas that could either be for or against the practice outside Pauline writings.

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<sup>84</sup> At least three times Paul explicitly refers to the sayings of "the Lord", (1 Cor.7: 10-11; 9:14; 11: 23-25). Paul refers both to the common liturgical practice and unspecified quotations and parallel phrases in the Jesus tradition which Paul uses to suit his intention (cf. Hollander 2000: 349).

This position is also upheld by Keener (1993b: 585) who notes the following:

There are so many contexts in which head coverings were used, however, that one question which context Paul addresses. For instance, people covered their heads due to mourning or shame; but since this practice was used for both men and women, it is unlikely that Paul has this practice directly in view. ... East of Greece, however, the custom was prevalent, including in Palestine and southern Roman Asia ... further, Roman women (like Roman men) covered their heads in worship, in contrast to Greek women and men. ... Evidence from Egypt indicates that many Jewish women covered their heads outside Palestine, even if they were Hellenized in many other respects. ... Women's hair was a prime object of male lust in the ancient Mediterranean world ... societies which employed head coverings thus viewed uncovered married women as unfaithful to their husbands, that is seeking another man ... virgins and prostitutes, conversely, were expected not to cover their heads since they were looking for men. Women who covered their heads could thus be viewed uncovered women as a threat; uncovered women, however, undoubtedly viewed the covering custom as restrictive and saw the way they dressed their hair as their own business. Significantly, uncovered women probably include the cultured women of higher status, whose family homes hosted most of the house churches.

The above quotation, confirms that the custom of head covering was observed in wider society and carried different connotations. As Keener (1993b: 585-587) has indicated, the custom was not uniquely affecting the church. The fact that cultured women of higher status, could not observe the cultural custom could suggest that they were influenced by their broader context.

On a similar note, Terry (1995: 26) quotes Bruce as having declared that:

In the cultural milieu with which Paul was not familiar (both Jewish and Tarsian) it was not normally reckoned proper or seemingly for a woman to flout these standards and appear in public with her head uncovered, still less to pray to God in public thus, this is something he invites his readers to judge for themselves.

Among the Romans, even men covered their heads during worship services. Terry (1995: 27) quotes Plutarch as having asked the following fundamental question:

... why is it that when they worship the gods, they cover their heads, but when they meet any of their fellow-men worthy of honour, if they happen to have the toga over the head, they uncover.

In view of the above, we can observe that the head covering that Paul advocates bears more of the liturgical connotations and he is not himself the author of the practice. In the Greco-Roman environment as afore-observed above, head covering was practised but for different reasons. For example, Roman men and women covered their heads when they worshiped while among the Greeks, both men and women uncovered their heads as they worshiped. In this regard two observations can be made: Firstly, what Paul advocated in this chapter goes against the cultural realities of the day where already people of high status did not strictly observe the custom and applied the influence of broader society in which uncovered heads were part of normal styles hair and expressions of liberty. Secondly, what we find in this text is therefore not a Christian general norm to be timelessly applied elsewhere, but a Corinthian Christian contextual issue that may or may not find its parallel counterpart context of modern times.

#### **3.3.3.6 Drunkenness at the Lord's Supper**

Drunkenness at the Lord's supper is another problem that Paul addresses in the Corinthian Christianity. It appears that the Corinthian believers were celebrating the Lord's supper in a less sacramental manner. The people who reported for the celebration early could not wait for the late comers and many of them were getting drunk. Perhaps this problem springs from two standpoints: Firstly, as Gundry (1994: 366) suggests, maybe the Corinthians took so sacramental a view of the Lord's supper that they thought the more the bread and the wine, the more the divine grace. Secondly, their drunkenness could be as result of some kind of overspill from their immediate context. In the ancient world, drunkenness was sometimes considered as part of a religious rite, particularly in the worship of Greek gods. Within the vicinity of Corinth, was the Dionysus cult that stressed religious intoxication (Budd 1975: 514). Drinking of undiluted wine at meals was a custom. However, even if drunkenness was part of worship in a broader sense, at most religious ceremonies it was not condoned (Terry 1995: 31). Perhaps this was the basis for the Corinthian drunkenness at the Lord's supper.

### **3.3.3.7 Ecstasy**

In chapters 12-14 Paul is pre-occupied with issues concerning the spiritual gifts in the Church (cf. 1: 7, 12: 4, 28-31). A whole range of what we can summarise as spectacular and non-spectacular gifts are discussed. In his discussion, Paul affirms the reality of these gifts and advocates orderly and unselfish utilisation thereof. The issue of ecstasy, which Paul tries to combat, can be traced back to Greek religion which had elements that emphasised it particularly in the worship of Dionysius (Terry 1995: 31). It was obvious that the Corinthians had great enthusiasm for ecstasy because it was part and parcel of the festivals within their cultural environment. Coming from such a cultural setting where meetings were noisy and celebrative, the Corinthians wanted the same environment to prevail in Church. Paul's call for order and non-selfish attitude was in a way culturally offensive.

### **3.3.3.8 Resurrection of the Body**

The entire chapter 15 is devoted to matters of the resurrection from the dead. This is one of the issues that this study will pursue further. The whole discussion is prompted by the denial of the resurrection by "some" among the Corinthian Christians (15: 12). For the purposes of this study, at this moment we can only indicate that the bodily resurrection of the dead was a wider problem than the Corinthian Church confines. It was rooted both in Greek thought and some Jewish sectarian view that denied it. Quoting ancient Greek sources Terry (1995: 33f) shares with us such thoughts as expressed in the following extracts:

... When the dust has drained the blood of a man, once he is slain, there is no resurrection ...

I know no way how by more words to bring the dead back to life ... If the dead can rise, you may look to see Astyages the Mede rise up against you; but if nature's order be not changed, assuredly no harm to you will arise from Smerdis.... These persons, to wit, say that many bodies of those who have come to an unhappy death in shipwrecks and rivers have become food for fishes and many of those who perish in war or who from other sad course or state of things are deprived of burial, lie exposed to become the food of any animals which may chance to light upon them.

These thoughts reveal the denial of the resurrection of the body and may have been reactions to the Christian kerygma that undoubtedly affirmed that the dead will be

resurrected on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The problem might have also rested on doctrinal error that must have stressed the realised eschatology and preached that the resurrection had already taken place.

As we have observed above, Jewish thought denied the resurrection of the body thereby making it very difficult for the Corinthians to easily believe that the dead will rise. It is not clear whether or not the denial of the bodily resurrection by “some among” the Corinthians, was a genuine attempt to contextualise the Christian gospel into the Greek culture and thought.

We may conclude that the above brief survey has indicated the reality of culture in the 1 Corinthians and that these cultural aspects gave form not only to the problems, but also the solutions suggested by Paul. Any interpretation that ignores these cultural aspects misses the essence of the kerygma. New Testament interpretation seem to have realised the significance of culture in this regard as evidenced by scholarly efforts that call for integration of culture in interpretation. Therefore, the question that remains for our study is how a specific culture would make a reading of 1 Corinthians in the light of what has been described. Does African culture hinder or enhance the interpretation of 1 Corinthians today. These and many more are the issues to occupy this study in the next section.

#### CHAPTER 4: AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON 1 CORINTHIANS

In order to discuss African perspectives on one Corinthians, it is important for us to understand the African culture, which we contend to be a premise for African interpretation as far as the reader's perspective is concerned. African culture in this study will be discussed with reference to the Chewa culture. The Chewa culture is chosen for two reasons: Firstly, it is to establish a genuine entry point into the African culture by investigating one of the large groups of Africans spread over Eastern Zambia, many parts of Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. This Bantu group is known by many names yet it is one group. For example when people discuss the Nyanja, Mang'anja, Chewa, Chipeta or Goŵa people, they are speaking about one *Cinyanja speaking people*. Most of these designations emerged as some of the members of this cinyanja speaking people moved to some other place while other's remained. As they split most of the times peacefully or otherwise, they called each other names, some of which carried the connotation of places, events or circumstances in which they lived and settled. Although it can hardly be denied that Cinyanja language differs<sup>85</sup> from Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, the difference can be attributed to influences from other tribes, nationalities and languages that each group encountered, but they remain members of the same Cinyanja<sup>86</sup> speaking people. The other influence came from individual contextual attempts to include in their language new insights which were never conceptualised before and here the ready example comes from counting of days forward and backwards and also animals and personal effects (cf. Nthara 1949: 40-121, 167). The second reason for selecting the Chewa culture is because it is the culture of the author and therefore it provides privileges to discuss it not only from a scholarly perspective but also within the participatory perspective and as one who is affected by the same.

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<sup>85</sup> There are other linguistic differences affecting preferences of choice vowel and consonant combinations that for the purposes of this study are not necessary to discuss e.g. the use of "A" instead of "O" in the vocative case - "A Banda!" Instead of "O Banda!" (Mr. Banda sir) and "N" instead of "M" thus one would say "Nkristu" instead of "Mkristu"(Christian) (cf. Nthara 1949: 168).

<sup>86</sup> Modern Cinyanja linguists prefer to call the language Chinyanja or Chichewa while calling the tribe as Chewa.

#### **4.1 General Perspectives on African (Chewa) culture**

As aforementioned, African culture is the core of existence for African peoples. This statement rests on the fact that culture generally embraces the people's value system, thought pattern and forms the hermeneutic framework regardless of who such a people are. What people accept or reject is usually assessed through their cultural text, which is inseparably part of them. For this reason, our study will briefly describe the Chewa people and their culture for the reasons indicated above.

##### **4.1.1 The Chewa People**

There is very little written history that explains the origins and movements of the Chewa people. A number of factors may contribute to this unfortunate situation. It seems two of these factors played major roles and these are: Firstly, the Chewa history mainly circulated orally. The elders told stories of their experiences as they travelled from one place to another and as they chatted around the fire in the evenings. Secondly, these Chewa forefathers did not know how to read and write their history. Up to now there are very few good resources for the study of the history of the Chewa people as if it is meant to suggest that the oral tradition and lack of interest to write down history continue to be a reality. Only a few outstanding written works like those of Archibald J. Makumbi and Samuel Y. Nthara, which are utilised in this study are available. Oral sources have actually no limitation though the reduction of the life-expectance age among the Chewa people renders this claim questionable. The current generation of Chewa elders were not part of the original group that probably displaced the Bushmen as the archaeological paintings and writings in caves in many parts of Zambia and Malawi suggest. Some of such famous caves are the *Mphuzi cave* in Dedza, Malawi and *Munali and Mphangwe hills* in Zambia. The writings in caves discovered by some of the early Chewa traveller's confirm that the places occupied by modern Chewa people must have been occupied by some other different tribes. Tribal wars must have been fought with the Chewa winning although normally the Chewa people are not a militant tribe. The fact the the current Chewa land must have been occupied by some other unknown tribes can be confirmed for example, by what Nthara (1949: 2) tells us as he writes concerning the Mphunzi cave:

... Ndipo ati m'phangamo muli malemba osadziwika amene adalemba; ndipo utoto umene adalemba sudziwikanso. Anthu amene acokela komweko akuti, kumene kunthera phangalo kunali munthu wakale wakufa ndipo tsopano adauma tsungwa. Ndipo sitidziwa ngati ali pobe tsopano. Chifukwa ca zimenezi tikhulupirira kuti kale m'dziko lino munali anthu a mtundu wina.

(... And it is reported that in the cave were writings whose author is unknown; and the type of paint that was used in writing is unknown too. People from the vicinity of the cave report that at the end of the cave were the remains of a person of the olden age, who died and was embalmed. We do not know whether or not the remains are still there. In view of the above, we believe that long ago, there were other people in this Country - DTB).

In the above quotation, there are some interesting observations that we can make. In the first place, as already indicated, Nthara confirms that other people had occupied areas that are currently occupied by the Chewa people. In the second place, most of Nthara's sources seem to be oral. The words "ati" and "akuti" are only applied in a context where the communicator is quoting a verbal statement that had been issued earlier on. This is the reason why we have translated it as "reported" and not simply "said" which is another possibility. The other observation is that even if Nthara writes from the perspective of Nyassaland (current Malawi), his findings equally apply to Rhodesia (current Zambia and Zimbabwe) and Mozambique where the Chewa people settled.

In short even if we do not have many written source, the Chewa people are part of the Bantu-speaking people. They moved from the Luba-Lunda Kingdom in the Congo basin to occupy areas which currently are parts of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique and they took on different names such as: Achewa, Anyanja, Amang'anja, Achipeta and Agowa to mention but a few. All these people are members of one Chichewa-speaking group (cf. Nthara 1949: 2-3;) under one paramount chief Kalonga Gawa Undi whose headquarters is Mkaika in Katete, Zambia.

#### **4.1.2 The Chewa Culture: Major Tenets**

The Chewa culture like many other African cultures is embedded in its worldview. The Chewa people view, perceive, organise and order reality in terms of their worldview.

The belief system is related to their perception of the world. Let us briefly survey this worldview in line with our study<sup>87</sup> through the following:

#### 4.1.2.1 Unitive Cosmology

The Chewa people like other African people view reality and life in unitary terms. Life in the world is not compartmentalised into for instance: Matter and spirit, profane and sacred, secular and religious. Reality is a unity with visible and invisible, good and evil dimensions inseparably belonging together (cf. Ukpong 1995: 8). Even when the Chewa person is exposed to the Westernised worldview that views reality like a machine that can be compartmentalised and is schooled in such, at the back of the mind the unitive view is retained. Where the Chewa person like other African persons propagates a compartmentalised worldview, it is either for a specific gain or a clear case of living with psychological cognitive dissonance. This unitive view informs many things including African anthropology. The human being *Munthu*<sup>88</sup> is viewed as one holistic being with *thupi*<sup>89</sup> and *moyo*<sup>90</sup>. Such anthropology is related to the general view of reality in which the many components contribute to the whole. For example death to which we shall return latter on, brings change in the mode of existence from *Umoyo* to *Uzimu*<sup>91</sup>, from *Dziko Lino*<sup>92</sup> to *Kulichete*<sup>93</sup>, yet the pairs are part and parcel of the same human life (cf. Banda 1999: 23). The dead, though dwelling in *Kulichete* (invisible world of silence), are still part of the living and can interact with the living through dreams though the dead themselves cannot be seen (cf. Ukpong 1995: 9 and Mbiti 1988: 97). Once again this perception of reality affects many things and is crucial to the African culture. Christian life is worth believing in if it is not only a part of life but it is in itself life, which can be lived everywhere.

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<sup>87</sup> Some of the ideas are just an upgraded version on what is contained in my master's degree thesis (Banda 1999) in sections 4.3.1 - 4.3.2.4 where the similar issues were discussed. I am here still dependent on that work.

<sup>88</sup> Chewa term which means "human being".

<sup>89</sup> Body

<sup>90</sup> Life

<sup>91</sup> Spiritual or ancestral

<sup>92</sup> This world

<sup>93</sup> "Quiet place", as a designation for the dwelling of the "living-dead", in this case the invisible world.

In this case it is interesting to note that some of what Neyrey (cf. 1990: 16) discusses in his "six specific areas of a given culture" fit in the above description though his perspectives may not be the same. For example what he discusses separately as *purity* and *cosmology* are covered here and partly by the section that follows.

If the New Testament text has to create impact, its interpretation as a whole is called upon to address the people holistically and not in a compartmentalised fashion. In order for interpretation to address its audience holistically, it must in itself be a holistic or an integrative endeavour. In this vein, the holistic and integrative character bear a slant towards the serious consideration of this unitive view of reality as an essential component of African culture.

#### 4.1.2.2 Belief in Mlengi

The belief in Mlengi (God) is central to many life-events of the Chewa people. God, humanity and creation are interconnected. Because God is *Mlengi*, *Nyamalenga*, *Mulungu*<sup>94</sup>, there is a network of relationships linking God to humanity and the cosmos. Both human beings and nature participate in the life of God who orderly created and sustains all things. Among God's creation, humankind occupies a central place. God exercised his power when creating the earth as a home of humankind and he exercises his same power in sustaining the world so that it functions orderly. Seasons come and go in an orderly manner to allow humankind to discover events suitable for each season<sup>95</sup>. Nature was created by God to meet the needs of wo/man. The power of God also affects visible, invisible, present and future things. This view agrees with Mbiti's (1991: 43): description of man as the centre of the universe in African belief as he writes

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<sup>94</sup> Chewa expressions. *Mlengi*, *Nyamalenga* and *Mulenga* are all addressing God as creator and provider. These divine titles are derived from the verb *lenga* (create) the prefixes and suffixes convey specification.

<sup>95</sup> This concept is confirmed by proverbs like *wachela msampha kumwezi* (you have laid the trap during moonlight). This proverb is used to mock someone who has missed something precious. The fundamental conviction is that when the moon is shining the animal easily notices a trap and avoids it. The right season for trapping animals is when there is no moonlight.

Because man thinks of himself as being at the centre, he consequently sees the universe from that perspective. It is as if the whole world exists for man's sake. Therefore African peoples look for the usefulness (or otherwise) of the universe to man. This means that both what the world can do for man, and how man can use the world for his own wellbeing. This attitude towards the universe is engrained in African peoples. For that reason many people have, for example, divided animals into those which man can eat and those, which he cannot eat. Others look at plants in terms of what can be eaten by people, what can be used for curative or medical purposes, what can be used for building, fire, and so on.

The Chewa culture embraces most of these issues that Mbiti brings out. In this case, from a Chewa perspective, a conversionistic response to the world would in a way make sense because what affects people affects the world. Life is so bonded together as Daneel (1970: 17) puts it (though he only describes the Shona people) that:

... no distinction can be made between sacred and secular, between natural and supernatural, for nature man and the unseen are inseparably involved in one another in a total community.

In this regard, calamities such as drought and plagues, illnesses and/or even the death of someone who commits suicide or dies during childbirth are all believed to always have an outside cause and as indicative of impurity within the matrix. For example when the elders of the village explain to the urban dweller the sudden death of either a woman who died during childbirth or someone who has committed suicide, they tell the visitor that his/her relative died out of *ziomtaka* (cf. Mbiti 1991: 118). This word conveys the strong belief that someone elsewhere played bad magic that led to the death. In other words almost everything has a cause and in the final analysis the bad events like the ones described above are interpreted as the punishment of the living from the outside world either God or *azimu*<sup>96</sup> (ancestors). In the face of calamity of any kind the elders of the village are challenged to carry out a post-mortem and advise the village to either make peace or expel persons suspected to be responsible for the impurity that has brought about calamity. Describing the belief of many Africans in the "mystical order in the universe" Mbiti (1991: 42-43). points out that:

It is the knowledge of this mystical power which is used to help other people (especially in

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<sup>96</sup> This word literally means the spirits but actually referring to the ancestors or living dead.

healing, rain-making, finding the cause of misfortunes and troubles, detecting thieves, and so on), or to harm them. When it is used harmfully, it is regarded as evil magic, witchcraft or sorcery; and it may also be used in curses. The ordinary people do not know much about this mystical power. It may take a long time for someone to be trained in the knowledge and use of mystical power; and such knowledge is often safeguarded and kept secret. In some cases the ability to use this mystical power is simply inherited or passed on without the conscious intention of those concerned. Once a person has discovered that he has some of this power, he may then proceed to undertake further training in using it, or he may just neglect it

Though such issues are not in the documented history of the Chewa people, what Mbiti states applies to them as well. The issue of keeping a secret of mystical powers is still very much alive. There is another belief that the more one exposes the powers he or she possesses to manipulate nature and affect others, the more such powers will weaken. In fact, if there are any village professors that can train the novice in such knowledge and practice, it is done secretly with very few people knowing and the entire family of such persons is feared and treated with suspicion in almost all matters of village life.

As the broader relationship with nature, the killing and eating of certain animals and cutting of certain trees are believed to bring catastrophe and therefore forbidden. For example in many Chewa villages one finds a beautiful black and white bird called *tyetye* or *twetwe* as others call it. The sight of *rats* is not scarce too in many villages all round the year. Though these species would have been so easy to eat, even in times of hunger and starvation neither *tyetye* nor *rats* are edible. What would surprise an outsider is that when the people of any village go to a nearby bush even within a distance less than a kilometre and finds a hole where mice reside, he or she may spend even three hours digging mice for eating. Though mice and rats look alike and undoubtedly they are of the same species, rats are not edible because like the *tyetye* they are too close to human life and people believe that there is something of human life in these species and so they cannot be edible. The same principle is applied to the eating of the fruits from a fruit tree that grows close to /on the graveyard. Many people will not eat of it for reasons that such fruits share something of human. People who cross the boundaries and eat of these prohibited species and many others, are regarded as abnormal and rebellious and are responsible for any calamity because they committed *malodza* (taboo).

The interrelationship involving humankind and nature underlines the view of the cosmos as what wo/man depends on for the supplies of livelihood because it is a means through which *Nyamalenga* (God of providence) meets the need of humankind. In this regard a revolutionist view is totally irreverent to the Chewa/African worldview because in Africa, land is so connected to life that it cannot even be commercially sold. It belongs to the people on which they buried their ancestors. When the elders performed burials of the dead, all the living polled dust on the caskets not only to signify farewell but also as a symbolic message to the living-dead, declaring that *the land you have left for us we shall preserve and utilise*. In this case, Neyrey's specific areas of a given culture which he calls *purity, rites, sin* and *cosmology* are all interwoven here (cf. Neyrey 1990: 16). We can sum up this aspect by emphasising that belief in *Mlengi* extends to the realisation that humankind stands in a matrix of relationships involving *Mlengi*, nature and humankind. It is such a matrix of relationships that informs another equally important aspect that we explore below.

#### 4.1.2.3 Community Based Lifestyle

The African worldview is very much influenced by a strong sense of community life. The core of this strong sense of community oriented lifestyle is the unitive view of reality and firm belief in the existence of the matrix of relationships involving God (mentioned in different titles each of which conveys a specific attribute), nature and humankind. In many African cultures an individual is a person amidst others. "Others" in this case include God and nature as already repeated a number of times thereby forming a kind of "African trinitarian community" of *God, nature* and *people*. The expression of life is not as Descartes' dualistic and egocentric philosophical conception proclaims *cogito ergo sum* "I think therefore I exist" (cf. Higgs 1982: 149; Dooyeweerd 1953: 196) which has influenced the Western world. In Africa, as demonstrated by many tribes in Zambia, for example the Chewa people, the philosophical conception is *ali awiri ndi anthu kalikokha nkanyama* ("an individual who leads an isolated life is as good as an animal"). And another proverb states: *Cala cimodzi siciphwanyansabwe* (One finger does not crush a louse to death). In the

village where people cannot afford chemicals to kill lice, the only way of killing lice is crushing them one by one. The exercise cannot be done with one finger but by placing the louse between the fingers and then crush it to death. The proverb symbolically indicates that life and problem resolution takes place in the community. In other words, no single person is an island and life is life in a community. Hence *cogito ergo sum* as a principle of life would become *I belong to a family*<sup>97</sup> *therefore I live* thereby replacing “I think therefore I live” as an expression of life. Life has meaning in the limitless or unlimited relationship networks. Although the Chewa people like all Africans are highly rational people and their rationality is validated by numerous contextual proverbs some of which we have quoted, the “*ergo*” proves existence not by mere rationality but beyond rationality by a community oriented lifestyle. The weakness that one who is not African would see is that the long chain of relationships important within the network is burdensome. The reality however, is that what the outsider sees as a weakness in some specific sense actually in other perspectives offers strength. The community provides a fair share of an individual’s role and sets out safeguards for the community. This aspect makes a parallel with what Malina (1997) describes as “Honour and Shame” as primary values in the Mediterranean world when he persuasively argues:

The values of the first century were mainly *honour* and *shame*. *Honour* refers to a person’s worth as a person and to the recognition of his worth by others. *Shame*, on the other hand, refers chiefly to people’s (especially women’s) mindfulness of their public reputation. Shame, therefore, was also a positive value.

In ancient times man was chiefly motivated by a desire to have his own values accepted by others. Of course, the individual’s group played the main role in the matter. The individual’s good name was maintained when the group recognised his honour. Thus it was essential for people to know, and then to conform to the standards of their group. When a person overstepped the mark (as when a child defied his parents, or when a pupil disobeyed his teacher), or when his claim to public honour was not acknowledged, he was punished, even expelled from the community.

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<sup>97</sup> In the Chewa culture like many African cultures, “family” can mean immediate extended family, the whole clan, village or broader society.

He was then branded as a fool, sinner, sot, heathen, and the like. Because such persons without honour had no positive status, they were excluded from the everyday life of the community, which boiled down to a social death sentence

The community accords the individual the most important aspect of personal credentials. What one has acquired becomes of secondary value. Even when a man has to find a spouse, the village elders of the woman would only sanction the courtship and later on marriage when they are sure of the community from which the man originates. Issues of poverty or riches have a very insignificant and secondary role to play in comparison with the community or village or family identity. Personal identity is determined and shaped by one's family, clan or community of origin. The community further determines *places, trees, animals and meals* that are forbidden to some category of people and yet permissible to others. Wickedness, sinfulness or foolishness as it is commonly called, in this setting is the violation of the community set regulations and/or "maps" as Neyrey (1990: 25-30) calls them. It must be pointed out that no sense of oppression by the community upon its members is heard of in many African communities. The rights of the individual end where they come into conflict with those of others within the community where everyone belongs. The community is the home of all members and each member has a role to play even if one was considered to be foolish. This is confirmed and expressed by a proverb *chitsilu cidaona nkhondo*<sup>98</sup> (It was a fool who saw the enemy approaching). In a few instances where an individual fight his community, it is believed that it is the individual who has violated the community code of conduct because *Njira ya nzeru siipita pa mutu wa munthu m'modzi* (The route of wisdom does not pass through an individual's head) and *Samva za anzace adamva nkhwangwa ili m'mutu* (He who does not consider the wisdom [counselling] of others and disobeys, obeyed when he was axed in the head).

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<sup>98</sup> A common story among the Chewa people is told around the fire in the evenings: One day in one village, all the people were rejoicing because the harvest season had finished and everyone in the village had enough food. As celebrations were going on at the place of the chief, one fool who had abstained from the celebrations and was in a tree outside the village saw a group of the enemy tribe approaching the village. He shouted and went to sound the drum of war. Most of the people abandoned the celebrations and ran away to the caves. The enemy came and killed those who had ignored the fool's warning. The survivors praised the fool and taught their young ones to respect and value the fool because if he had not seen the enemy and sounded the warning, the whole village would have perished.

These philosophical propositions usually convey the cardinal fact that among the Chewa people, like other African peoples, unity and community life are very important cultural aspects of *umunthu* (being human), which everyone lives to protect. Malina's "Honour and Shame" becomes a status within the community and not outside. In this case, we can point out that among the Chewa people, "Shame" is always negative and a shameless person is considered either a misfit or a fool.

We may summarise this aspect by emphasising once again that African culture is community oriented and the community maps out boundaries and the shape of its identity and that of its members through symbolism, taboos and proverbs. All forms of communication functions within the framework of the above. The community functions not like a machine that one lives to manipulate, but as a place where life in its fullness is formed and fulfilled. It provides a forum for serious and sensitive contemplation and performance of events and acts perceived crucial to the survival of the people. For example, during times of natural calamities like drought and starvation, religious rituals like prayer are a responsibility of the whole community and not subjective individuals only. The *Mfumu* (Chief) / *Mfumukazi* (Chieftainness) or *Nyakwawa* (Headman/Headwoman) leads his or her people to some chosen sacred place to offer rituals or prayers. The communal nature of such activities can be detected from the following extract from an African prayer:

**MFUMU:**

- Mamawe-e-e-e... Hi! hi! Hi!
- Bambo Mtekanjiru iwe-e-e-e!
- Mai Mdauyana iwe-e-e-e!
- Ayo ine-e-e-e... hi! hi! Hi!
- Kum'mero kwauma ife-e-e-e!
- Tikufa ndi njala mayo-o-o-o!
- Munatisiyira nkhondo mayo-o-o-o!
- Tinalakwanji Kalanga ine-e-e-e!
- Mayo ine-e-e-e! Mayo ine-e-e-e!
- Ndiwalera bwanji ana mayo-o-o-o!
- Ndisunga bwanji mudzi mayo-o-o-o!
- Tipatseni mvula nditani ine-e-e-e!
- Inu **Chauta/ Chiuta** mvula tipatseni-i-i-i!
- Inu **Leza** madzi mutipatse-e-e-e!
- Inu **Chisumphu** tidalakwanji-i-i-i!
- Inu **Nyamalenga** tidyenji ife-e-e-e!
- Gogo Cirumpha m'natisiya ife-e-e-e!
- Tazunzika nao umasiye ife-e-e-e!
- Nditani ine, nditani ine-e-e-e!
- Padakakhala cirombo, cikanangopha Chirombo chilikuti cindidyene ine-e-e-e!
- Imfa tenge, tenge, tenge ine-e-e-e!

- Taonani anthuwa nditani nao ine-e-e-e!
- Kalanga toto! Kalanga ine-e-e-e!
- Tipatseni mvula, tipatseni lero-o-o-o!
- Ngakhale mocepa landilani izi -i-i-i!

**ONSE:** *Kubvomereza mwakuyimba m'manja and kunena pepa! Pepa! Pepa!*

- Landirani **Mphambe**, landirani tsono-o-o-o!
- Mvula bwerani! Mvula bweretsani-i-i-i!
- Tibvumbweni tonse kum'mero kwauma-a-a-a!

**CHORUS:**

- *Mfumu: Mvula-a-a-a!(4)*
- *Onse: Kolole-e-e-e!*
- *Mfumu: Kamtambo ndi aka ndi aka-a-a-a!(2)*
- *Onse: Kanya mvula nd'yaka kamtambo-o-o-o!(2)*
- *Mfumu: Gokwe-e-e-e!(2)*
- *Onse: Kolole-e-e-e!*
- Tipatseni mvula!
- Ticitireni cifundo
- Tithandizeni, tabvutika ife ana anu, mwatumira mtima
- Nsembe napereka, nalankhula, pepani ndithu muticitire ife cifundo.

The above prayer can be translated as follows:

**CHIEF:**

- Dear me!!!.....hi! hi! Hi!
- You! Our father (forefather-DTB) Mtekanjiru!!!
- You! Our mother Mdauyana!!!
- Dear me!!!.....hi! hi! Hi!!!
- Oh!!! Our throats are dry!!!
- Oh!!! We are dying of hunger!!!
- Oh!!! You left us untold misery!!!
- Dear me!!! What wrong have we committed!!!
- Oh dear me!!!.....Oh dear me!!!
- Oh how shall I nurse these children (people -DTB)!!!
- Oh how shall I keep the village!!!
- Oh what shall I do!!! Give us rains!!!
- Honourable **Chauta/ Chiuta**<sup>99</sup> give us rains!!!
- Honourable **Lesu/Leza**<sup>100</sup> give us water!!!
- Honourable **Cisumphu**<sup>101</sup> what wrong have we committed!!!
- Honourable **Nyamalenga**<sup>102</sup> what shall we eat!!!
- Our grand **Chirumphu**<sup>103</sup> you have neglected us!!!
- We have suffered the misery of being orphans!!!
- Oh what shall I do!!! What shall I do!!!
- Where is the wild beast to devour me!!!
- Death, swallow me, swallow me, swallow me!!!
- See!!! What shall I do with all these people!!!

<sup>99</sup> Name of God literary meaning *possessor of the great bow and arrow*. The bow and arrow are used for protection against the enemy and also provision of food particularly meat products. As Cauta God provides.

<sup>100</sup> Name of God especially among the Nsenga people or the Chewa people of Petauke district who live in villages bordering signifying God's power over nature.

<sup>101</sup> Another name of God.

<sup>102</sup> Name of God used to indicate that God is the creator of all things.

<sup>103</sup> Name of one of the deceased senior members of /or forefathers the clan.

- Oh no!!! Dear me!!!
- Give us rains! Give us today!!!
- Receive our humble offering!!!

The rest of the people solemnly acknowledge by clapping of hands and exclaiming: “forgive us!, forgive us!”

- Honourable **Mphambe**<sup>104</sup> receive, receive now our sacrifice!!!
- Rains come! You honourable bring us rains!!!
- Let us all be soaked, our throats are dry!!!

**CHORUS:**

- **LEADER-** Rain now!!!(4)
- **ALL-** Look! Look!!!
- **LEADER-** Oh little cloud! Here is the cloud! Here is the cloud!!!(2)
- **ALL-** Oh yes! This is the cloud, which brings rains!!!(2)
- **LEADER-** Rain now!!!(2)
- **ALL-** Oh look! Oh look!!!
- Give us rains!!!
- Be merciful to us!!!
- Help us, we your children have suffered enough, have you harden your heart!!
- We have offered the sacrifice and pleaded for forgiveness, show mercy to us!!

A few observations can be made from the above-prayer: Firstly, the communal nature of it goes far beyond doubt. The people are not only taken out to a place of prayer to observe their leader performing prayer. They all participate in the liturgy with their own part to play in response to the leading words of the chief or chieftainness. Secondly, the unitive worldview and communal character of life are as well depicted. The people have a need of something that is part of nature (rain) for their survival and relief. The leader even appeals to the beast to kill him if it happens that his prayer is not answered. The prayer furthermore involves *Bambo Mtekanjiru* (Mr. Mtekanjiru) and *Bambo Cirumpha* (Mr. Cirumpha) who died a long time ago and are at the time of the prayer according to Chewa tradition known as *Nthaka* (the late) *Mtekanjiru* and *Chirumpha*. Yet prayer is directed to God who is addressed in titles; *Chauta/Chiuta*, *Leza*, *Chisumphi* and *Nyamalenga* of which, each depicts what they have experienced of him. Again we see the same underlining trinitarian view of characters of life namely, *God*, *nature* and *ourselves* (with our living dead).

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<sup>104</sup> Name of God (emphasising God’s sovereignty).

Therefore, when the biblical message is preached to an African audience, it is weighed and interpreted against these conceptions of Africanness which are applied to a concrete reality which we now examine below.

#### 4.1.2.4 Concreteness

Africans are generally very practical people. To them, the practical approach to problems and concerns of life is much more appealing than theoretical rationalisation. Abstract views and explanations are to Africans of little or no meaning and value. For the purposes of this study we demonstrate the concrete character of African is two ways: The first demonstration concerns religiosity and prayer. As we can see in the example of an African prayer extract above, God is addressed and challenged not in abstract terms but as a caring living *Cauta, Cisumphi* who hear prayer and can act in response. The prayer participants clap hands, make bodily movements and literary point to the cloud that promises them the rain that they pray for. There is a common perception among the Chewa people concerning the people whom God helps. This perception is that *God helps those who help themselves*. A common story in Chewa fiction is told of two people who had gone hunting. Suddenly a hungry lion charged against them. One of them ran to the tree and while running he cried to God for help until he climbed to the highest branch of a tree. The other man knelt down, closed his eyes and cried to God for protection. The lion came nearer and nearer and suddenly pounced on its victim and dragged him to the nearby bush for a meal. Then the question is asked: Who of the two prayed for God's intervention? The correct answer is given, as "the man who climbed the tree" because climbing the tree was a contextual prayer. Equally, when the Chewa people walk across the forest and they come through a place where they suspect that a snake just crossed, they take some soil and throw it behind them in the opposite direction. If the journey is still long and the sun is almost setting, they take a stone and put it *pa mphanda ya mtengo* (between two branches of a tree) that is close to the path or road particularly if it is near a village. Perhaps it is necessary to point out that there is nothing magical in these acts that have survived to the present day.

These acts of throwing dust behind and putting a stone between branches are symbolic acts of prayer for security and that they should not meet with dangerous animals or any calamity on the way.

The second demonstration can be drawn from the way in which time is measured. It is incorrect to generalise and claim that Africans do not observe time. To the contrary, time is very important to all Africans just as it is to all other people. The difference in the time concept concerns the manner in which it is measured and accounted for. It was Mbiti (1990: 37) who argues that:

... African ideas of time concern mainly the present and the past, and have little to say about the future, which in any case is expected to go on without end. Events come and go in the form minor and major rhythms. The minor rhythms are found in the lives of the living things of this earth (such as men, animals and plants), in their births, growths, procreation and death. These rhythms are thought to occur in the lives of every body and everything that has physical life. The major rhythms of time are events like day and night, months (reckoned on the basis of the phases of the moon), the seasons of rain and of dry weather, and the events of nature which come and go at greater intervals (such as the flowering of certain plants, the migration of certain birds and insects, famines, and the movement of certain heavenly bodies).

From the above quotation a number of interesting issues related to the African concept of time emerges. Time is not an abstract concept that one only measures with a machine known as a clock or watch. Time goes beyond the clock/watch indication to point out to the events that currently take place or have taken place in the past. The underlining philosophy to this understanding and knowledge of time is the concrete approach to life and reality. When the Westernised mind is concerned with "clock hours" and the future, the African mind becomes preoccupied with what has been achieved today, the recent past and the distant past. The emphasis on such ideas of time falls more on the present and the past because the present and the past can be more concretely assessed than the future, which in any case remains important though not so important as the past and the present. It is this concreteness in thought pattern that inform and influence other equally important aspects of African life such as marriage and life after death to which we now turn.

#### 4.1.2.5 Concept of Marriage

Besides birth and death, marriage marks a very crucial phase of African life. The community-oriented lifestyle discussed above is rooted in marriage as a core for the family, which is the basic unit of the community and society. Among the Chewa people just like other African peoples, marriage is so important that it includes the communities of the man and the woman that marry. It is a mark of the union of the clan or communities of the two (man and woman) who join in marriage. Marriage can be understood from a number of perspectives among many Africans and the Chewa concept provides for us an entry into some of these perspectives. What has been indicated above is just one perspective, namely the community perspective. This perspective further views marriage as a means and guarantee for its continuity. It is for this reason that other people have called it the "garden concept of marriage" because of the emphatic expectation of children. Members of the community close to a couple encourage, arrange, and monitor the couple's conjugal activities. Two examples may suffice to qualify the observation. When people are newly married, both the man and woman are discouraged from maintaining strong relationships with the unmarried peers. The man is frequently given assignments with the elderly who educates the young man in essential skills such as hunting, house construction<sup>105</sup>, granary shelter construction, making hoe and axe handles, and mart-marking skills to mention but a few. During the same time, the senior women monitor's the wife's pounding and other domestic skills in the village.<sup>106</sup> When a man comes home, the other women cleverly smear some maize/corn-meal or white powder at the back of the head of the woman (most of the time without her knowledge) and encourage her to go and greet the husband or give him some food. When she returns, the women check the powder that was smeared. If they do not find it, they conclude that the couple has had sex, and they rejoice as further convince themselves that the couple is doing well. Meanwhile, soon after the wedding, the grandmother asks for a big log of firewood for her home fire when it is cold.

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<sup>105</sup> Particularly roofing so that houses at the wife's village which have bad roofs can be repaired.

<sup>106</sup> This scenario is applicable in the village set up. In cities and remarriages, many things are either avoided, negotiated or performed so secretly that only relatives and close allies know monitor the observance thereof.

Even if the reason given indicates that she uses it as explained, actually, the log helps her count the duration and sexual activities of the new couple. If the log finishes and there is no sign of pregnancy, she starts investigations to determine who is at fault. Both the families of the husband and wife get worried when the sign for the first child does not appear. At this time it may appear that the privacy of the couple and their right to do family planning before the first born are not thought of at all.

All that the community is concerned of is new life from the new couple. Under very extreme cases, when it is discovered that the new couple cannot bear children because the man is a *Ngomwa* (impotent man) the families devise a plan. The wife's family either secretly sends a wife's cousin to have sex with the woman so that she conceives or the two families discuss and the husband's family resolves that the man employs his own cousin or close friend to have sex with the wife and bear children. The children born out of such arrangements belong to the official husband and at no time can the real biological father claim them. Payments in some kind is arranged and secretly paid to the 'employee'. If the families discover that the couple cannot bear children because the woman is a *Chumba* (barren woman), arrangements are made that the husband begins to have (family sanctioned but very secret) sexual intercourse with either the young sister of the wife or the cousins in order to raise the family.<sup>107</sup> If this does not take place, the man goes into polygamy<sup>108</sup> by obtaining permission from the wife to allow him to marry a second or even third wife. Unfortunately, there is no known case among the Chewa people where the woman is officially allowed to go into polyandry and get married to two or more men even in the case in which the failure to bear children is believed to be the fault of the husband.

Although justification of such activities would be hard from the "Christian" perspective, it must not be missed but emphasised that the community does what it does with honourable intentions that intend to preserve this crucial institution of marriage.

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<sup>107</sup> These practices are now reducing and avoided due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Whether one can rule out the existence of such is very doubtful. In many Churches most of the disciplinary cases are still related to either adultery or marriage without the Church's authorisation.

<sup>108</sup> It is a known and acknowledged fact that there are many other factors that make people become polygamists such as economic and social factors, which this study would not wish to pursue further.

It must also be pointed out that even in such a scenario as the one depicted above, intimate and sexual activities among close relatives are totally forbidden except among cousins. Sex in many African societies is only allowed in the context of marriage. This is validated by the observation that people are at times justified for initiating and developing sexual relationships when such relationships are perceived as a way of preserving some marriage that is in crisis. Whether or not these activities really solve these problems could be subject to debate. What seems to be perceivable is the undeniable fact that childlessness poses a problem to the African concept of marriage. In an attempt to find a solution, it seems some extramarital sex sanctioned by the community particularly in favour of men do take place. Individual persons who indulge in sex when they are not married and beyond the community set boundaries are punished by society or surrendered to civil courts of law as offenders.

In view of the above, perhaps the means of solving the problem invite critical analysis and review particularly in respect of the current context where sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS pandemic affect peoples of all cultures. There are cardinal questions that need to be faced in this regard and among them are the following: Can the problem be 'Christianised' by addressing the problem from a Biblical and ethical perspectives? Can we devise and advocate what can be called a 'Christian' means of handling cases of childlessness in the culture that places such importance on children beyond what the Church currently does? Among such responses, would the Church include counselling, medical attention and special nutritional attention to mention but a few?

Another interesting question worth investigating concerns the perspective of the woman and the man who marry, herein after called the 'couple'. How do they view marriage and where do they place emphasis. Undoubtedly, the couple does have a perspective. It appears there are various positions that particular couples take and these can be categorised into two. The first is the *traditional position* wherein the couple approaches marriage as way to legitimise the beliefs, myths and conceptions of marriage that their parents and communities uphold. In this case, the pressures that the community exerts on the new couple, the couple exerts on each other, while retaining

high respect and secret for one another<sup>109</sup> so that marriage can be preserved. The other position we can call the *modern elitist* position in which the couple emphasises things like love, beauty, rights, economic capabilities etc, as a basis for marriage with or without children. On the one hand in the traditional position the community is so dominant that the choice of a partner is subject to its approval and good conduct, reliability and fertility are major consideration for marriage initiation and sustenance. On the other hand the latter position the individual draws out his or her own scale of preferences in which the partner has to suit. The community becomes important only in as far as it supports the individual. Even if the two positions appear to oppose each other, the interesting thing is that many couples live in a combination of the two positions. Many times, the modern elitist position becomes a public position, which can be shared with peers, Church members, work-mates, former schoolmates and people are free to advertise what they are. The traditional position becomes the hidden, private, home-lived and unknown sphere. It is the most difficult sphere of a couple to penetrate because sometimes the couple resorts to wrong and different issues that they make public while at the deeper lever, each one fully knows the real issue other than the triggering event. Once in a while when the couple has small differences, one of them may in public say he or she is ready even to break the marriage bond. History has however, indicated many examples of couples that have remarried even several times and at times under circumstances that are very difficult to understand and apply logic to. Most of such couples persuade each other for *kubwelerana* (remarriage) by putting children at the centre of the argument. Even when the so called children are grown up and have their own homes, people would argue that remarriage is important because of children who should not feel ashamed when they come home to the village with their spouses and/or friends.

This becomes an important hermeneutic framework for expressions and songs composed and sung by Chewa women whose marriages do not automatically lead them to the status of mothers.

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<sup>109</sup> Sharing of marital frustration that one experiences is forbidden by society and anyone who becomes so free to share her or his frustration is termed a fool in society. The bedroom is believed to be a place of secrecy and all that takes place in the bedroom is expected to end there.

Particularly when they suspect that the husband is the one to blame for their state of childlessness, they sing songs of their lamentation and one of such songs that discloses their philosophy is as follows:

N'nayamba kale kulira mwana, (I begun a long time ago yearning<sup>110</sup> for a child)

n'nayamba kale kulira mwana x2

Refrain

Tenga mpeni undicekeeee! N'nayamba kale kulira mwana x2 (Take a knife and cut me to pieces, I begun a long time ago yearning for a child).

The above song which women who have no children sing mostly as they pound grain in the villages is sung loudly. The singer sings out her frustration and registers her complaint to society and her husband. Through singing, she indicates that she is in agony for her status. Since her complaint is expressed in song, the strategy defends her from fellow women who may be gossiping about her childlessness, while at the same time appealing to the husband that he should work hard in seeking ways of alleviating the problem. As aforementioned that people who share publicly their marital frustration are considered to be foolish, singing aloud is the only way she can register the same frustration to the same public without being termed a fool as such. Although there is no traditional explanation for not subjecting the singer of complaints to sanctions, the reason suggests the reality that the African culture is a 'singing and dancing culture'<sup>111</sup> and music plays a very important role in conveying education, information and entertainment through these artful activities.

From the above overview, it is important to note that the concept of marriage among the Chewa people is in no way limited to them. All Africans hold the institution of marriage in high esteem. It is an important institution for both the community and individual members. Among many things that any African aspires for, marriage ranks high because it is crucial to the survival of the family lineage, clan and community. Both broader society and individuals regard Child bearing as the key purpose of marriage. Thus, as far as culture in relation to marriage is concerned, life is bonded

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<sup>110</sup> Literally this word means crying or groaning for something.

<sup>111</sup> In Zambia there many dances which people perform as they sing. A few examples that can be given are: Byototo, Chintali, Chinamwali, Chitelere, Chiwele, Fwemba, Kadai, Kalera, Makishi, Ngoma, Nyau and Vimbuza to mention but a few. Each of these is performed for specific occasions.

together in marriage where the child is born. For this reason, some people can change Churches, jobs, places and even religion as long as they feel and think that they may serve their marriages. Therefore, there is no doubt that any hermeneutic that takes marriage seriously and reaches out to address the fundamental convictions of the people in their cultural context is very welcome to any African audience. Marriage is so important that it is in a unique sense part of one's preparation for another crucial event in life (death) which we discuss below. Among many things that affect life in the thought pattern of an African, marriage and death rank very high.

#### **4.1.2.6 Life after Death**

Among Africans life consists of three major phases which can be called *birth*, *maturity* (where marriage belongs)<sup>112</sup> and *death*. It appears that the greatest celebration of human life takes place at one's death. To be human means to be a being towards a decent burial upon which life activities seem to revolve. No achievement in life is of any meaning and value if it does not contribute to one's own burial preparation. In the above section we have indicated how children are crucial for both the community and the couple who approach motherhood and fatherhood as a high status comparable to none.

Part of such an approach to life in cultural terms, is the crucial role that children are expected to play in the burial and mourning of their parents. The childless persons in society (though acknowledged as full human beings with dignity) are thought of as people who have no one to mourn them. No matter what social advancement and material possessions they may have accumulated, they are looked at with pity and considered unfortunate. It becomes worse if such persons are cruel in society whereas if they are kind, society finds a way of securing their dignity. Since children are very important not only for the individual but much more to the community, the community accommodates the childless couple by encouraging them to regard children in the community theirs as well and so desperation is discouraged. However, people still prefer to have their own children besides children in the community

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<sup>112</sup> Among the Chewa people, the married person is given more responsibility and honour than the unmarried even if the unmarried person was older than the married. One of the pieces of advice given during wedding ceremonies emphasises that the person who has married has by so doing grown.

because of some belief that whatever is owned by the community, has certain limitations on the individual.

The above-mentioned belief is commonly expressed in a common proverb *n'zathu salowa yekha* (They belong to us; so one cannot enter alone). This parable is drawn from the pastoral farming background and teaches that if people own a head of cattle, none of them can decide to go into the kraal of cattle and slaughter or sell any animal unless all parties to the ownership agree. People apply this parable and aim at having children of their own besides the ones belonging to the community. This seems to be the reason why among many well-educated Africans who out of circumstances (chosen or otherwise) prefer not to go into marriage, there is a tendency to father or mother at least a child under specific arrangements that they believe they can handle. A good number of single parents are found among the educated and the city dwellers and not in villages where at least the cultural structures are still surviving.

The rationale behind this is that in spite of all achievements in education, technology, business, economic, socio-political life and even spirituality, a feeling haunts them that when they die, someone should bury them, mourn them and possibly inherit what has been achieved.

During burial and bereavement, it is considered to be an honour to the dead when the bereaved family including the spouse and the children express a sense of loss and missing the dead. From the time of the agony of death (*kuthatha ind imfa*) to the time of actual death, the spouse and the children are expected to start lamenting softly (*kusisima*) while their close friends make every effort to comfort them by encouraging them to be strong and stop them uttering to the bereaved the words: *Tonthorani, limbani mtima* (be silent and courageous or strong).

Lamentation covers the whole period of bereavement and it common among the Chewa people to utter words as they weep. As Van Breugel (2001: 98) correctly sheds insight on this issue when he states:

...lamenting and repeating over and over again the words *mayi ine* (alas). For a child, a mother

will say: *mayi ine* (alas) ... *mwana wanga ine* ( my child) ... *ndilowere kuti ine* (where can I go) ... *ndiyende bwanji ine* ( how can I walk) ... *ndinalakwanji ine* (what did I do wrong) ... *mwana wanga wandisiya ine* (my child left me alone) ... *ndapalamula chiani ine* ( what did I do to provoke this). For a husband, a wife will say: *mayi ine* (alas) ... *ndakhala ine ndekha* ( I stay behind alone) ... *mwandisiya ine ndekha* (you leave me alone behind) ... *andithandiza ndani* (who will help me) ... *mwamunawanga wandisiya ine* (my husband left me alone) ... *ndilira chotani ine* (how can I cry enough).

The above series of unanswered questions express a loss of services that the dead rendered while in living. It is also important to note that in the above-quotation, the unanswered questions expressed during lamentation also includes children whose services may not strictly be missed especially when they die as babies. This inclusion can however, point to a thought pattern that in away elevate the dead regardless to the actual contribution that they rendered while living.

In other words, though surprising, it is not an overstatement to say that the highest honour that a person receives is when she or he dies. If one were to compare birth and death rites, it would undoubtedly be discovered that death by far surpasses birth. Two examples can qualify this statement: In the first place, when a child is born, it is possible to hide from the other members of the community particularly those perceived as enemies to the family with a new-born baby. No drum is sounded in the village to announce the new birth and no official messenger is sent to the surrounding villages or chiefdoms (cf van Breugel 2001: 98). In fact some members of the community only discover much later on, that there is a new baby in the village. When one dies however, the mourning drum is sounded and life in a community slows down and only essential activities are allowed to go on. Even if the person who died had little food, no clothes and no blankets, when she or he dies, the bereaved family seeks clothes and at times buys new blankets for the dead. When items with which the dead has to be buried with are secured, the bereaved family prepares a large meal for the day of burial, which should be large enough for the whole village and other people from the neighbouring villages or communities that attend the burial. Refusal to eat the food offered during or after burial is regarded as refusal to bury the dead and is culturally offensive. While the bereaved family mourns, the other members of society play their part by bathing *citanda /thupi* (the dead body) after observing for some time to ascertain that the person has really died.

All this happens because an important phase of one's life is considered to have arrived. Much to what may be a surprise to non-Africans, the most important pronouncements that a person may make is not when he or she gives an inaugural speech while assuming the responsibilities of a new professional career, but when such a one is on a death bed. Though it is from a perspective of ethics and social morality, Magesa (1997: 144) correctly observes:

The death of a young person in battle is understood, but apart from such circumstances, the death of the young is an inexplicable tragedy that points to moral disorder in the individual's or in society. On the contrary, death in old age is a dignified event. It is expected that old people must demonstrate courage and heroism when faced with death. Such behaviour increases their honour and the influence of their vital force in the eyes of those they leave behind. As a result, the words a person utters at the moments of death have utmost significance. ... The prestige of the aged in death has been frequently enhanced by the significance attributed to their 'last word.' These final statements have often dealt with disposition of property, choice of successors, impartation of special knowledge or council, pledge of special favours from the spirit realm, and pronouncement of blessings - sometimes curses - upon close relatives.

Even if Magesa's description best suits the death of someone who was very responsible, rich and influential, among the Chewa people, the importance of one's death as a phase of transformation, applies to all persons. Regardless of a person's status in life, whether or not she or he was a slave, a fool or free, rich or poor, at death, she or he becomes a *mfumu* (Chief) (cf. Makumbi 1975: 40) and she or he is accorded burial (: 28, 44). The title *mfumu* (Chief) is symbolic of respect, honour and responsibility among the Chewa people. The status of a chief occupies very honourable office in the village life and among the living because he or she also mediates between his people and the powers that be. By calling the dead person *mfumu*, the Chewa people believe that the dead person deserves as much respect and honour as the Chief does. This means that at her or his death, the community accords the person a high status that at times by far surpasses his or her previous status in life.

Due to this high status ascribed to the dead, it is considered a taboo to speak bad things against them. Whether or not a person was cruel, a thief, lazy or very unhelpful

to society, publicly, only the positive elements of her or his life are spoken about and not the dark side of the life of the departed. Another reason for this high regard for the dead seems to be based on some fear that most people have when handling the dead. The dead person is considered to have joined the world of ancestors and spirits or living dead who are believed to be the ones who ensure peace and harmonious relationships, curses or blessings among the living or bring calamity as a form of discipline for any provocation particularly from the bereaved extended family. In this sense, Magea (1997: 145) could be correct purporting that

death is perceived as a change of status, an entrance into a new and deeper relationship with the clan, tribe and family. The end is also a conspicuous beginning. This beginning contained in death is in many cases symbolised by a ritual sexual act, which is the most obvious life-generating act.

Secondly, death among Africans does not only change from the state of 'shame' to 'honour' (cf. Malina 1997) or responsibility, but it points to a much more fundamental state of transformation. One is almost tempted to call this state the 'African transfiguration' (DTB). The state and act of dying is complex and described in many different ways among African peoples. Some of the common examples of such descriptions are:

... returning home, going away, answering the summons, saying 'yes' to death, disappearing, departing, ceasing to eat, ceasing to breathe, sinking, fighting a losing battle, refusing food, rejecting people, sleeping, taking one away, saying goodbye, shutting the eyes, being broken up, being snatched away, being taken away, joining the forefathers, becoming God's property and so on (Mbiti 1991: 119).

Others include: going to live in a one roomed house, going *kulichete* (to a place of silence), going to a place of peace, returning to the fertile earth, going to the village of everyone, disappearing into the air just to mention but a few more.

The variety of words and concepts describing death indicate that Africans view death uniquely. The overtone of these words and concepts points to a fundamental conviction that death is not the end of life. It is believed that beyond the grave life continues though in a different form from physical life before death. On the one hand, it is an exit of physical life and thus, a disruptive mark of departure and separation. On the other hand, however, death is an entry into higher life in which the dead joins

the ancestors and as such remains part of the living as we have already alluded to.

This deep thought manifests in the lives of the bereaved in so many ways that culminate into rituals and ceremonies that they observe. For the purposes of our study, we can discuss only two of such rituals and ceremonies that we consider relevant and these are burial and *m'meto* (shaving of the bereaved soon after burial).

#### 4.1.2.6.1 Burial of the dead

Burial is the common way of disposing off the remains of the dead among many African peoples though other forms of disposal such as burning in campfires and throwing into deep waters are reported among some tribes. Burial ceremonies are usually preceded by preparations of the corpse which differ in terms of duration, time and form from one tribe to another. Among the Chewa people, there are no reports of other forms of disposing off the remains of the dead apart from burial. Other ways of disposing off the remains of the dead such as cremation are not practised. After washing and dressing the corpse is put into the coffin mostly made out of wood though the poor people mostly in villages still make coffins out of *mphasa* (rid-mats). The coffin is carried to a graveyard where it is buried. While dressing the corpse some selected articles particularly those that the dead liked most are put either in the pockets of the clothes that the dead is buried with or they are put into the coffin beside the corpse. Large articles that may not fit into the coffin are put into the grave with the coffin. Among such articles and objects are pipes, some tobacco, axes, walking stick and a bow and arrows. If the dead was a woman or a girl in adolescence, frequently used articles such as cooking pots, baskets, a pestle and other objects she was fond of using in life. Most of the times these objects are broken as they are thrown into the grave in order to symbolically confirm that the honour is dead (Cf. Van Breugel 2001: 109-111).

The question usually asked concerns the reason why people observe what appears to be a wasteful practice as some of the items buried may be of use by the survived. Two observations can be pointed out concerning the articles.

Firstly, the articles are carefully selected as can be seen above. They fall into the category of essential tools that one would use in daily life.

Secondly, the notion of bodily resurrection is unheard of among most of the African peoples and the Chewa people in particular. Stories of people who died and are said to have resurrected in body are always in reported form with no one specifying that the person reported resurrected was seen. It is also strongly believed that persons reported to have resurrected practised magic and witchcraft. Even in such cases, none of the people believed to have resurrected in such ways ever return to live among the living. The stories about their resurrection goes into oblivion as time goes by. The articles buried with the dead are therefore, not for use after resurrection but to use in the other world of *Kumphepo* (the thin air), the abode of the living dead. Withholding of such articles is believed to keep the living dead within the vicinity of the living thereby allowing *ciwanda* (the spirit of the dead) to haunt and torment the living. Though there is a strong denial of the bodily resurrection among the Chewa people, death is only viewed as a loss for the survived. This is the only perspective from which death can be portrayed as disruptive and devastating. Therefore, death among the Chewa and many other Africans is perceived as both tragic, unwanted, painful on the one hand, and as an opportunity, and entry into the world of rest on the other hand. In other words, beyond the grave life continues, so believe the Chewa people. This deep belief manifests in many ways of which the most important is the symbolic and ceremonial sexual cleansing which is performed as part of bereavement performed not only for the purpose of passifying *chiwanda* (the spirit of the dead) that is believed to be laid to rest, but also to provide for a possibility for conception and new life. Moreover, numerous stories of success, heroism and minimal failure have frequent references to the dead who are believed to continue their life but in a transformed form. This is what paves the way to observing other traditions like m'meto (shaving of hair) as part of mourning that we briefly discuss below.

#### 4.1.2.6.2 M'meto

M'meto is the complete shaving of the closely related survived relatives of the dead as an essential component of mourning and is done in stages. Soon after burial, the spouse, children, immediate brothers, sisters, the mother, the father and grandparents of the dead undergo a shaving ceremony which, is commonly known as *kumeta maliro* or *mpalo* (shaving of/for the dead). Publicly, they cut and remove all the hair from the above members of the family. This is a very serious phase of morning that

many people still adhere to. Perhaps, it is important to point out that these seemingly strange practices surrounding deaths and burials also take place in urban areas where cultural observances are observed with laxity. When a person dies and her or his burial takes place in the city where either the dead was living or where some influential members of the family live, it usually happens that the bereaved seek permission from employers, school authorities etc and bid farewell to their friends *Kukapereka maliro* (to take the funeral home). "Which funeral ...?" the people who are unaware of this cultural practice frequently ask. This study discovered that by *Kukapereka maliro*, people employ indirect rhetorics. What they mean is that they need to go to their respective homes to explain to the clan that someone died. The funeral is considered to be still on until after the shaving ceremony. The old tradition involved making of holes in the walls and abandoning *siwa* (abandoned house or house without owner). This was done so that the dead does not haunt the village but should instead settle in the spirit-world. Another ceremony is organised where some of the achievements of the deceased are pointed out and the senior members of the clan appoint someone to shave close relatives of the dead as aforementioned. If any of the persons appointed by the senior members of the clan to shave refuses, people believe that such a person is cursed and any if anything tragic happens to her or him, they conclude that *ciwanda* (the spirit of the dead or the ghost) is responsible for such tragic events. This is called *m'meto woyamba* (first shaving in honour of the dead) At this stage, only the head is shaved for all who participate in the shaving as appointed by the senior elders of the clan. When this is finished and after some time of approximately a maximum of six months, a year or as it may be decided, the family comes together again for *m'meto wachiwiri* (second shaving in honour of the dead). The cutting of the hair and the ceremonial disposal of the hair is believed to be the final mark of the physical departure of *Nthaka* (the late) and it takes place during this *m'meto wa chiwiri* (second shaving). By this time the dead are believed to have settled in the world of the living dead or spirit-world (cf 2001: 115). It is also believed that *ciwanda* (the evil spirit or the ghost) of the dead is thus laid to rest.

During *m'meto wachiwiri* (second shaving in honour of the dead), one person may be appointed to be the one to observe and mourn the funeral on behalf of the rest of the family. At this time, the appointed person was shaved both on the head and the pubes and the hair would be buried in a secret ceremony.

This would mark the end of the official mourning period in a normal case. Only if the dead was a chief, a *Nyamkungwi* (traditional instructor) or other prominent members of the tribe could another ceremony characterised by *Nyau* (traditional dance) and a beer party with a colourful celebration be organised.

It is interesting to note that both unbelievers and Christians observe this practice even if it is noticeable and recognised fact that some Christians negotiate, compromise or modify some of the practices particularly where there are elements that are considered to be in contradiction with Christian ethics. Most people observe these practices secretly and those who know never publicise their knowledge. For example a lot of Christians in cities prefer to cut part of the hair instead of a "potato-shave."<sup>113</sup> They either have the courage to do it in public or they do it secretly at their homes when fellow Church members have left them alone. It can be noted that the belief that the dead can affect the living particularly in times when the mourning procedures and rites are violated probably deserves a study of its own. Equally, many more practices that follow *m'meto*, could be interesting to investigate, just like questions such as: who performs second *m'meto* and what follows thereafter? Whether or not such tendencies can be "Christianised"? However, for the purposes of our study, we have chosen to point out the major underpinning factor of such a complex mourning pattern. It can only be repeated that the practice rests on the firm belief that the dead continue to exist differently and that they retain the capacity to affect the living either positively if *akumphepo* (those who dwell in the thin air)<sup>114</sup> are pleased, or bringing calamities if the dead are displeased. In this belief system, the individual spirit of the *nthaka* (the departed or late) person can carry out the above effects or they (effects) can be carried out by *akumphepo* (those who dwell in the thin air) as a community. What is important to point out is that all instances of such effects only find cultural explanation and are usually in reported form. Whether or not scientific verification can be employed to investigate this aspect of life remains another area of study.

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<sup>113</sup> In Zambia, a potato-shave is a contemporary style of haircutting in which all hair is removed completely such that the head almost looks like the face as far as absence of hair is concerned.

<sup>114</sup> Another figurative description of the living dead.

It is perhaps sufficient to indicate that the observance of this practice and the preceding procedure burial for the dead are based on the belief that life continues beyond the grave. This belief in life beyond the grave is of paramount importance to this study and we shall return to it.

Having discussed the above trends of African culture, what can we conclude? One perspective from the above scenario enables us to contend and conclude that New Testament interpretation should concretely embrace such a worldview as part and parcel of the horizon of the reader or world in front of the text. Only an approach that embraces this Africanness can be deemed an authentic endeavour to interpret the Biblical text in a manner relevant to Africans. Furthermore, there is need for inculturation in this reading so that perceptions of what the Bible is understood to be, that is: *“a sacred book of devotion, word of God contained in human words for norms for Christian transformed living”*, can become a reality. We contend thus, because the cultural world of a people as stated in outline above, forms a “pre-intentional background” and therefore, an interpretative framework (cf. Thiselton 1992: 45).

The text and the African context should interact with the interpreter who is fully aware of his or her conditioning. Meaning is attained when an interpreter’s context approximates (as it ought) the historical context of the text and should aim to do so even where term and phrase equivalents cannot easily be identified (Ukpong 1995: 10). People understand what they read or hear in terms of what in their cultural conditioning they either believe or disbelieve. What they find culturally believable and acceptable they positively recognise and embrace, while what is perceived to be culturally unbelievable and offensive, they resist, despise and reject. In this case, what is finally rejected cannot also be hermeneutically viable.

In view of the above, the question that is to shall now investigate is: How can an African (Chewa) read the Biblical text of the first letter to the Corinthians? What can she/he interpret and enjoy as the word of God or find difficult to comprehend and attribute to Chichewa culture whatever the case may be? Let us attempt to respond to these basic questions by interpreting the selected texts below as some test case:

## 4.2 Interpretation of specific texts

### 4.2.1 Combating divisive elements: The paradoxical Church (1 Cor.1: 4-17)

In the text outline of verses (4-17) Paul presents the entry into the body of the letter inclusive of the thanksgiving which is typical of Pauline letters but only omitted in Galatians (1: 1-24). Even if Paul apparently faced some hardships (4: 8-12), he made a distinctive utilisation of the included *thanksgiving form* (1: 4-9). As Thiselton (2000: 84) correctly points out, the exordium that Paul alludes to here, was very functional in Greco-Roman rhetoric. It was a means of securing a 'favourable attitude' on the part of the author's audience (2000: 85). The thanksgiving is a very important feature of the Pauline letters because therein he gives the gospel in a nutshell. He alludes to issues that he later on picks up in the body of the letter. It is interesting to observe that in the first nine verses Paul mentions Christ (Jesus) nine times and in the first seventeen verses, fourteen times (cf. Brown 1997: 516). The frequent reference to Christ serves the central role that Paul attributes to Christ Jesus as κυρίου ἡμῶν (our Lord, master) in the Church. To create emphasis, Paul repeats the phrase five times or six times if ἡμῶν in (1: 3) does not only refer to God. Paul further insists that the Corinthians are ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ (the Church of God verse.2) as opposed to a mere human association and κλητοῖς ἁγίοις (called to be holy, a holy convocation verse 2) (cf. Schonfield 1998: 303) as regards their current status. They have already received God's grace (1: 4), sanctification (1: 2) and baptism (1: 13) in no other name but that of Christ Jesus (cf. Eph.4: 4-8).<sup>115</sup> It can be observed Paul puts on various images in order to address either problems or questions that affected the local churches. Some of the dominant images that he puts on can be said to be *pastor*, *teacher*, *church planter* and *parent* to mention but a few. According to Murry (1993: 654):

Paul's letters are a clear testimony of his pastoral heart. Indeed his letters are a product of his pastoral care, for through them Paul exercised a pastoral role in regard to the churches which he or his converts had founded. Paul was no academic theologian, far removed from the realities of church life; rather it was his concern for the churches which proved to be a springboard for his

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<sup>115</sup> Here it assumed that Ephesians is accepted as an authentic Pauline epistle.

theology. Nor was Paul a single-focus evangelist, intent only on winning people for Jesus Christ; rather it was his concern to remain in relationship with the churches he planted.

The above-expressed interplay between theological convictions and contextual concerns in which Paul expounds the theological basis in order to address the contextual problem or questions is very crucial for interpreting Pauline writings. As aforementioned, Tomson identifies the “two-step approach” as *continuous reference to Scripture* and *consistent concern for the actual situation* of his audience (1990: 58), while Beker (1984: x, 11-16) describes the same axes on which this fundamental feature revolves as: *Coherence* and *Contingency*.

Paul utilises this principle in order to combat divisive elements in the Church, of which he has learnt from members of “Chloe’s household”<sup>116</sup> (1 Cor.1: 11). In this first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle addresses his audience by stating the principle on the one hand (what the Corinthian believers are), and draws out implications thereof (what they consequently ought to be) on the other hand. In the thanksgiving, Paul focuses on what God has already done in the lives of the Corinthians and the following divine dealings that are an already reality are pointed out: (i) τῆ χάριτι<sup>117</sup>-Grace, undeserved kindness or favour (1: 4), (ii) ἐπλουτίσθητε<sup>118</sup> -enriched in every respect, both in understanding and knowledge (1: 5). He further continues to indicate that as a holy convocation, God has made the Corinthians to be such a community that (iii) μὴ ὑστερεῖσθαι ἐν μηδενὶ χαρίσματι-Is not lacking, not coming short of gifts of grace. The Corinthian community of believers is fully equipped in χαρίσματα. This term χαρίσματα is a very important principle statement in Paul’s address to the Corinthians. It points out the ideal status of the community of believers in the eyes of the triune God. God has equipped them in such a way that they never come short nor lack for any spiritual gifts as they await the revelation of the Lord Christ Jesus.

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<sup>116</sup> There seems not to be more information about Chloe as to whether or not she was a prominent member of the Church at Corinth. Neither do we find further reference to the members of this family. Probably they were members of the Church at Corinth who were dealing in business that enabled them to travel. Concerned with the problems that the Church at Corinth experienced, they reported to Paul when they met him at Ephesus (cf. Brown 1997:512).

<sup>117</sup> The dative form of χάρις.

<sup>118</sup> Second person plural aorist passive indicative of πλουτίζω.

Then Paul calls upon the Corinthian community of believers to remember that God who has called them to be in fellowship with Christ Jesus is faithful. In all this discussion Paul is committed to the scriptural disposition which forms his basis for addressing the contextual concerns of his audience.

Having expounded the status of the Church of God by reminding the Corinthians of the *ideal status* of the Church as a fully gifted community of faith, Paul now turns to address the concerns of his audience which, in this case was disunity. Divisive elements had torn the Corinthian community along petty loyalties to human leaders whose traditions had reached Corinth. Whereas Paul was thankful to God for the ideal status of the Church at Corinth, he expresses the grave concern for their real *mundane status* which, unfortunately, was engulfed by divisions. The same community he described as τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ -the convocation, community of God that is κλητοῖς ἁγίοις - (1: 2) *called to be holy, consecrated, or set apart as holy to God in* (through union with) *Christ Jesus* and μὴ ὑστερεῖσθαι ἐν μηδενὶ χαρίσματι ( in ideal), he already indicated that the same community of God is situated not in the exclusive abode of God but οὕση ἐν Κορίνθῳ -exists at Corinth (1: 2) prayed for them μὴ ἦ ἐν ὑμῖν σχίσματα, - not to have divisions among yourselves. Here, the term σχίσματα - “divisions,” “splits,” or “breaches” stand as the direct contrast of χαρίσματα (1: 7). The presence of σχίσματα in a community that is empowered by χαρίσματα can be called the *real mundane status* of the Church. The church in this pericope exists as a paradoxical or an ambiguous entity ever facing the tension between the *ideal* and *real* statuses. This does not in anyway mean that the church should easily accept divisive elements and factions within herself. The church should instead realise that she is haunted by contextual realities of her time which in our pericope is σχίσματα. For this reason Paul furthermore prayed: “but rather” that ἦτε δὲ κατηρτισμένοι “you may be perfectly, sufficiently joined together” ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ γνώμῃ. The notion of accommodating or agreeing with one another and being perfectly united in mind and thought counters the spirit of σχίσματα - “splits” “divisions.” καταρτίζω from which κατηρτισμένοι is derived, at times carries a connotation of mending, repairing or restoration of something to its former condition and healing of a wound. It also means putting into proper condition or completing what is lacking (Arndt 1957: 418; Mounce 1993: 270).

Applying this would imply that in the face of splits and divisions the community of believers is challenged to draw from what God has achieved and establish the healing effect and sustain unity. Unity of mind and thought entails a kind of unity that embraces the inner disposition and resolve, decision or judgement.

The question that we have to face concerns how an African mind would perceive the locus of this pericope as briefly portrayed or outlined. Suppose Paul was addressing this subject today in the third millennium to an African audience, how would his audience have listened to him? It is hereby stated that this is one passage in the Bible that an African reads with appreciation. This is for the reason that in the text the apostle grapples with issues of unity. He carefully expounds the Biblical principles of what God has done in order to combat splits in the community and Paul does in a way that upholds the plight of the community much more than he does with individual liberties. We contend that an African reader would be receptive to this message because the theme of unity, which is under the spotlight, is very much embedded into the African cultural worldview. As it is the case among many Africans, the Chewa people value unity and interpersonal relationships. From childhood the Chewa people grow with an understanding that relationships are an important part of life. This is expressed through the *Ubale* (relationship, brotherhood or sisterhood) concept. Through this concept, the Chewa people (even sacrifice personal liberty just for the sake of securing a relationship. In this case, friendship, marriage and kinship are viewed as perpetual and only temporarily disrupted by death. The loyalties of members to leaders expressed in the passage as: "I follow Paul", "I follow Apollos", "I follow Cephas" or "I follow Christ"(1 Cor 1: 12) which apparently triggered splits would be in no way tolerated among the Chewa people and many African peoples. Good leadership and loyalty is tested by its capacity to sustain community life and nurturing of individuals within the community confines.

As already alluded to, *Nyamalenga, Mulungu, Ciuta, Lesa, Leza* or *Mwari* etc<sup>119</sup> is one in terminology and being and as a high being he has created and sustains the universe as a unity and things that function in some kind of defined order. It is such values placed on unity that informs that way of life.

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<sup>119</sup> African names and titles of God drawn from some of the dominant tribes in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

For instance, when a Chewa chief dies and people keep referring to him<sup>120</sup>, as they deal with the new chief, the elders state a proverb: *Akumanda m'samawalira anamuka kale* (Never grieve over the departed ones for they are long gone). Similarly, where people have divided loyalty between the *catuluka* (retired) and the new leadership, another proverb is cited: *Tsobola wa kale sawawa* (Old chili does not have a hot taste). Senior members of the clan site these proverbs in order to teach members of the clan that loyalty to leadership (past and present) should not prevail over unity.

The apparent tension between the ideal status of the Church and her real situation, finds another parallel in the Chewa culture. The Chewa culture portrays the past and the future in glorious terms. What has been lived is better than what is currently going on and *anamoyo* (the future) will even be better. This would be taken as the meaning of Paul's remedial suggestion when he calls upon the community of believers at Corinth to "... agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor 1: 10). Unity should prevail over all things and circumstances because *umunthu* (to be human) entails existence in a community and not in isolation.

#### **4.2.2 A Paradoxical Power Dynamics (1 Cor 1: 18-2: 5)**

Like the ancient World, many nations and their peoples of the modern world struggle and lust for power forms the order of daily living. Power hungry individuals are accepted as normal and at times as heroes until they cause harm to humanity. Many Kings and Kingdoms have risen and perished in pursuit of power.

It seems the audience of Paul was no exception to the lust for power. Stating it differently, one would say that the *lust for power* was a reality both in the world and the church during the time of Paul. It affected both the *secular mind* of the broader Greco-Roman Corinthian culture (Fee 1988: 200; Thiselton 2000: 170) and the *Christian mind* of the "Church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy ..." (1 Cor.1: 2).

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<sup>120</sup> Though the Chewa are a matrilineal tribe, most chiefs are male but descending from the mother and not the father.

The contention and lust for power has in no way changed in modern times.

It equally affects both the secular and Christian mind and it manifests in both mindsets either covertly or overtly. In this passage Paul explicitly or implicitly refers to power seven times: δύναμι (v.18), δύναμιν (v.24), ἰσχυρότερον<sup>121</sup> τῶν ἀνθρώπων (v.25), δυνατοί (v.26), τὰ ἰσχυρά (v.27), δυνάμει (2 Cor.2: 4) and δυνάμει (v.5). Each of these terms bear reference to power and can be translated as: *power, powerful might, mighty, the strong, strong ones, stronger or strength*, as the immediate context may determine. What is important for our study, is the power connotation that each of these terminologies carries.

We can argue that through the ‘sevenfold power reference,’ Paul delivers the locus of the pericope: *access to power* is not through the worldly path ways of struggle and lust, but that *God grants power through weakness*. In order to qualify his thesis, Paul draws on a threefold illustration which, we may explore as follows:

#### 4.2.2.1 Power through weakness in the Gospel (1: 17-25)

On the one hand, Paul argues on the basis of the *Jews and their demand for miraculous signs* (v. 22). He drew from the images of Jews as portrayed in the gospels or wherever, they have an encounter with the prophet. Their mindset demanded the proof of spectacular signs as evidence of the Messianic strength and manifestation.

Such signs as demanded are unfortunately not part and parcel of the gospel package. For this reason Paul viewed this grandiosity for the miraculous signs in the Jewish mindset as a σκάνδαλον<sup>122</sup> (scandal, stumbling block, obstacle or something offensive) to them. The Jews who had access to wisdom through the Torah, needed

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<sup>121</sup> Neuter, singular nominative and comparative adjective of ἰσχυρός which is translated as strong or mighty. Though some translators translate τῶν ἀνθρώπων as “... man’s strength” as the context may suggest, ἰσχυρότερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων as can as well be translated as ‘God is stronger than men’. This is the translation preferred herein since there is no repetition of any form of the adjective ἰσχυρός.

<sup>122</sup> Thiselton gives a detailed discussion of this term and the various translations thereof. For the purposes of our study, we align ourselves closer to him especially the limitation of any single English perceivable equivalent (2000: 170ff)

miraculous signs in order to locate their circumstances and situation within the promised purposes of “salvation history” (cf. Thiselton 2000: 170).

This quest for signs may not be totally wrong; however, Paul views it as a stumbling block because of the fact that divine wisdom and indeed power is not granted through the same path ways as those of the world. It is not so much the mode of communication or human inventions that matters but God’s will.

On the other hand *Greeks look for wisdom* as a gateway to achievement, honour and admiration. Paul charges that the way that God has taken to disclose the divine mystery appears to the Greeks as foolishness. The Greek or Hellenistic life valued the *philosophia* (philosophical wisdom) the most. As we have already alluded to, a person could prove to be living through rationality. The νοῦς (1 Cor 14: 15) (the mind or intellect) (Mounce 1993: 141) was viewed as the seat of human life. In this case logic was a necessity of life yet power does not according to Paul reside therein. The Greeks sought success in all facets of life: politics, economics, family life etc through *philosophia* that an individual could attain. If there is denial that power can be sought in miracles and Greek wisdom, where is it then?

Paul’s response to the above question is in the claim that *Christians preach Christ crucified* (v.22). He indicates that the proclamation of Χριστὸν (a Christ), is an authentic path to “success”. “To the called God’s power and wisdom” (v. 23-25) is based in the ‘weak gospel’. Once again, Paul redefines the power dynamics for his converts by contending that divine power is manifested in the preaching of *Christ and him crucified*.

#### **4.2.2.2 Power through weakness in the converts (1: 26-31)**

In this second demonstration of what we may legitimately call ‘Pauline power dynamics,’ he turns for an example within the Corinthian context itself (v. 26-31). The Corinthian believers are reminded of their origins through the *not many* ‘formula’. Through this formula, he applies the very ‘worldly standards’ that they deem attractive on them and convincingly concludes that many of them did not meet the standards and were of the humble and uncountable background. It was from such

a background that God's power and wisdom (operating differently) transformed their social status that they found themselves among the "countables" of society. He challenged them that: "... since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those believe" (1 Cor 1: 21). In other words, as God's power was manifested through the cross; a symbol of weakness in the Greco-Roman context, so also was the same power of God manifested not among the δυνατοί (the mighty or powerful ones) and among the despised for the purpose *no one may boast* (29-31).

The applicative question as one reads this passage is: - Are we any better? It is hereby submitted that an African (Chewa) reader or listener would answer this question with a categorical no. We are not any better than the audience in context. The reason for identifying with the audience is mainly based on the humble attitude that is embedded in the culture. An African culture is very humble and non-confrontational. So humble and non-confrontational that those who choose to misunderstand would think that such humbleness leads to deception. When one considers that Africa is becoming more and more the centre of Christianity where space for the "flock" is the problem and not huge but either empty or half-empty space as it the case in the so called "First World." The fact that many churches in Africa fully embrace and integrate the youths in church life whereas, in many "First World" countries, church life is predominantly for the old and expiring; is attributed to God's providence. No pride and no boasting seems to be the unwritten slogan for many Africans whose origins in the missionary era leaves much to be desired. Indeed, even if it is from the perspective of *Reformational Philosophy* Van der Watt (2001: 23) is correct in lamenting that:

... something is missing in African Christianity. Most Western missionaries taught Africans a "broken" or dualistic worldview. This caused a divorce between traditional culture and their new Christian religion. The Christian faith was perceived to as something remote, only concerned with a distant past (the Bible) and a far-away future (heaven). It could not become a reality in their everyday lives. It could not develop into an all-encompassing worldview and lifestyle.

In a setting where the above extract is accepted as representative of the African broader context, it is not an overstatement but a mere statement of fact that Paul's *not many* 'formula' would find more than fertile soil in Africa. His charge that the Corinthians should look outside themselves and the "Other" who is God through

Christ Jesus as basis and criterion for any sense of pride and boasting also does have a parallelism in African (Chewa) culture that would make the task of applying the message achievable. Finally, Paul moves to the third demonstration of his “power dynamics” namely:

#### 4.2.2.3 Power through weakness in the preacher (2: 1-5)

Here, Paul draws on his own background and experience in Corinth when he first came to them with the gospel. Corinth (as already alluded to) was one of the great and important cities of the ancient Greco-Roman empire. Its importance was among other things due to the following: It was strategically located and was served by two ports<sup>123</sup> it was a centre of trade and industry; it was the place of residence of the Roman proconsul and it was ethnically, culturally and religiously very diverse in population (cf. Furnish 1999: 2ff). Although in such a city one would have expected rhetoric to have been a core-marketing tool and a competitive skill Paul doubly renounces *philosophy* and *rhetoric* (v.3). Much to the shock of his readers in the place of human philosophy he advocated the Gospel of Christ crucified (v.1-2) furthermore, in the place of human rhetoric he emphasised the divine effect of the ἀποδείξει πνεύματος (the showing off or demonstration of the Spirit’s power) (v.3-4). Paul’s remarks and the emphasis away from himself could suggest that he was aware that his audience was influenced by their context and were comparing him and his message with the sophists and rhetoricians who took it that persuasion depended on the personality of the presenter and his delivery. Over against this Paul’s authentic power does not reside in the preacher, but in God’s Spirit. In this case, as Fee (1988: 89) correctly puts it:

... Thus, the *means* (the cross) and the *people* (the Church in Corinth), but also the *preacher* (Paul) declare that God is in a process of overturning the world’s systems.

Indeed God’s power and wisdom operate differently from the world’s systems and

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<sup>123</sup> According to Furnish, Cenchræe served the city on the Saronic Gulf to the southeast and Lechaëum on the Gulf of Corinth to the northwest. Ships were regularly unloaded in one port and their cargoes transported across the isthmus for reloading at the other port, thus providing a link between shipping in the Aegean and the Adriatic (1999:1ff)

Paul apologetically indicates that it is his model that has worked and not that of the sophists and rhetoricians to the Greco-Roman Corinth. To summarise, this section, Paul ends his demonstrations and one can agree with Thiselton (2000: 175f) that somewhat Paul expounds a threefold coherent theme in which Paul alludes to:

- (1) the nature and transformative power of the proclamation of the cross of Christ (1: 18-25)
- (2) the nature and social status and composition of the Church in Corinth (1: 26-31); and
- (3) Paul's own experience and presentation of the gospel when he first came to Corinth

To put it differently, even if in the Hellenistic-Jewish Corinth people did all they could to pursue wisdom and signs as means to achievement, self-esteem, success and honour, it was actually through the *cross* that they perceived as a symbol of shame and weakness that God used to demonstrate authentic power. Similarly, self-renunciation for the sake of confidence in the outside person (Christ and him crucified) or thing that again would be viewed as a symbol of weakness and defeat is a genuine path to authenticity. Therefore, in the threefold weakness of (i) *message or gospel* (1: 18-25), (ii) *hearers/converts* (1: 26-31) and *the preacher* (2: 1-5), God's power has been demonstrated and therefore, there is no basis for human pride and boasting.

The purpose for which Paul expounds the "threefold weakness" is implicitly clear: that his audience should not become self-centred and feel that they have made it themselves to be where they are. They must look beyond themselves in humbleness and attribute their new status to the 'Other' whose wisdom and power operate differently from that of the world. Such a message would be easily applied to an African audience. The point of contact would be the very African worldview itself. Though so many definitions for 'worldview' may be available, the meaning that it carries herein is the view of what reality is; the relationship between the creator, creation and humankind. It includes the way in which humankind utilises relationship with the creator, with nature and within humankind to the benefit of wo/man. This relationship and utilisation is characterised by dependence.

Humankind totally depends on *Nyamalenga, Mulungu, Ciuta, Lesa, Leza* or *Mwari*<sup>124</sup> and nature.

In this case, self-renunciation for the sake of trust in the other that Paul advocates, would fall within the culture and worldview.

In conclusion, the paradoxical power dynamics can be more easily applicable within the African (Chewa) context because the African (Chewa) culture or/and worldview enhances the Biblical hermeneutics of the pericope under investigation.

Having looked at the above texts, let us investigate another one probably addressing a somewhat different issue and determine the role that the African culture plays in the hermeneutics of the same.

#### **4.2.3 Combating illicit sexual conduct (1 Cor 5: 1-13)**

In this section, it is noticeable that Paul grapples with a second major problem that had engulfed the Corinthian church and had been reported to him: (The phrase “it is actually reported...” (1 Cor 5: 1) confirms this observation). The sexual immorality or unacceptable illicit sexual conduct that some member in the Corinthian church was guilty of triggered this problem. Paul seems to be much exasperated by the hesitation and subsequent failure of the Corinthian community of believers to take decisive disciplinary measures against the sexually immoral man. The problem that Paul addresses and its magnitude can possibly be appreciated when it is viewed in its context. At a deeper level of this problem, there is a conflict of the *new identity* of the Corinthians as the church ἡ ἐκκλησία του θεου (the Church of God) and the *challenges* facing this identity in daily living ἐν Κορίνθῳ (in Corinth) which formed the broader context. This conflict is the real cause and the rest are only its symptoms. According to Furnish (1999: 49), Paul implicitly draws a distinguishing line between “this age” and “the age to come”. This can be discerned from the summary that we quote below.

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<sup>124</sup> See note 116.

Paul has been distinguishing at least implicitly between “this age” (or “the world”) and an age that is to come. Although the coming age, which is “God’s reign” (4: 20), has been inaugurated in the cross where God’s saving power is already at work, the Corinthians would be quite wrong to regard it as somehow fulfilled already (4: 8). This “already but not yet” of life in Christ means that the believers in Corinth must reckon for the time being with a dual identity. Fundamentally, in their belonging to Christ and to God they belong to God’s reign. Thus, as *God’s church* they comprise an eschatological community of the end-time. However, as God’s church in *Corinth* they also comprise a “present-time” community with a specific social location and a continuing social identity.

As it has been correctly observed in the above-brief quotation, though the cause is the report concerning one man (and of course a woman<sup>125</sup>), Paul’s response brings out the major principles that informed the unacceptable sexual act and subsequently attracted his vehement response. The principles that are at war with each other concerns the conflicting codes of conduct in one community that belongs to God in Christ and its *new identity* on the one hand, and the *status quo* in another community that exists in the world outside Christ. This gives the reason why Paul devotes more attention to the community of believers to which the man belonged than he deals with the man himself and much less the woman who were actually involved. It is as if the conduct of the man in Paul’s focus had more severe consequences for the Church than for the individual himself. The question to face is what really is at stake in the scenario?

It can be contended that at the deeper level of this problem, what is at stake is some kind of overlapping life styles in the Corinthian church community in accordance with their new status in Christ, contrary to what could be tolerated as of least offence in the broader Greco-Roman Corinthian society. According to Morris (1958: 86), sexual laxity was rife among first century Greeks, and that from the beginning the Christian attitude to the prevailing practice and thought was of uncompromising opposition. This position is in agreement with Witherington (1995: 153). who discloses to us that in the Greco-Roman world, “extramarital sex and indeed a wide range of forms of non-marital sex that Jews and Christians find aberrant including forms of incest, was not considered shameful” In other words, as Craig (1981: 61) puts it:

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<sup>125</sup> We note that Paul does not in any way deal with the woman. Probably she was a pagan and in this case she falls within the category that Paul surrenders to the almighty God’s judgement (1Cor 5:12f).

Despite the fact that Paul here contrasts the community unfavourably with pagans, such illicit sexual liaisons were not unknown in the Greco-Roman world, though they were generally reprobated by the better elements in society. The shocking thing is not sin itself and all that it implies of a divorce between religion and morality to the detriment of both, but that the Church in Corinth had complacently condoned the offence.

If the above scenario depicts life in the Corinthians society in which the community of believers lived, how can one explain Paul's vehement attack? As we have already alluded to, Paul's critical response can be explained in terms of his hermeneutic of the Church and the implications of professing to belong to God in Christ (1 Cor 6: 19). The Pauline perspective is that the Christian community operates with reasonably well-established boundaries and subcultures with unique sex morality and legal systems (6: 18, 7: 2-5, 6: 1-8) (Witherington 1995: 151). Unfortunately, the oral reports that Paul received indicated the total opposite of his ideal of the Christian community that he advocates by emphasising corporate responsibility. On the one hand, once again the real problem was that the man, who must have been a prominent member of the Corinthian church, went overboard and crossed the border into secular tendencies and acts while at the same time still clinging to the Christian faith. It is much more a matter of what Furnish (1999: 51) describes as: "what constitutes transgression of boundaries, thus marked, by which God's church is to maintain its distinctiveness within pagan society."

On the other hand, however, a closer look at the text of chapter 5 indicates that Paul pronounces the man guilty of πορνεία (sexual immorality or prostitution) involving γυναῖκά τινα τοῦ πατρὸς (his father's wife). Here, the apostle grapples with a double problem. The first problem concerns πορνεία which is an important key word in what Conzelmann (1975: 95) calls "primitive Christian paraenesis and Jewish sexual ethics." Christians are always called upon to root out sexual immorality, and clinging to prostitution of any kind prevents whosoever is guilty from entering the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6: 9-10). The second problem which seems to cause much more concern to Paul is that the man's involvement in πορνεία as indicated above, concerned γυναῖκά τινα τοῦ πατρὸς (his father's wife), which the church apparently condoned while that practice was not tolerated even among pagans. Here, helpful insight into the issues at stake, comes from Fee (1988: 200) who writes:

The word *porneia* ("sexual immorality") in the Greek world simply meant "prostitution," in the sense of going to the prostitutes and paying for sexual pleasure. The Greeks were ambivalent on that matter, depending on whether one went openly to the brothels or was more discreet and went with a paramour. But the word had been picked up in Hellenistic Judaism, always pejoratively, to cover all extramarital sexual sins and aberrations, including homosexuality. It could also refer to any of these sins specifically, as it does here. In the NT the word is thus used to refer to that particular blight on the Greco-Roman culture, which was almost universally countenanced, except among the Stoics. This is why *porneia* appears so often as the first item in the NT vice lists, not because Christians were sexually "hung up," nor because they considered this the primary sin, the "scarlet letter," as it were. It is the result of its prevalence in the culture, and the difficulty the early church experienced with its Gentile converts breaking with their former ways, which they did not consider immoral.

The above quote does not only deepen the reader's insight into the growth of the usage of the concept of *πορνεία* and how the ancient society responded. Equally, it does not only enrich one's background information, rather, it also indicates the direction towards broadening of the double problem that Paul addresses.

In this regard, a voice is added to the scholarly view that recognises that Paul's vehement response is directed more on incest, a man having sexual advances with a close relative which in the case in question happened to be his "father's wife." Though no reference to frequency is made, it is apparent that the case is not about a single accidental coition due to any unforeseen circumstances. It must have concerned cautious sexual pleasures in a surviving relationship of wife and husband. In such a scenario, the strange silence and hesitation of the church to execute disciplinary action outraged the apostle. Although such practices were not, by contrast, tolerated among the pagans whose morality was lower than that of the church by virtue of the church's nature as a "belonging of God"; in contradiction, the church took a casual approach on the matter. Indeed it is not clear what "father's wife" means except some logical assumption that the man must have inherited his stepmother who must have been a widow by then. The man was sharing sexual life as if it were in a legitimate marriage. If the expression "father's wife" can be drawn from the Levitical sex code of conduct, it would still stand that sexual relations involving "stepmothers and stepsons," "stepfathers and stepdaughters," "mothers and sons," "fathers and daughters" or indeed any close relatives, were forbidden and punishable by death (Lev.18: 6-18: 20: 17-20).

Even if the Levitical law were to be ruled as overloaded by Jewish culture, then still it would appear that such marriages between the “steps”<sup>126</sup> whether fathers and daughters or mothers and sons, were prohibited not only by Jewish culture, but also by Roman law. Here, Conzelmann (1975: 96) reveals that:

In Roman law, relatedness by adoption rules out marriage between adoptive parents and children, even after cancellation of the adoptive relationship, and also between step-relatives in direct line. ... Neither can I marry her who has aforesaid been my mother-in-law or step-mother, or daughter-in-law or step-daughter. I say ‘aforesaid’; for if marriage which has created the affinity still subsists, I cannot take her to be wife for this other reason, - that neither can the same woman have two husbands, nor can the same man have two wives.

The fact that the act had no official ratification in the immediate context of the Corinthian church, and among the pagans, Paul found it unjustifiable that the church of God could adopt a casual approach to it. Certainly, even if Paul could have used distance as a reason for not acting upon the matter, he could not keep silent because the very identity of the church in a secular society was at stake. For this reason, Paul rebukes the church for ‘pride’ and lack of ‘grief’ because of the unacceptable sexual misconduct of someone who must have been a prominent member of the church.

The church’s hesitation in taking decisive disciplinary action against the particular immoral member, can lead to a number of explanations. Although Fee (1988: 200) indicates that the early church experienced difficulties linked with members of the church with a Gentile background who struggled to break from their past, there is no indication in the text that the man had a Gentile background. Perhaps, Witherington is more correct in viewing the difficulty that the Corinthian church faced with the man in question, within the context of the “honor and shame” cultural setting of the Greco-Roman Corinth. He (1995: 154) discloses that:

... it was difficult to shame a person who already had high status or considerable power or authority, since in a stratified society shaming is normally what superiors do to inferiors or equals to equals. It is a way of putting someone in his or her place. Since honor in a Roman city like Corinth had a public and male face, it had little to do with a man’s sexual involvement, with certain clearly defined exceptions.

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<sup>126</sup> My own formulation as an abbreviation of the relationships under discussion.

Against this background, Paul challenges that the man's sexual misconduct should have attracted shame not only on the man himself, but also on the whole Corinthian community of faith. This he did, of course, knowing well that for his audience, his perspective would have been perceived as unnecessary, irrelevant and infringing on some of the male privileges. In other words, Paul's perspective redefines the entire system of honour and shame for the people who are not their own but, were bought at a price and have, therefore, to honour God with their bodies (1 Cor 6: 19-20) (cf Witherington 1995: 154) and have a new identity to manifest. In this new status in Christ, it does not matter whatever a person's social status can be, an act that is bad, like prostitution, requires shame and communal discipline.

In redefining the cultural values and boundaries, Paul is motivated by the *indicative* of belonging to Christ and his strong *eschatological conviction*, and then draws the imperative for the *man*, the *church* and wider Corinthian *society*. It is noted that there are a number of phrases, terms and sentence constructions that call for scholarly investigation. However, for the purposes of our study we will leave out some of them and pursue only those that are perceived to be closely related to our subject matter. To qualify this observation, the following is quoted from Thiselton (2000: 395):

... (iii) The most controversial clauses are παραδοῦναι τὸν τοιοῦτον τῷ Σατανᾷ εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός, ἵνα τὸ πνεῦμα σωθῇ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου. translated ... as **we are to consign** (the aorist active infinitive has to be rendered as a finite verb unless the sentence is continued from v3, and **we** is clearly the subject of the **assembly** in which Paul is **spiritually present**), **this man such as he is** (τὸν τοιοῦτον) **to Satan with a view to** (εἰς with accusative) **the destruction of the fleshly...** (ὄλεθρον τῆι σαρκί...), **in order that spiritually he may be saved** (ἵνα followed by the first of σωζῶ) **at the day of the Lord**

Firstly (in this regard), the imperative for the man is that he must be handed over to Satan (5: 5). Using the unusual expression, Paul recommends excommunication or expulsion of the man from the community of believers (v. 2, 5, 7 and 13). On the one hand, we note Fee's observation (1988: 208) that the language "to hand over to Satan" is not found elsewhere as an act of expulsion from a religious community. On the other hand, however, we argue that Paul's thought in the text clearly suggests that παραδοῦναι (delivering) the man to Satan' means surrendering the man into the

realm of Satan outside the body of Christ. The notion that outside the Church is the realm where Satan reigns is not foreign to the New Testament thought (cf. Eph 2: 11-12; Col 1: 13; 1 Jn 5: 19). Paul develops this thought but qualifies the purpose. In the text the purpose of this radical action that he recommends is that ἡ σαρκίς (the man's body or flesh) can be destroyed and τὸ πνεῦμα (the spirit) may be saved on the day of the Lord (v. 5). Again the text poses two other difficulties: firstly the meaning of ἡ σαρκίς and secondly that of τὸ πνεῦμα.

It is not clear whether by σαρκίς he refers to the body or flesh as humankind, as one entity or just a component of human life. At the same time, there is nothing in the text that suggests that Paul was applying a dualistic or trichotomist anthropology. As Witherington (1995: 157) puts it; Paul is really not a "trichotomist" in his anthropology even when he pictures human nature in terms of outer bodily physical parts and the inner metaphysical dimension, which he holistically calls "spirit". Perhaps Paul uses σαρκίς in terms of sinful desire because the purpose for delivering the man to Satan is not really to totally condemn the man the exercise has a pastoral intent and effect of salvation on the day of the Lord (v. 5). The question that many hermeneuts face is: how can surrendering the man to Satan and the subsequent destruction of his body (certainly Paul thinks in terms of death) have salvific effects?

In the first place, concerning the salvation of the "man's spirit," it must be noted that according to the Nestle-Aland 27, τὸ πνεῦμα stands in the nominative position which should then be translated as simply *the spirit* and not necessarily the *man's spirit*. "Man" would then be in the genitive case. Any reading that forces the case of the noun in question from the nominative to the genitive only preserves the theological nuance as the interpreter grapples with the interpretation of the text. Even when one takes the common mistranslation of τὸ πνεῦμα as the man's spirit or his spirit, it still remains difficult to understand Paul's terminologies. Having afore-argued and agreed with Witherington that "Paul is not a trichotomist", we contend that τὸ πνεῦμα refers to the man himself and not necessarily a faculty within him. Without going into the technical details of the meanings of such expressions, one observes that in essence Paul was evoking the whole Corinthian community of believers to utilise their authority in the name of the Lord and execute a painful disciplinary measure "already now."

The intent for such action is that the sinful man may “yet” be saved eschatologically “on the day of the Lord.”

To come back to the question of how delivering a man to Satan would lead to salvation: It would appear that this expression had become a common way of referring to severe disciplinary action of expelling someone out of the community as the context of First Timothy suggests (1 Tim 1: 20). In order to share some perspectives of this difficult question, it is probably important to recall that for Paul, the basis for radically dealing with evil and for the eschatological hope for salvation is Christological. As Morris (1958: 90) says, the death of Christ delivered them from deadly peril, and constituted them as the people of God. The Christian life is linked to a present perpetual festival. Through the sacramental metaphors *leaven* and *unleavened bread* Paul depicts the Christian life as not observing this feast in accordance with the old or past life. This is the reason that the *old leaven* is negatively linked with vices like *malice* and *wickedness* which characterise evil, whereas the bread without leaven is positively linked with virtues of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5: 8). In all these strong imageries, Paul’s framework is eschatologically fixed. It is so fixed that he seems not to bother about the means it takes for one to be saved. If it means subjecting one to the realm of the devil where such a one would be tormented and return to the Lord, that seems for Paul not a problem. In this case, church discipline is not at all punitive but pastoral in character and effect.

Secondly, Paul draws the imperative for the church, and his principle appears to come from verse 11. The community of believers should radically deal with evil by severing any form of close fellowship with any hypocrite who claims to be a Christian yet his/her lifestyle falsifies the profession. Once again Paul makes a movement between the *indicative* as *foundational base* and the *imperative* which carries *eschatological implications*. The community of believers is not only *a possession of God* that is *sanctified in Christ Jesus* and is *called to be holy* (1: 2), but it is also *God’s temple where God’s Spirit dwells* (3: 16) (indicative). If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him, because God’s temple is sacred (3: 17) (imperative with eschatological implications). Whatever one does or fails to do in this life will bring a reward accordingly (cf 2 Cor 5: 10).

After dealing with the principle in verse 11, Paul then draws the imperative for society in verse 12. In essence, the thrust is that there should be distinctive boundaries between the people within the *church* and those who reside *outside the church* and are in the world. Connecting to verse 13, the community of faith should carry discipline only within the bounds under the church's jurisdiction. By limiting the scope of church discipline to only within the church (Morris 1958: 92), Paul indicates that both the Church and society are subject to the eschatological effects. Though Satan can now rule outside the church and affect those that the church throws out to him, he deals with them temporarily for the final effect rests with God "on the day of the Lord"(5: 5). God would finally redeem those that Satan can in a limited and temporary way get hold of. For this reason, the individual who belongs to the church and indeed the church herself, cannot afford what psychologists call *cognitive dissonance*: living with the battle inside a person who believes one way and acts another. The church as a community of believers lives in the world yet her ethical conduct ought to be clearly distinguished from that of the world by being above it. Faith must be congruent with Christian ethical responsibility in daily living and anyone who practices double standards must face communal expulsion and the community itself should execute the task.

A reading of this passage in an African (Chewa) context creates in the audience feelings of "identification" and "distancing." Both of the major problems that Paul is addressing within this pericope: sexual immorality or prostitution and incest (sexual coition between close relatives) would find parallelism and therefore, contact points. Sex is important for African people because it is not performed for mere adventure but for a purpose, which in most cases is linked to procreation. One would only have sex with a potential mother or father of his or her child to be. Sex is not a matter of techniques, but it signifies a long relationship and even if one may not in all cases prepare for such a relationship, he or she should prepare for the consequences. For this reason as we have afore-argued, a community is so orderly structured so that borders are mapped out and individuals know with whom sex may be performed and with the community approve this time or in future. No individual may argue along reasons of either love or personal liberty to cross boundaries to pick anyone of choice. The community sets the stage and individuals comply for the benefit of both the individual and the community. The community erect invisible walls that protect the

mystery of sexuality within the African community. For instance, among the Chewa people, a young man may inherit the widow of his uncle (mother's brother)<sup>127</sup> and share sex in a traditional marriage but he cannot do the same with his sister in law. He may marry his cousin (daughter of his mother's brother) but never the daughter of either his mother's sister or father's brother. This is common among many African peoples where marriage or sex with any in-law except a distance (not direct) sister in law is strictly forbidden.

The essence here is not a debate on the rationale of these relationships or minor differences among several African ethnic groups. Rather, it is a clear indication that the man whom Paul is recommending for expulsion could not have been an African because as we can repeat, Africans make careful choices when it comes to matters of sexuality. Of course the choices are more of a prerogative of the community than an individual. We note that maybe one person in five to ten villages may be reported to be having improper sexual acts in violation of the approved structures. Most of such reports become difficult to prove. This is for the reason that such reports of sex with close relatives concern the individuals who do not accept that they have had sex with persons related to them yet in spite of their denial, the community strongly suspect them of adherence to bad myths or *muti*, *nyanga*, *mshonga*, *juju* (herbal medicine with a connotation of witchcraft). In such cases the community still does not approve such practices.

What we are stating is that within the African culture, there is no provision for sex with a close relative like a "father's wife" as the case was reported in 1 Cor 5. It is a taboo for anyone to engage in such a relationship in an African context.

Therefore, like in the previous pericope, we contend that the African (Chewa) culture would enhance the interpretation and application of this pericope because within the culture, the matters of sexual immorality and incest are already prohibited and taboos provide a framework for regulation and enforcement. This would be the basis for what we have called a feeling of identification.

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<sup>127</sup> Such marriages are carefully planned and constituted through a *chokolo* custom.

On another note however, this passage also contains issues that have no parallel in African (Chewa) culture and in this case they do create a feeling of distance in a reader's mind from such a context. To demonstrate the observation, two examples may suffice. In the first place the surrendering of the man's body to Satan for the destruction of his body so that the spirit may be saved (5: 5). The implied dualism is difficult to understand in the African context for two reasons. The first reason is that *Munthu* (a person or human being) is a holistic being with *thupi* (body) and *moyo* (life) and the category *muzimu* (spirit) in relation to people refers to the whole person in a different form of existence and not just a component. The other reason for the difficulty is the salvation of the spirit on the day of the Lord. Among Africans, it is believed that *Munthu ali ndi moyo umodzi* (a person or human being has only one life). It is a question of whether one is living this life in *dziko lino* (this world) or living it in *kulichete* (silent world of the living dead). At death one crosses over from this world and goes to another higher world where he or she becomes a spirit and joins the ancestors. In this case, the whole eschatological thought that proclaims salvation in the exterior future is foreign and does not make cultural sense. The honour to be accorded to a person when she or he dies begins here where one can either grieve or appease the ancestors who can inflict calamity or bring a good omen now and not "on the day of the Lord."

The second problem that would create distance is Paul's recommendation that the community should terminate any fellowship with the man who sinned: "Expel the wicked man from among you"(5: 13). In Africa, *ubale* (relationships) never ends. Not even death ends relationships. For example, a couple may have had six children and two have died. Whenever this couple is asked a simple question: "how many children do you have?" In most cases the response is *pansi awiri kubwalo anai* (two in grave and four among the living). Such language does not reflect some grammatical shortfalls but conveys a deep conviction that even in the grave one still belongs to his or her surviving relatives. *Ubale* (relationships) must always survive closely or loosely. Therefore, Paul's recommendation would have been the most cruel thing to say to an African audience. Many people in the audience would have boycotted Paul for fear of direct confrontation. The community can do all it can to preserve itself but *ubale* must survive. In this case the African (Chewa) culture unfortunately hinders the interpretation and application of the passage because of the lack of point of contact

between the demands of the pericope and the cultural framework. Unlike in the previous texts, where culture provided a natural conducive environment for the reading of the text, here, it lacks the contact point not only for interpretation but also for the subsequent application of the same.

This study recognised that the cultural framework of any people is dynamic and affected by change. Equally true is the Chewa cultural framework which has been in contact with Christianity for many years now. The fact of the matter is that the impact of Christianity and the gospel has effected change on many traditions yet traditions that govern sexuality and brotherhood or sisterhood are still operative. Although it may appear as if people have abandoned these traditions on the surface, they covertly adhere to them. This does not imply that 1 Corinthians 5 has lost value for the Chewa beliefs and tradition, rather it confirms that this text lacks bridging codes in the Chewa cultural world. The *ubale* (brotherhood or sisterhood) and the supporting philosophical beliefs are still intact and clashing with Paul's charge and recommendation to expel a man from the community of believers and sever fellowship with him. The report that a man had sexual relationship with his father's wife would be treated as a myth and not a real life situation because it would sound too strange to be true. Therefore, unless something happens that can bridge the chasm and some reference points were to be established, reading the text of 1 Corinthians 5 would be very difficult and the effect of the reader would be minimal.

#### **4.2.4 Lawsuits among believers (1 Cor 6: 1-11)**

One of the problems that faces the church in this century concerns lawsuits among believers. Most often believers are reported to be dragging each other to civil courts of law. In fact, even churches as organisations have also been affected by this new trend. Are Christians supposed to be dragging each other to courts as they do? What insight does 1 Corinthians 6: 1-11 bring on the readers and how does an African (Chewa) reader and listener engage with this text?

In 1 Corinthians 6: 1-11, Paul is wrestling with the problem that involved certain Christians who were in the habit of taking fellow Christians to civil courts of law in order to settle disputes. Having contended and advocated that the church should carry

out judicial functions in matters of sexual offences (ch.5), Paul now advocates that the church should exercise the same jurisdiction in settling disputes involving believers.

According to Paul, a Christian who has a grievance against another, dares not take the case ἐπὶ τῶν ἀδίκων (ungodly, unrighteous) as opposed to ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγίων (the righteous, or saints). The apostle forbids Christians from settling their cases before the gentile or secular judicial systems but settle all disputes through Christian arbitration.

It is most unlikely that Paul refers to the Gentiles as ungodly or unrighteous. Rather, he disqualifies their legal system as unsuitable for settling Christian disputes. In order to understand why Paul is negative towards the secular courts, it is important to understand the legal process in the Greco-Roman Corinth during the time of Paul. Such data is the pre-condition for understanding the entire chapter 6. The Roman administration of justice had a lot of defects. According to Witherington (1995: 163):

A number of forces in Roman society affected the administration of justice. Social status and rank vis-a-vis one's opponents were major determining factors. While the situation of the weaker plaintiff improved with the end of the Republic and the coming of the empire, the system remained heavily weighed in favour of people of higher status. From at least the time of Augustus certain people - fathers, patrons, magistrates and men of standing were basically immune from prosecution.

It is such a system of justice in which only the fittest survive that Paul wages war against. A system subject to manipulation is no good for the Christians many of whom are so poor that they may not afford a reputable attorney to pursue justice on their behalf. In this case, the apostle does not advocate secular judicial systems because there is no guarantee for justice.

Secondly Paul argues that it is wrong for Christians to drag each other to secular courts of law because the saints will judge the world. He does not qualify the manner in which they will judge the world. We may argue that the saints' capacity to judge the world does not rest within their own individuality, but rather, in their union with Christ to whom all will appear for judgement (2 Cor 5: 10).

The saints will share in the eschatological judgement and as such, their present identity demands from them a high level of ethics that includes confidence in the capacity available within the body of Christ

Reading of 1 Corinthians 6 through African eyes brings very interesting perspectives. Among many African cultures and within the Chewa culture in particular, family ties and friendship have a very high value. Disputes affecting members of one family, clan and tribes are resolved within the local ranks and never taken to the outside world. The outside world is perceived as incapable of preserving *ubale* (relationships). In this case, *ubale* (relationship) and *ubwenzi* (friendship) concepts within the Chewa culture enhance interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6 because the two concepts provides a parallel which creates a rapport between the text and an African audience. Whenever, disputes cross boundaries, it is interpreted as disloyalty and sacrificing the family honour in pursuit of individual glory, which in a way was the core of Paul's struggle against lawsuits involving Christians. The apostle is mainly concerned with the preservation of the community of believers.

Having selected and treated some pericopes with unique relevance to the African (Chewa) culture, for the purposes of our study, let us turn to one more pericope that is crucial to an African mindset and this pericope concerns issues of life beyond death as we explore below.

#### **4.2.5 The resurrection of the dead: Principle statement (1 Cor 15: 1-11)**

If there is any single chapter that has drawn massive scholarly attention not only in the First letter to the Corinthians but indeed in the whole Pauline corpus, then it is chapter 15. Some authors have attempted to come to a valid interpretation of this chapter by attending to some specific issues related to the chapter. Some scholars have devoted their attention to interpretation methods like rhetorical interpretation arguing that unless the rhetorical situation is correctly reconstructed, it would be difficult to identify the "deniers" of the resurrection. Presumably, this would lead to missing the main rhetorical problem that concerns a crisis in loyalty based on the apostolic Pauline kerygma versus that of the "deniers" who are his opponents (Vorster 1989: 287).

Other authors have either treated some specific issues within the chapter (cf Vorster 1989, Sterling 1995, Longenecker 1998 and Asher 2001), while others have offered a comprehensive treatment of not only the whole chapter but also the whole epistle (cf Witherington 1995 Fee 1988, Furnish 1999 and Thiselton 2000). According to Thiselton (2000: 1169), the scholarship on 1 Corinthians 15 dates back to seventy-five years ago when Karl Barth delivered a scholarly verdict by writing that chapter 15 “forms not only the close and crown of the whole epistle, but also provides the key to its meaning from which light is shed onto the whole, and it becomes intelligible ... as a unity”.

Arguing that no research has convincingly disputed Barth’s verdict, Thiselton throws his weight behind the proposition that 1 Cor 15 and the resurrection issue raised therein plays a crucial role. He does so also by indicating that both Luther and Calvin devoted efforts to this resurrection chapter. He stresses that both Luther and Calvin were also of the opinion that 1 Cor 15 addresses issues that are central to the gospel and the epistle. In this case Luther is quoted (Thiselton 2000:1169) as having said:

If a person does not believe in the resurrection, ... he must deny in a lump the Gospel and everything that is proclaimed of Christ and of God. ... Whoever denies this article must simultaneously deny far more..., in brief that God is God.

In a similar vein, Thiselton emphasises (2000: 1170) that Calvin regarded 1 Cor 15 as important as it addresses more than one problem among others: the nature of belief in postmortal existence. It is about God and the nature of the gospel; this is why Paul makes reference to the doctrine of the resurrection as the Gospel.

From the above-survey, we observe that two things that are joined together are important. In the first place the chapter is important in the context of the epistle; while in second place, the resurrection is equally important in the context of the Corinthian audience. We agree with the above view and not only for the sake of the text itself and the original audience is Paul’s proclamation of the resurrection of Christ Jesus as the sole foundation of hope important. Across the ages and much more in our time, the message of the resurrection of Christ Jesus as the basis for the hope of the forthcoming resurrection of the believers also remains important (Harris 1998: 147). In our contexts where millions of people die through natural calamities such as floods,

drought, earth quakes and man-caused calamities such as pollution, international regional and civil wars and indeed the HIV/AIDS pandemic, one shares in asking the historical question that concerns the possible delay. According to Thiselton (2000: 1170) who quotes Calvin as having as well struggled with the question when he wondered in the words: "If the issue is a comprehensive and central one, why does Paul postpone it until almost the end of the epistle?" In what Thiselton calls "moralistic ... and over-ecclesial way" Calvin then concluded: 'Until he had subdued their pride' and fully established his apostolic credentials. Whatever, could have been the reason for Paul's apparent delay, it is not easy to determine from the text, and it seems established that, the findings do not affect the text's effectivity as such. For this reason, our study would like to grapple with the question: What is happening in 1 Cor 15 and how does our African (Chewa) audience share in the interpretation? This question is crucial because interpretation informs people's faith and subsequent conduct.

Chapter 15 forms a unity within itself and it discusses a different issue from both the preceding chapters and the proceeding chapter, however, it functionally fits into them such that the integrity of the entire 1 Corinthians calls for no doubt. The core issue in this chapter is the resurrection from the dead. Harris (1998: 148) reminds us of an interesting terminological definition when he states that the term "resurrection" translates the Greek word ἀνάστασις (1 Cor 15: 42) and that this term is a compound word that carries with it a prefix ἀνα which may mean "up" or "again". Thus Harris (1998: 148) argues that:

"signifies either a rising up (i.e, standing erect) of someone who has been in a reclining position or coming to life again of someone who has died. In its basic sense, "resurrection" denotes a person's restoration to life after an interval spent in the realm of the dead. Paul's favourite verb to denote resurrection is egeirō ("rouse," "rise up") which he uses to refer to either the resurrection of Christ or the resurrection of believers.

From a different perspective, Harris' definition is in line with Mounce (1993: 72) who just sums up the meaning of the term as *a rising or rising up, resurrection or an uprising into a state of higher advancement and blessedness*. In other words, in 1 Cor 15 Paul grapples with the issues concerning death and the *victory* over death by the *living again* of the victor first Christ and then forthcoming those who believe in Christ

Jesus. Even if these issues are spread as a unity in 1 Cor 15: 1-58, it is in this line that the scholarly observation that the resurrection which forms the core of 15: 1-58, "epitomises" 1: 31 which clearly states that "... let him who boasts boast in the Lord" is validated. Thiselton (2000: 1171) agrees with Moltman and Moxnes on the view that "divine action is directed toward the dead, who cannot contribute to their welfare" and that this underlines both divine sovereignty and divine grace. It is for this reason that the resurrection event denotes human finitude and wo/man's inability to effect her or his own salvation, thereby becoming totally dependent on God and losing ground for human boasting except solely in the Lord (1: 31).

Once again, the chapter is well presented as a discourse that avails the reader to an opportunity to grasp some Pauline thought progression on the same issues of concern. The cardinal issues raised in this passage and Paul's reflection can be categorised in three phases.

The first phase is contained in a block that does not take a "reply" form or reflect directly that Paul was responding to any question in 15: 1-11. Paul mainly dwells on the principal statement concerning the resurrection of Christ. This is the opening of the *narration* and it brings out facts that form the basis or foundation of the establishment of the resurrection faith. The principle he brings out will play a fundamental role in the blocks that follow.

The second phase belongs to 15: 12-34 in which Paul gives a hint of the cause for his response as the denial of the resurrection by "some" among the Corinthian Christians (v. 12). This section contains to a great extent the Pauline *refutation* of the possible standpoint of the "denier" and the serious implications for their denial: deformed faith, invalid apostolic witness that they had received, loss of the saints who were dead and the loose meaning of freedom from sin and its effects (v.12-19). Within this block,(20-34), Paul also makes *confirmations* of principles with foci on Christ: Christ was raised as the "first fruit" of the resurrection of those who partake in Christ's life and death (15: 22-23); what Christ has experienced confirms that God's salvific plan is on course toward the ultimate goal "so that God may be all in all" (15: 24-28).

He then concludes this block by making reference and appealing to Christian practices of his time and the meanings thereof “baptism,” “risks” call to “vigilance” and taking strong stance against sin (15: 29-34).

The third and final block in this chapter is 15: 35-58. In this block Paul moves to another level within the discourse and mainly discusses issues related to the nature of the resurrection. How comprehensible will the resurrection be and what type of body will those who die be raised with? Paul concludes this chapter by deconstructing the assumed opponent’s position (15: 35-49) and restating or re-enforcing the principle statement in (15: 50-58)<sup>128</sup> (cf Witherington 1995: 291-298; Fee 1998: 713-720; Harris 1998: 147-152 and Thiselton 2000: 1169-1178). For the purposes of our study we treat the first block: 1 Cor 15: 1-11 which we consider as containing the principle statement that later on finds application in the other subsequent blocks.

As we have already alluded to, this block functions as a principal statement in which Paul focuses on Christ’s death and resurrection as a principle event from which all things evolve. Just as Paul does in the rest of the book, in 15: 1-11, his rhetoric does not reflect the impression that he launches apologetics. On the contrary, he utilises every means at his disposal to strengthen his implied audience by combating the heresy of that which was leading or about to lead “some” astray. He refutes the erroneous doctrinal stance by proving with illustrations his version of the kerygma and drawing implications from the position taken by the deniers (cf Witherington 1995: 295). Probably the Roman imperial eschatological propaganda that was prevalent in the Greco-Roman Corinth and appears to have appealed to the “influential minority” by stressing the realised, present blessedness (Witherington 1995: 295). Here we differ from Furnish (1999: 105) who views the deniers as having been in the “majority.”

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<sup>128</sup> As Thiselton (2000: 1304) brings to our attention, verse 58 can be separated from 15: 50-58 and it can be viewed as charge or exaltation that picks up again the theme of 1 Cor. 15: 1-2.

The fact that Paul only refers to the deniers merely as “some” (15: 12), suggests that it is unlikely that the majority of the Corinthians denied the resurrection.

Nevertheless, even if the number of the deniers is not indicated, contrary to the imperial realised eschatology, Paul identifies with his audience by expounding the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the effect of this death and resurrection on the future. As Vorster (1989: 290) writes:

By means of various speech acts the solidarity of their group is emphasised. No attempt whatsoever is made to identify the implied readers with the deniers of the resurrection. On the contrary, explicit efforts are made to distance the implied readers from the deniers. Identification and confirmation of a hierarchical relationship serves to kindle the goodwill of the implied readers, thereby creating a favourable disposition towards the argument.

In other words, though Paul refers to “some” among the Corinthian community of believers who were denying the resurrection of the dead (15: 12), his communication is directed at the group that he was identifying with. This is the reason why his opponents cannot be easily identified, and the whole section does not take up a form of an answer. Moreover, 15: 1-2 that opens the narration does not even reflect the opening of a response of any kind. The position of his opponents can only be reconstructed from the perspective of Paul as implied by text. The inclusive character of Paul’s kerygma presupposes that the deniers held a limiting view of the resurrection. The Pauline comprehensive portrayal of resurrection as inclusive of *regaining of physical life* that was once forfeited in death, the *transformation* of the *soma* (15: 50ff), and the *exaltation* into the newness of life may indicate that the deniers narrowed and reduced the resurrection to mere resuscitation of the dead body. Harris (1998: 149) puts it well when he states that:

... for Paul, resurrection implies not only restoration to life but also transformation and exaltation. In its full theological import, resurrection signifies the raising of persons from the dead to a new and permanent life in the presence of God. Such a definition applies first of all to the resurrection of Christ, but it also applies to both the present spiritual resurrection and the future bodily

resurrection of believers.

As it has been alluded to in the above quotation, the resurrection of Christ Jesus forms the principle point of departure and is the sole foundation of the resurrection of believers. Even if 1 Cor 15 does not avail us of Paul's comprehensive eschatological views (Furnish 1999: 105), in this portion, Paul nevertheless does not contradict his earlier eschatological conception (cf 1 Cor 6: 14) and thus, provides enough framework that can assist his audience to create distance with the deniers.

Therefore, in vv.1-2, the apostle is in an uncompromising and a non-negotiating mood. He indicates that what he does is to γνωρίζω<sup>129</sup> (let them come to know; make it known to them; or remind them) that *salvation* is only through the gospel that he has proclaimed earlier on and adherence to this Pauline and apostolic kerygma is the safest for the audience. The gospel of the resurrection of Christ is the sole foundation of the transformation that takes place at one's death (15: 35ff) and culminates in the triumphal declaration of victory over death (15: 54-57). This is not given in a limited way to the dead (or as the text puts it "those who have fallen asleep" (15: 51) only, but also includes the living "us" (15: 57).

This is the *Gospel* that Paul has preached to the Corinthians, and he encourages them to uphold it as they know that their labour will not be futile (15: 58) (cf Perriman 1989: 513). By so doing, Paul also indirectly addresses their need to be knowledgeable rather than living in ignorance. Here, "gospel" is a very important word particularly in the context of the Pauline corpus (cf Rom 1: 16-17, 1 Cor 9: 16). His entire calling is understood in terms of the proclamation of the gospel though in 1 Cor 15: 1-2 he uses it with a specific substance that includes the subject of resurrection as he has received and passed it on thereby establishing a rapport with the audience since both Paul and they have received the gospel and no one can claim ignorance.

In verses 2-5 the apostle appeals both to the Scriptures and the apostolic tradition as his sources in order to situate the place of the death and resurrection in the Christ

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<sup>129</sup> See Thiselton 2000:1183 for the difficulty and detailed notes on the translation of Γνωρίζω

event. Over the use of the term “tradition,” it is necessary to take note of Thiselton’s caution (2000: 1186) that:

“Paul does, however, refer to a continuity of handing on and receiving which constitutes, in effect, an early *creed which declares the absolute fundamentals of Christian faith and on which Christian identity (and the experience of salvation) is built.*<sup>130</sup>

The essence of 15: 3-5 rests in Paul’s usage of descriptive terms and phrases that locate Christ’s death and resurrection in the framework of God’s plan of salvation which, according to Paul, bears implications for both the individual believer and the entire community of believers. It is the view of these verses as *a gospel in a nutshell* to justify the adoption of the substance thereof into creedal formularies as suggested in the above-quotation. Furnish (1999: 110) alludes to the same significance by correctly stating that:

He (Paul - DTB) chooses to summarize this gospel by citing a traditional two-part statement that affirms Christ’s death and resurrection (vv.3b-5). In doing so, however, he significantly extends the list of those to whom the resurrected Christ appeared (vv.6-8).

Another thing to note in this passage is that this gospel in a nutshell does not only convey the reality of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, but it also points toward the purpose that was to be served by the same. In this case the preposition ὑπὲρ in v.3 which takes on the genitive form is important. Whenever, ὑπὲρ takes the genitive case it carries the meanings of (on behalf of, for, for the sake of or for the concern of).

The reality of Christ’s death and resurrection and his subsequent resurrection is enforced by ὅτι ἐτάφη (that he was buried) in v.4. Thiselton (2000: 1193) correctly stresses this point: “The point at issue is that the role played by *he was buried* in the kerygmatic, confessional, creedal tradition is to assert the double reality of the genuine death and authentic resurrection of Jesus Christ.” This had two other functions: to affirm this reality in the minds of Paul’s implied audience by reminding them in case they had forgotten, and, secondly, to render void any possible denials that could have

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<sup>130</sup> Thiselton’s italics.

been going on in the wider Greco-Roman Corinthian context. One may not claim any comprehensive Christology based on this part, yet the significant role of the resurrection, which, is of course is crucial to any Christology, is herein adequately presented. The point at issue is that as far as Paul's kerygma is concerned, all that Christ Jesus experienced, he did not experience for his own benefit but for the benefit of whosoever believes and continues to believe in him.

The believers in Christ do not only confess that ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν (he died for our sins),<sup>131</sup> but they also equally share and will share in the benefits of the resurrection, of which one is the benefits will be sharing in the victory over the last enemy in the post-resurrection era: "Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?"(15: 55).

It appears that for Paul, the events of death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have not happened by chance. They fit into God's salvific plan that steadily moves toward the future. The reality of the divine plan is catered for by the emphasis that Paul places on Scripture. Indeed there is no apparent evidence that suggests that by the repetitive phrase "according to the Scriptures" (15: 3f) the apostle was referring to specific portions of the Bible or verses. Rather, it seems his reference was to the entire Old Testament which was then the full Bible in the sense of a written witness to how Yahweh's plan continues to unfold through specific events and personalities. In this case it goes even without mentioning that the events are death and resurrection while the personality is Christ Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is put in the passive for the reason that Paul views both the resurrection of Christ Jesus and the believers in theocentric terms. God through the Spirit is usually the subject of the resurrection (cf Rom 4: 16f; 8: 11,18-27: 1 Cor 15: 4, 56).

In the portion under discussion, there have been a lot of discussions about the meaning of the phrase "on the third day" on which Jesus was raised from the dead

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<sup>131</sup> Fee (1988:724) offers some interesting insight on the meaning "for our sins". According to him: "The language 'for our sins' is a direct reflection of the LXX of Isa.53. Since Judaism did not interpret this passage messianically, at least not in terms of a personal Messiah, and since there is no immediate connection between the death of Jesus and the idea that his death was 'for our sins' it is fair to say that whoever made that connection is the 'founder of Christianity.' All the evidence points to Jesus himself, especially at the Last Supper with his interpretation of his death in the language of Isa.53 as 'for you'....

after burial (15: 4). Thiselton (2000: 1196f) discusses a good number of such commentators who attempt to read the phrase from the perspective of the Old Testament and Jewish midrash.<sup>132</sup> Valuable as such works may be, suffice it for us to say that the phrase appears to be an extract of a traditional empty tomb theory that Paul co-opts it into his own framework to signify that Jesus was raised and continues to be alive. The third day in this credal phrase goes back to the discovery of the empty tomb and first resurrection appearances of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels (cf. Matt 28: 1-10; Mk 16: 1; Lk 24: 1-12 and Jhn 20: 1-31). This position is also advanced by Fee (1988: 726) as he states:

The combined emphasis on the burial, and the third-day resurrection would have had an empty tomb as its natural concomitant, even if not expressed in that way. Given this language, embedded in the heart of the earliest tradition, the early Christians and Paul would find it unthinkable that some would deny that they believed that the tomb was also empty, or that those stories were the creation of a later generation that needed 'objective verification of the resurrection. One may not believe that Jesus rose and that the tomb was therefore, empty; but one may scarcely on good historical grounds deny that they so believed.

In other words, Christ's death and resurrection on the third day forms one inseparable event whose witness is not only the four gospel writers and the people they indicate as having been witnesses but also the entire Old Testament bears the same witness. The reason for this thought is the fact that each part of the event is said to have taken place according to the Scriptures. The importance of the empty tomb cannot be overemphasised, it was crucial to both the early Church and Paul in this particular Corinthian context. Thiselton agrees with Pannenberg over the importance of the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection. He quotes Pannenberg as having raised the following four points which Thiselton (2000: 1198) calls "fundamental":

(1) "The first Christians could not have successfully preached the resurrection of Jesus if his body had been intact in the tomb ... We must assume that the tomb was in fact empty." All the same (2) "Paul's mention of the burial of Jesus in 1 Cor 15: 4 tells us nothing regarding his knowledge of the finding of the empty tomb. From the fact that he does not expressly mention the empty tomb, we cannot infer that he did not know about it," i.e., only that it played no decisive theological role

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<sup>132</sup> According to the Old Testament motif supported by Midrash and the Targum the third day was viewed as the "day of divine salvation, deliverance and manifestation.

in his specific arguments as such. "This is not surprising if for Paul the empty tomb was a self-evident implication of what was said about the resurrection of Jesus." The empty tomb could never in itself constitute a "proof" for it could be explained in a variety of ways. (3) However, the empty tomb tradition does not create difficulties for attempting to interpret the appearances as "mere hallucinations." (4) Above all, the resurrection of Jesus constituted a transformative event, "*yet the event took place in this world, namely in the tomb in Jerusalem before the visit of the women...*" Any assertion that an event took place in the past implies an historical claim and exposes itself to testing.

The above observations provide for us with an appropriate coverage in brief of the empty tomb and its significance. In this case the confirmation that *he was raised on the third day* attempts to qualify the assertion as we have already alluded to above. For one like Paul to proclaim the resurrection, qualifying the proclamation must have been very necessary. This qualification would combat other explanations that may have in turn jeopardised the gospel. One possibility of such explanations that we can think of is a claim that the body was stolen by the disciples. According to Matthew's Gospel, there were already attempts by the Chief priests and the Pharisees to make the above claim before and after the resurrection (Matt 27: 62-66; 28: 11-15). In fact, this would have been a very difficult story to falsify as Matthew's (28: 15) comments that: "So the soldiers took the money and did what they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day."

Perhaps with this background, or more likely, as if presupposing that the resurrection message had not been so rooted in the Corinthian believers, Paul then restates the reality of Jesus death and resurrection by making a qualification. Therefore, καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα ("and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve") must have been more important in Paul's context than we probably realise from our third millennium standpoint. Coming back to our text, it is important to note that Paul's account does not match with the accounts of the post-resurrection appearances in the Gospels. He does not refer to the women as the first witnesses. It is not clear why he calls Peter by the name Cephas (cf. 1 Cor 1: 12; 3: 22; Gal 1:18; 2: 9,11; 14), and much more, the meaning of "the twelve" and whom he was referring to by this designation is still problematic. It is very unlikely that by the "twelve" Paul was referring to the twelve disciples, for this would contradict the record which indicates that Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus had already committed suicide and

his successor Mathias had not yet been appointed (Matt 27: 1-10; Acts 1: 12-26). Although we cannot argue on the basis of chronology, it is a known fact in the New Testament that most of the post-resurrection appearances of our Lord Jesus, happened within the forty days that he remained on earth prior to his ascension (cf. Acts 1: 1-3).

In view of the above fact, we take the view that the phrase “the twelve” had become an appellation for the disciples regardless of the numerical number. It is not clear what sources Paul used to know of these appearances to Cephas and to the twelve; probably he makes his own inclusion or at least edited the sources, if at all he used some traditional material available to him. Nevertheless, whatever his sources were, the point he advances cannot be missed: not only was Jesus raised from the dead, but he also certainly made bodily appearances to a variety of witnesses. In this case Paul proclaims an emphatic objective reality of the resurrection of Jesus by stating that Jesus was “raised” and was “seen” (Fee 1988: 728).

It is this emphatic objective reality of the resurrection that made Paul to state beyond falsification to cite other appearances in vv.6-8. His point is that after the risen Lord Jesus had appeared to “Cephas” and “to the twelve,” as if these appearances were not enough, or as if to indicate beyond any reasonable doubt, the Lord also made an appearance to “more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time.” The adverb “ἐφάπαξ” which has been translated as “at the same time” in the NIV which has been quoted here, has other renderings among which are “all at once” or “at one time.” Quoting the Gospel according to Matthew (28: 16ff), Witherington (cf 1995: 300). suggests that these appearances that Paul refers to may have taken place in Galilee which is at the same place where the risen Lord appeared. Perhaps it is safer to take note of Fee’s argument (1988: 730):

The adverb “at the same time” can hardly be explained as except as an attempt to emphasize the reality and objectivity of this appearance. Beyond that, terms of time and place, all is speculation.

The appearance to the “more than five hundred” seems not to be recorded anywhere else in the New Testament, and, as we have already alluded to, there is no specific mention of women as witnesses as the case is in the Gospels. It is not clear whether or not Paul uses a given traditional source that could have had these inclusions of Cephas

(v. 5) and “James” and “all the apostles” (v. 7) and the exclusion of women attributed to the wider negative attitude to women in the wider context. Probably it is his own addition and he sought to quote witnesses with honour and influence in society whose witness would raise the least doubts but would be credible.

Once again, Paul’s concern appears not to be historical accuracy or to provide the chronological order of the post-resurrection appearances, but to make the resurrection a credible event. In this case, the time location and place of occurrence are not issues for Paul but the indication that the risen Lord did publicly appear to a variety of eyewitnesses most of whom were still alive at the time he was writing the letter. By stating that some eyewitnesses were still alive, Paul challenged those of his implied audience and the doubting “some” to verify the report if they so wished.

In order to seal off the list of eyewitnesses and to emphasise that *Jesus truly died, was buried and was raised* not only in a transformed but also a physical body, Paul eventually adds himself to the list in v. 8-9. He is one of the many to whom the risen Lord appeared and who is available for verification, and so he wrote: “... last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (v.8)<sup>133</sup>. Two observations are worthy noting here. The first one is that Paul’s interpretation of the events surrounding his calling when the risen Lord appeared to him on the way to Damascus (Acts 9: 1-18; 22: 4-16 and 26: 9-18) is that the encounter was a real and physical one and not merely a vision. The second one concerns the difficult noun ἐκτρώματι that Paul used to describe or call himself which has been a cause of many debates in the history of interpretation. Though the NIV has a soft translation of ἐκτρώματι as “abnormally born,” suggesting that Paul merely referred to his birth and not himself, this word is actually a pronoun and Greek pronouns directly stand for the noun. In this case, referring to himself as an ἐκτρώματος Paul called himself *an abortion, a miscarriage, a baby prematurely born* (cf. Mounce 1993: 176). Witherington (1995: 300) suggests that Paul could have been aware that this was the “term of scorn” that some used to call him behind his back. This would imply that Paul was disfigured or odd in appearance. In other words by calling himself an ἐκτρώματος, Paul was referring to his physical condition. This opinion is taken up a step further by Fee who

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<sup>133</sup> NIV translation.

makes a word play on the name “Paulus.” Fee (1988: 734) argues that:

As in 4: 9, he once more goes on the “attact” in this matter by asserting as a value what they would disgrace, namely his “untimely birth” or his “dwarf” status as a real “paulus” of an apostle. What they see as weakness and therefore, as evidence of a lesser standing, he sees as the true evidence that his apostleship is from the Lord. Thus in 2 Cor 10-13 where all this comes to a head, he defends himself once again by glorying in his weakness (cf 1 Cor 2: 1-5, and 9: 1-27).

Our comment on this insight from Fee will come by a way of an overview of the whole debate. In agreement with Thiselton, an overview the claims on Paul’s ἐκτρώματι terminology in the verses under our consideration brings out the following:

- i. that it referred to Paul’s sudden and unexpected calling since the calling found Paul still persecuting the church.
- ii. that it was an abusive term that some early Christians used to apply on Paul to mock him. The argument is that when he was persecution the church, Christians applied this term on him with the meaning of “monster” or “freak” as another rendering of the term.
- iii. that some Christians at Corinth applied this abusive term of Paul with reference to his physical condition; in comparison to other apostles, like Peter and Apollos, who had also worked at Corinth after Paul first visited them.
- iv. that the term involves a wordplay with the Greek meaning of the name “Paulus:” in this case, Paul appeared as a small one or one of short stature. This position claims that through the patristic exegesis it refers to human humility.
- v. that the term acquire the meaning of humility only in comparative terms and that the term indicates that understood himself “as unworthy to be called an apostle as an abortion to be considered a fully human person.
- vi. That the term is used in figurative and comparative terms and that the idea of the “abortive birth” brings out prominently the Grace of God to one who could not in any way make a human contribution (cf. Fee 1988: 734f; Witherington 1995: 300f and Thiselton 2000: 1209ff).

While we consider the possibility that Paul could have been reflecting something of his physical condition, whether that be for rhetorical reasons or whatever the case would have been, caution is hereby raised against “over studying” and “over stating” some of these perspectives. We must not forget that Pauline letters, including 1 Corinthians, do not provide us with Paul’s biographical data. These are contextual theological correspondences whose aim was to inspire or consolidate faith as the case

may be. In this regard, whether coincidentally Paul had bodily deformities, in the Corinthian context he sounds more to be referring to his calling both as a Christian and as an apostle which came out of different circumstances and a timeframe in contrast to the rest of the apostles. In terms of the above summaries, we would advocate the last view. Paul's concern is not his deformity (if any) but using all means at his disposal to passionately reason with his implied audience so that they may be reassured that by believing Paul's version of the gospel they have not been deceived. Through the phrase "I am the least of the apostles" in v. 9 Paul indicates that the whole apostolic tradition bears witness to the resurrection which to him is validated by the huge cloud of eyewitness including himself.

In this sense his argument seems to point in two directions: on the one hand, Paul makes an affirmation that he is in a line of genuine apostolate, though this could not match with their opinion on him; he is at the tail of the hierarchical ladder. Though he does not "even deserve to be called an apostle ...." he is in any case an apostle and the Corinthians are themselves part of his credentials as an apostle (cf 1 Cor 15: 1-2; 2 Cor 3: 1-6). This helps us to explain the "apologetic flavour" that he adds by a slight digression "... No, I worked harder than all of them" (v.10b). He confidently challenges them to consider the fact that whatever view is held of him, the concrete fruit of the gospel that he has proclaimed like any genuine apostle, stand to be seen and cannot be doubted.

On the other hand, however, as we have contended above, Paul is not preoccupied with personal issues so much. He takes on the image of "a pastor" encouraging his flock to be rooted in the gospel. He does this by lowering himself and bringing out much more the grace of God (v.10a and 10c). He is not only the least of the apostolic hierarchical ladder as we have called it, but he was a "mere a channel of divine grace" and so he clarified what sounded as a comparison of the effectivity of his ministry to that of the other apostles. This he does by a "grace inclusio" in v.10 where he attributes all to the grace of God at the beginning, and ends by stating that it was not actually him that worked and bore much fruit, but the grace of God with him. By so doing Paul launches an attack on the criteria probably used by some of the Corinthians in their judgement of not only Paul's status as an apostle but also of his ministry (cf. 1 Cor 1: 10-17; 2:1-5; 4: 1-5; 13: 1ff; 14: 6, 18, 36-38) (cf Fee 1988:

735). As he has done before in the earlier part of the text, he depicts the glory of his ministry not in terms of his human success or strength, but in terms of the power of the Holy Spirit that by grace made a manifestation through Paul's human weakness (1 Cor 2: 1-5; 9: 15-18). This is the reason why Paul does not leave claims hanging but he qualifies them most probably to curb misunderstandings. For instance, he qualifies that his reason for not deserving "even to be called an apostle" is not as they may think, i.e. Paul as a *paulus*, but based of his "sad past" wherein he persecuted the church of God.

In all these discussions we need to note that Paul brings himself out as a "Theologian of Grace" who is theologically very aware that his calling was received as a gift to one who did not expect it and who received it at a time outside the "normal." As such he upholds grace in a very centre place in his theology. The great contribution is that, like all humankind, this grace did not find him in the corridors of the saved, but when he was alienated and actively wrestling against the work of God. Yet the gracious God did not leave him in death, but brought him to life and made him a new creation in Christ Jesus (cf 2 Cor 5: 17ff).

Paul depicts God as a sole agent of divine sovereignty and grace. Χάρις (undeserved, unmerited, free gift) plays a very centre role in Pauline theology and whenever Paul digresses, it is when he recalls grace and then returns. Grace for him is not an abstract concept but a concrete instrument that God uses to shape the preacher of the gospel. The effects of grace can be experienced in the lives of people in ministry. To demonstrate this point, Paul refers to his own story and the Corinthians themselves whom he regards as the initial evidence of the transformation effects since not many of them were of high standing in society. The human response to divine grace and human labour (v.10b) is not to be viewed as a way of compensating the Triune God, but a way of manifesting the presence of grace that God extends toward his people. It is this theme of grace that manifests in human *weakness* that pre-occupies Paul in his communication with the Corinthians and to which he invites them to appreciate. In this case, we agree with Thiselton (2000: 1211) who correctly states:

... Undeserved, unmerited grace (χάρις) which springs from the free, sovereign love of God alone and becomes operative in human life not only determines Paul's life and apostolic vocation but also characterizes all Christian existence, not least the promise of resurrection and the reality of the

activity of Christ as Lord.

Paul's argument revolves around two foci: firstly, it is God out of his own sovereign grace who has made Paul what he is, and secondly, the divine grace has effects on Paul's life. It is at work in him and as such, his ministry entails sharing this gospel to many so that many may as well receive and experience the same grace. These foci inform Paul's principle in his ministry: what he has freely received, he freely gives (cf 1 Cor 15: 3; 9: 15-18; 11: 23f).

In other words, the theme of grace leads Paul to declaring a categorical no to human pride, boasting and self-glorification because, after all, it is God through grace who works in humankind (15: 10c) and therefore, if there is any boasting that humankind can experience, it is in the Lord (1: 31), and on this Paul remains consistent throughout his letters.

In the context of our text, Paul's emphasis on grace and its effects of human life is at an equilibrium with the emphasis that he puts on the resurrection and its power. As grace has been prominent in his discussion of vv. 8-10, so also is the resurrection central and for this reason Paul returns to the matters concerning the resurrection (v. 11) after an interlude of grace. In this case we may basically treat v. 11 as Paul's conclusion of his validation of the resurrection of Christ Jesus. He proclaimed that: "Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you have believed." Through this statement Paul convincingly argues that the resurrection of Christ Jesus is the core content of all kerygma no matter who the preacher is. In this way, Paul portrays himself as a selfless, passionate and mature preacher of the gospel, and a mature pastor who has neither *inferiority* nor *superiority complexes* but upholds the power of combined witness. The test of genuine apostleship and Christianity is in believing the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead, and strategically he states that the Corinthians have believed. By putting Christ's resurrection as the core content of kerygma irrespective of the preacher, Paul logically identifies with the gospel that the Corinthians have already believed in vv.3-5 and indirectly draws their attention to a fair evaluation of his style of ministry. In the same vein, as Fee (1988: 736) observes:

... therefore, he is pressing on them that their current behaviour and theology are out of step with

those of other Churches (1: 2; 4: 17; 11: 16; 14: 33). Thus, "what they believed" through his preaching when he was among them is the same gospel preached presently by him and by all apostles.

Putting the above differently, Paul's argument is that the bona fide gospel is much more an issue that the means through which it came and again the function of 2: 1-5 comes into play. In this case, if the Corinthian Christians are prudent, they should examine themselves on the basis of kerygma and its implications for the current life.

The other thing that comes out of this centrality of kerygma with the resurrection content, is that Paul challenges them that laxity in morality (discussed earlier on in ch.5) and the denial of the resurrection (even if it only affects "some") cannot be linked to the apostolate but it is a matter of personal misdirection by themselves. He thus wages a vehement refutation of the very foundation of the "denier" but he does so with a clear, least alarming yet effective strategy.

Through the same approach, Paul sets a common stage for him and his "implied" readers by indicating that the gospel of Christ's resurrection affects the entire apostolic tradition and all believers in this life and in the life to come (15: 12-58). This Paul attempts to achieve not necessarily by creating or accumulating "proof texts." It is not his aim to overwhelm his audience with academic evidence. As we have contended, Paul's self image in this text is to a large extent that of a pastor whose sole aim is to reaffirm the gospel of the resurrection of Christ Jesus. He draws on a variety of public witness, and on the basis of that reality, those who are in Christ, dead or alive, will continue to belong to Christ.

The grand finale rests on the risen Christ Jesus whose death and resurrection have positive implications for the believer in this world. This appears to be the calling that Paul received and once again, this is a calling to which Paul invites his readers to join so that with faith and conviction in the reality of both the historical death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, the new challenges may be faced. The gospel of hope in life beyond the grave when the last enemy (15: 26) strikes, may be proclaimed because in Christ, the enemy is already defeated and will finally be mocked (15: 54-57).

Therefore, belief in the bodily resurrection is at the centre of Christian theology right from the early Church and goes on through the ages and centuries. Any denial of the reality of the bodily death and resurrection of Christ Jesus leads to the denial of the very foundation of Christianity across all cultures. It is for this reason that a dead and buried saviour is no saviour at all.

Another observation to make is that the message of the bodily resurrection from the dead is a message for Christians.

As we have seen from Paul, this gospel is pastoral in character so that when it hurts most, Christians may transcend their circumstances and look up to a saviour who has demonstrated the way and is now alive not through escaping but by facing the enemy and coming up victorious. In other words, this is not a message with which to threaten unbelievers or convince them through proofs. As Fee has observed (1988: 736), the resurrection of Christ as an event itself lies outside the ordinary categories of historical proof.

In attempting to find out how our African (Chewa) audience responds to such a message, we hereby state that the response goes with a sense of great ambiguity. This ambiguity comes because the message of hope for the future is a need and it is already embedded in the culture. Any discussion on life and death is important to an African because, as we have stated, Africans view death as the apex of this life. It is a high moment of transition from this world to a better world of the living dead. This is the reason why death is celebrated through various death rites and rituals that may differ from cultures to culture but retain thrusts that seem to permeate through the individual cultures to form an African culture in the singular sense. Through these celebrations of death in diversity one realises that life from birth through puberty and adulthood is basically a preparation for a good and honourable death. At this death, the whole community marks the event by a communal meal. If it is a village set-up where poverty is so high that people rarely eat meat, during death celebration, domestic animals are slaughtered and the whole community celebrates. In this way, though death is always received with pain, and every time it strikes the surviving members look for the external cause, in actual fact, death as such is not viewed as the last in a person's life. When it is emphasised over and over again in 1 Cor 15: 1-11, that death was not the last event in the life of Christ Jesus and that it will never be the last event

in the life of those who believe in him, there is nothing strange about this message to an African audience because as we have mentioned, there is already belief in life beyond the grave involving the transformed existence within the African culture.

Through symbolic acts, even during burial many Africans believe that they can still communicate with the departed. In rural life, one such example is that during burial, some soil would be put in the palm of the departed and the living would pour soil in the grave prior to burial.

That is believed to be a message to the ancestral world that the living still possess the land. In urban areas and among the educated Africans, this practice is either modified or through the influence of the Church not observed at all. The common "new rite" among the educated Africans is to write and deliver extensive eulogies. Some of these are published at quite some costs. Even if there may be very few to acknowledge that there is a communication or at least an attempted communication, and other explanations may be preferred, the fundamental assumption is that even beyond the grave, life continues. In this case, the discussion of Paul concerning the nature of the resurrection body in 15: 35-58 may not raise radical problems because the African concept of death indicates that when one dies s/he goes into a higher state among the living dead. Such a one is believed to join the ancestral world at the real "home."

If the above is the state of issues, where is the ambiguity and how does it come about? Strangely, the idea of a "bodily resurrection" does not exist in the African culture. People who are reported or alleged to have been bodily resurrected, are those people who have been living in the context of strong suspicion of witchcraft. At this point the proclamation of the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ Jesus reaches an African audience like a strong light approaching them externally because it has no parallel within the culture and therefore no frame of reference. In this case, when an African is in Church and pronounces the words *I believe in the resurrection of the body* during the reciting of the Apostolic creed in accordance with the common practice in many churches (Harris 1998: 150), there are a few possibilities of what is made of the phrase. Either they are said just as part of being church without critical understanding or in a more polite sense, amidst some conviction in self encouraging words: "we will see when we are there". It is different from the experience when reciting the phrase *I believe in the communion of the saints* because in the thinking of

an African, communion of the saints includes the living dead. In this regard, on the subject of the bodily resurrection and existence, the African culture fails to enhance interpretation. On the contrary, it hinders the interpretation and application of the message.

For this reason, if the core of the gospel in our text rests in a resurrection that is not abstract but a concretely bodily resurrection in a transformed form, then this gospel ought to penetrate the African culture.

Since we have stated that like all cultures, the African culture is dynamic and responds to change, perhaps the concept of life after death that is already present in the culture should be utilised as a departure point to effect change that could lead to the eternalising of the profession of belief in the resurrection of the body. This would be a noble course to chant because, as we have contended, in the text, the gist is that the understanding of Christ's death and resurrection in concrete terms is the basis for appreciating the freedom from the alienating effects of sin so that the community of believers may know the power of God's forgiveness and secure a firm hope for the future even in the face of a strong sense of finitude. The relevance and significance of the gospel in our context rests no where else but on this mystery that must be shared

#### ***4.3 Conclusion: Reading 1 Corinthians through African eyes***

In the first place, one question is important for us at this stage: how African eyes read the text of 1 Corinthian in the light of the selections that we have investigated above. We need to redefine for ourselves what we have been doing and what we mean by "a reading through African eyes." Perhaps this can be best approached by stating what the hermeneutic task is not: (i) it is not a customary opposing or reactive stance against any other readings and their presuppositions, values and practices that guide hermeneutics. (ii) it is not a superficial "Afrocentrism." The term Afrocentrism is used by Punt (1999: 315) to describe an alternative to the reading of the Bible from dominant Western perspective since the enlightenment. He argues that Afrocentric readings ought to mean more than mere opposition to Eurocentric (Western) readings. Punt (1999: 315) argues that

Afrocentric readings should like any other readings be subjected to the same 'hermeneutic of

suspicion' or ideology criticism and 'cannot be naïvely be accepted as 'authentic' to Africa and therefore, universal and neutral or objective.

In this study, reading 1 Corinthians with African eyes is part of reading the Bible with African eyes in the sense of re-establishing the African cultural context and as a premise of hermeneutic without reducing the value of massive historical research that has already been put into effect. Rather, it is an attempt to state theologically how the reading of this text that honours the context of the African reader produces or fails to produce results. Once again this is in relation of other readings which already play dominant effects on hermeneutics.

In view of the above clarification, it is hereby submitted that the reading of the text of 1 Corinthians with African eyes reveals that this text continues to be significant and relevant. The issues that the apostle raised with his implied audience to a great extent have some bearing on the African reader. A reconstruction of Paul's audience would in many ways depicts similarities and parallels with the African one. This is not to suggest that there should always be a direct transfer from the Corinthian text to the African one. What is meant is that a serious consideration of the African cultural context brings out many advantages in interpreting and applying the message of the text. In other words, the parallels are not necessarily between the *ancient Greco-Roman Corinth* which forms Paul's context, but rather, the parallels that we mention exists between the *ideal* to which the author invites his audience and the African *culture*.

We have seen that the text deals with issues affecting the unity of the community (1 Cor 1: 4-17) and the way power is regulated and utilised within the same community (1 Cor 1: 18-2: 5). It has also been observed that reading 1 Corinthians (5: 1-13) with African eyes in many aspects creates a conducive and positive anticipation because the direction to which the author pulls the audience is the point of identification with the African reader and audience. Though the rationale behind certain fundamental convictions may be the same, at least the interpretative framework facilitates the hermeneutic task. Our study has also pointed out that the reading of the text with African eyes creates both a sense of identification and security or distancing and insecurity depending on what aspect of life the text presupposes to be concerned with.

This was the case while dealing with aspects of 5: 1-13 and 15: 1-11.

All in all the text of 1 Corinthians is relevant to the African reader and listener. This relevance is expressed when the African reader or listener positively identifies and develops a sense of feeling secure with the preacher and the message on the one hand. On the other hand, relevance is as well demonstrated through a sense of amazement, insecurity or distancing as one fails to create links that can help a concrete relation to the gospel and either continues to seek or takes up a "leap of belief" and acceptance. In this case, the hermeneutical task of reading the text of 1 Corinthians with African eyes is an invitation into the world of discoveries. On the one hand, some discoveries include a leading to appreciating how rich this culture is and how in many cases one can grow within it and be able to bear an African Christian fruit that can contribute to the character of world-wide Christianity. On the other hand, however, other discoveries lead to a sad feeling of the inadequacy and limitations of this culture. In other words, one reassesses this culture in terms of a criterion that is outside the culture and be in a position to appreciate conversion and the impact thereof.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Several concluding observations and propositions can be cited and be offered as a way to consolidate major issues that we have encountered in our study of New Testament Interpretation and African Culture.

*Firstly*, the category culture is a *complex core of any human existence* and it is the *premise* through which humanity communicates and shares being amongst each other. The numerous attempted definitions are a confirmation that humankind does not exist without culture. Viewed comprehensively, the entire human endeavour is culture.

*Secondly*, since Biblical texts in general and New Testament texts in particular are documents toward communication involving personalities and events, the category culture is operative in the Biblical authors themselves as we have established concerning Paul in our treatment of 1 Corinthians and the nature of Pauline congregations.

*Thirdly*, since the Biblical text is a written form of the Word of God in human language, the culture of the people of Biblical times is already present in the Biblical text itself.

*Fourthly*, following the third observation, the consideration of the presence of culture in the text which is the focus of interpretation calls for its counterpart: the culture of the reader and of his or her audience. Hence, any attempt to wage a warring dichotomy between *interpretation* and *culture* is a “hermeneutic pothole” that must be avoided.

*Fifthly*, on the one hand, New Testament Interpretation must be inculturated and as we have established, the African culture enhances interpretation and thus makes a vital contribution to the unfinished hermeneutic task. Both the cultures in the world behind and the world of the text must receive equal attention with the culture of the world in front of the text which includes the reader and the hearer.

*Sixthly*, on the other hand, as every human culture faces limitations and challenges,

we have established even the African culture or at least some aspects of African culture, hinders the interpretation of certain texts that depict a culture and worldview of the Biblical author but that has no parallelisms within the interpreter's culture. To absolutely tame New Testament interpretation within the culture of the interpreter, whether or not the interpreter is an African or any other, leaves the interpreter at a great risk of recycling into the text the interpreter's own ignorance and preconceptions congruent to one's culture. Any interpreter is capable of being a prisoner of what alone she or he can see in her or his culture. Thus, culture as a dynamic category is subject to conversion.

*Finally*, this study has tested and established that African culture can both enhance and hinder New Testament interpretation. Therefore, New Testament interpretation requires a cultural critical approach that will recognise the extent to which the culture is playing its effect on the hermeneut so that the hermeneut should take a deliberate and informed decision to balance her culture with those cultures of the author and text which likewise demand respect and "autonomy." This should be done by subjecting culture to the same hermeneutic suspicion to which the text that is to be interpreted is subjected. Only when culture in the context of the Biblical author and his audience, the text and the interpreter and her or his audience receive equal and undivided attention, will New Testament Interpretation become an honourable endeavour. Once again the African culture, like any culture, should respond to all critical hermeneutic questions. In this case, the uprooting of African people into Christianity without any culture as was the case when Western Missionaries brought Christianity to Africa only succeeded in making "christians" with a small letter. This must be regretted as an error that in the spirit of reconciliation with the past must be corrected. Only when this error is corrected and culture is not demonised, but appreciated will Africans or indeed any people really become Christians.

In conclusion, on the one hand, consideration of both the worlds/cultures in the text and in the the hermeneut, and the conscious rightful positioning of culture can contribute to a better understanding of the biblical text - specifically the First Letter to the Corinthians and can lead to a vibrant and realistic spirituality that can revitalise the Church of modern times. On the other hand, however, culture can hinder interpretation and wherever it does, culture must itself be converted. In other words,

New Testament interpretation is a process where both *inculturation* and *de-culturation* become not opposing forces but cardinal components of the hermeneutical process and our reading of the selected pericopes from 1 Corinthians validates this proposition.

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## KEY WORDS

*Afrocentrism*

*COMESA*

*Culture*

*De-culturation*

*Eurocentrism*

*Hermeneut*

*Hermeneutics*

*Inculturation*

*Mlengi*

*Author focused reading*

*Moyo*

*Mulungu*

*Mzimu*

*Postcolonial interpretation*

*Reader-response*

*Socio-scientific*

*Ubale*

*Azimu*

*Ziomtaka*

*Umodzi*

*African culture/s*

*Western culture/s*

*Umunthu*

## NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION AND AFRICAN CULTURE.

### SELECTIONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS AS A TEST CASE

#### SUMMARY

“New Testament interpretation and African culture” is a study in hermeneutics. The study was designed to determine the effect on Biblical interpretation where culture - in both the world of the reader and the world of the text - is taken seriously. The quest further sought to determine whether a reading from the perspective of the African culture does not allow greater understanding of the text than from dominant readings from Western perspectives. In order to achieve these objectives, the perspectives would be applied by interpreting selections from the First Letter to the Corinthians.

This study is necessary because culture has always received a low profile in Biblical interpretation because of the misconceptions that view African culture as against the Christian faith. Chapter 1 has also given a working definition of the category culture.

It has been indicated that the category ‘culture’ in its complexity belongs to the core of human existence. People are a product of culture and as such culture was operative in the Biblical authors; it is operative in the text as a product of communication and it is eventually operative in the reader and her/his audience. All communication occurs within the framework of culture. Anyone who reads a Biblical text does so from a particular cultural perspective in which she or he stands. Both Paul and the Christians in 1 Corinthians are products of the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture.

Chapter 2 is a survey of the category “culture” in New Testament interpretation. This has led to a proposition that throughout the hermeneutical shifts and dynamic history of interpretation culture plays a very cardinal role and it is actually a premise of interpretation.

This has been tested in chapter 3 where the presence of culture in Paul, his congregations and letters has been tested, detected and affirmed. The entire study and interpretation of Pauline writings is cultural friendly and utilises culture as a vehicle of communication.

In chapter 4, African perspectives on 1 Corinthians are surveyed by testing selected tenets on some of the pericopes of the text of 1 Corinthians. This important section finally leads to the

study conclusion in chapter 5. In this final section a number of propositions are suggested which slant towards the following:

The hermeneut only labours in vain unless she or he strives to get acquainted with the culture in a given Biblical text. Equally, the culture of the hermeneut should be realised and controlled so that it does not dominate hermeneutics otherwise hermeneutics becomes reduced to a mere mental game with no concrete results and impact.

African culture both enhances and hinders interpretation of a given pericope depending on the nature of that pericope.

In conclusion, on the one hand, serious consideration of both the worlds/cultures in the text and in the hermeneut, and the conscious rightful positioning of culture can contribute to a better understanding of the biblical text - specifically the First Letter to the Corinthians and can lead to a vibrant and realistic spirituality that can revitalise the Church of modern times. On the other hand, however, culture can hinder interpretation and wherever it does, culture must itself be converted. In other words, New Testament interpretation is a process where both *inculturation* and *de-culturation* become cardinal components of the hermeneutical process and our reading of the selected pericopes from 1 Corinthians validates this proposition.

## OPSOMMING IN AFRIKAANS

### **NUWE TESTAMENT INTERPRETASIE EN AFRIKA KULTUUR: ENKELE PERIKOPE IN 1 KORINTIËRS AS GEVALLE-STUDIE**

'Nuwe Testament en Afrika kultuur' is 'n hermeneutiese studie wat onderneem om die effek van kultuur – beide in die wêreld van die leser en dié van die teks - op Bybel interpretasie te bepaal. Die navorsing verder poog om na te gaan in hoeverre 'n lees vanuit 'n Afrika kultuur kan lei tot beter verstaan van die teks teenoor dominante interpretasies vanuit Westerse perspektief. Om hierdie doelwitte te bereik, is die insigte toegepas op die interpretasie van enkele dele van die Eerste Brief aan die Korintiërs.

Hierdie studie is geregverdig deur die lae profiel wat 'kultuur' tot onlangs in Bybel interpretasie geniet het en omdat Afrika kultuur beskou is as in teenstelling tot die Christelike geloof. Hoofstuk een bied ook 'n werksdefinisie van die kategorie 'kultuur'

In die studie word aangetoon dat 'kultuur' in al haar kompleksiteit tot die wesentlike van die menslike bestaan hoort. Die mens is 'n produk van kultuur, en so ook spesifiek die skrywers van die Bybelboeke. Kultuur is aanwesig in die teks as 'n produk van kommunikasie en is in finale instansie ook operasioneel by die leser en sy/haar gehoor. Alle kommunikasie geskied in die raamwerk van kultuur. Elkeen wat die Bybel lees doen dit vanuit sy/haar bepaalde kultuur perspektief. Beide Paulus en die Christene van 1 Korintiërs was produkte van die Joodse en Grieks-Romeinse kultuur.

Hoofstuk 2 bied 'n oorsig van die kategorie 'kultuur' in Nuwe Testament interpretasie. Dit lei tot die gevolgtrekking dat in die hermeneutiese verskuiwings en in die dinamiese geskiedenis van interpretasie 'kultuur' 'n kardinale rol speel en in werklikheid 'n veronderstelling van interpretasie is.

Hierdie insigte is toegepas in hoofstuk 3 waar die aanwesigheid van kultuur by Paulus, sy gemeentes en briewe nagegaan en bevestig is. Die hele studie en interpretasie van die Pauliniese geskrifte is 'kultuur-vriendelik' en gebruik kultuur as middel tot kommunikasie.

Hoofstuk 4 bied 'n oorsig van Afrika perspektiewe op 1 Korintiërs deur 'n aantal beginsels op enkele perikope toe te pas. Hierdie belangrike deel lei tot die gevolgtrekking van die studie in hoofstuk 5. Hierdie finale deel bied 'n aantal stelling wat die volgende insigte bied:

- Die hermeneut ywer tevergeefs tensy hy/sy vertrou is met die kultuur in die gegewe teks. Gelykerwys moet die kultuur van die hermeneut erken en gekontroleer word sodat dit nie interpretasie domineer nie, anders kan dit 'n blote spel raak sonder enige resultate en impak.
- Afrika kultuur kan beide bevorderlik of stremmend op interpretasie inwerk afhangende van die aard van die perikoop.

Ten slotte: enersyds, kan ernstige aandag aan biede die kultuur in die teks en dié van die hermeneut en die korrekte verstaan van kultuur, lei tot 'n beter insig in die Bybelteks. Spesifiek by 1 Korintiërs kan dit lei tot 'n lewenskragtige en realistiese spiritualiteit wat kan bydra om die kerk nuwe stukrag te gee. Andersyds kan kultuur egter interpretasie negatief beïnvloed en moet

kultuur self 'bekeer' word. Anders gestel: Nuwe Testament interpretasie is 'n proses waar beide inkulturasie en de-kulturasie kardinale komponente van die hermeneutiese proses is. Die lees van 1 Korintiërs het hierdie aanname oortuigend aangetoon.

