

**THE LOCAL CHURCH IS A VISIBLE
HERMENEUTICAL COMMUNITY.**

by

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Introduction.

My motivation to write this work has arisen from alarming signs of the return of World Catholicism as I read the lucid writings of some concerned Catholic writers like Penny Lernoux (1989) , David Tracy (1989) , J-B.Metz (1989) , J.A. Komonchak (1987) and J.L. Segundo (1985) . My bibliography is dominated by organic critical readers who encourage the Church's historicity and cultural particularity . My work falls under a mode of hermeneutical production that bases its argument on the fact that the Church can lead people to eternal salvation not by being the guarantor of ecclesio-hermeneutical domination , but by its prophetic presence as a subversive and a systematic erosive force in interpreting every ideologico-religious configuration of various social formations in the Roman Catholic Church .

The kind of materialist textual reading of the Bible I resonate with , is one that challenges the ideology which serves as a system of directives on actions and authoritative power which claims a constitutive basis for all interpretive readings of polycentric and polycultural social formations . This Roman ideologico-religious interpretive system marks the return of World Catholicism which is the most influential superstructure apparatus with a hermeneutical power to justify the asymmetrical social conditions in the world at the advantage of the West .

Under the influential power of this Roman ideologico-religious interpretive system , the organic critical readers may soon follow the suite and assume a function of being a clerico-political apparatus or inculcator which subserviently supports a domination of the marginalised by theologising within the circumference of this Roman interpretive interest. This

practically means that they may be producing a theology from a biblical hermeneutics that glosses over the class interests of the Western ideology with a religious varnish .

The ideological aspect is dominant in the Church in so far as it makes possible and justifies in particular of the clerico-political apparatus and its functionaries (bishops and priests) by affording ideal relations of the actors to God\Jesus Christ , and thus primarily constituting these actors as believers and binding them to agreement on all decisive questions .¹

The religiously uncontested epistemological and political severance of the magisterium as the dominant group in the Church produces and reproduces a culture of hermeneutical silence and subservience of the Third World churches . So what we end up seeing is the production of texts like "An Instruction on Certain Aspects of Liberation Theology " . Such a text as revealing the general hermeneutical approach is not only meant to influence the conscious mind as affirmed by its subject matter , but it is also meant to create a 'dependency syndrome' or pre-conscious behaviour as a material sign system . Hence such a text clearly reveals the Roman Church's official position in the ideological intra-ecclesial class struggle . The poor and the marginalised are thus left with two options : either they passively yield to such official texts as a social nexus or they take it as a locus of direct confrontation within the Church .

I have opted to pursue the direction of the second option and I strongly opine that inculturation hermeneutics holds a key position in a critical reading of the Bible that openly confronts

¹ K.Fussel, 1981, 12.

a Catholic doctrine that is adapted to the economy and anti-Socialism of the Eurocentric social order . In line with this , I strongly challenge the metaphysical and paternalistic preferential option for the poor of the Roman hermeneutical approach which is so condemnatory that no one can oppose it and not automatically be labelled as a revolutionary atheist and God's enemy .

This socio-economic conditioning of the Church in accordance with the interpretive interest of the Occidental capitalist bloc strongly incapacitates the hermeneutical individuation of the various ecclesial communities within the Roman Catholic Church. The ecclesial communities of the Third World can neither be culturally original in their theological mode of production nor opt for the Church in their liturgical symbolic products that affirms their social ethic as a particular local Church . Instead , their struggle against the socio-political injustices and economical inequalities is seen as theologically sound if it is according to the ideological interest of the West.

The concrete doxological hymn of praise that is in thanksgiving for the presence of the liberating power of God in history is remotely orchestrated by the magisterium which has monopolised the sociological and religious hermeneutical mode of production. It is in the light of this that I ask myself whether we as a local Church of South Africa can subject ourselves to a biblical hermeneutics whose religious producers theologise as religious consumers of another historical context .

The other issue I am raising in this work is that religion and theology are no longer to be seen as sacrosanct within the epistemological mode of production of the West . Theology is no more to be seen as a creative art that is relegated to the specialists and their special interests , but theology has now

to be seen as socio-economically conditioned and reflective of the cultural particularity of each local Church . This textual appropriation and re-appropriation of the Bible through inculturation hermeneutics has to engage contextual readers into a new conversion or re-identification . The Bible has to be seen as a normative text whose meaning evolves and in turn revolutionarises Christianity rather than domesticates it .

As part of the introduction I feel I need to clarify my hermeneutical stand which qualifies the nature of the perspective from which this work has emerged and has been compiled . I write as a Roman Catholic priest who is a critical reader of the Bible and the encyclical theology from Rome . I am basically arguing for a catholicity and apostolicity that emerge from a 'hermeneutic of coherence' which acknowledges and affirms textual reading of the Bible from diverse socio-cultural contexts . It is on the basis of this assertion that I argue for an African theology and spirituality that reflect the catholic character of our local Church .

The Base Ecclesial Community with which I have read and reflected on the Bible was not of my own choice but it is a community I have been assigned to work with . This community is still basically traditional, though the non-governmental organisations and the Reconstruction and Development Programme have radically influenced this community by establishing adult literacy classes, primary health care , treated water supplies and even a technical school . This community knows the pain of dysfunctional marriages as a result of migratory labour market demand in the metropolitan areas . Though the socio-economical condition may change later on , at this present moment this community is experiencing a transition from paternal dependency on the Church

and the White local farmers for funds to self-efficiency and accountability . Responsible parenthood , industrial empowerment through technical skills , agricultural programmes and literacy are clear indications of this transition . These factors have become the basis of our materialist reading of the Bible to affirm this empowerment .

My method of research has been participatory observation . I have felt that I needed to give myself an opportunity to be a co-reflective reader with the other members of this Christian community . This was accompanied by some biases and insecurities on my part and also on their part as they could not feel at ease in my presence as a priest . As I began to express my appreciation of the insights I had gained from their simple gut-level sharing in these Bible reflections , I felt given a place of a companion in our Christian journey together . This gesture of the community still serves as an environmental space for my critical reading of the Bible and the occasional facilitation of these Bible reflection sessions .

These Bible reflection sessions have become a spiritual resource and empowerment in the social life of this community in its transition period . They have unavoidably marked their presence by their effect on the life of this community . These sessions have also become suspect by allowing women to speak and look at their societal status critically . On the other side , these sessions have been appreciated for being a secure platform and an arena of a Bible reading and reconstructive social ethic that transcends petty issues of denominational exclusivism in the community .

CHAPTER ONE .

THE RECEPTION OF VATICAN II AS A CALL TO TRANSITIONAL CHANGE .

1.0. Introduction

The significance of the Second Vatican Council (1962 - 1965) that was convoked by Pope John XIII to bring about change and renewal in the Roman Catholic Church has remained a historical ecclesial event . Yet if one assesses the encyclical theology and ecclesiastical teaching as reflected in writings like Ecclesia in Africa and the deliberations of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 , Roman Catholicism school of thought seem to discourage this progressive change and renewal and wants to turn the clock back to the Church being triumphalistic , juridical and hierarchical .¹

The ultra-intransigent position of this school of thought has serious effect on the hermeneutical ability of the ordinary readers of the Bible in the Catholic Church . It is on the basis of this concern that I argue that the hermeneutics of the organic intellectuals of the Third World like Leonardo Boff and Juan Segundo are not leading the untrained readers of the Bible to becoming schismatic groups , but in line with the spirit of the aggiornamento of the Vatican Council II , they aim at enabling the ordinary readers to contextualise and engage with the Bible .texts in an empowering and redemptive way. This mainly affects key issues like overcoming socio-political injustices and interdependency between the trained reader and the ordinary reader of the Bible .

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¹ For a clear and detailed study on the contrasting schools of thought on the Vatican II as a transitional Council , see Herman Potzmeier's article and another one by Avery Dulles .

This interdependent contextual reading actually refers to a non-dominating facilitation of a critical reader's co-reflective reading with the ordinary readers as one Base Ecclesial Community that reads the Bible to discern or hear what God is saying or challenging them to do in order to be a socially transformative and dynamic community of believers . In my attempt to clear ground for this interdependent or collaborative contextual reading , I intend challenging the prevalence of the Eurocentric paternalism and the triumphalistic biblical hermeneutics of the Western world that keeps silencing the emerging community-based contextual hermeneutics of the Third World . I remain suspicious of a leadership style that reflects a biblical scholarship that speaks at and for the poor and the marginalised . I will pay special attention on the interpretive interests of the Roman Curia in its response to the creative and redemptive contributions as delivered by Contextual and Liberation Hermeneutics .

I will finally highlight as to how critical modes of reading the Bible have been applied in the constant struggle between the public and the hidden transcripts of both the marginalised (critical and ordinary readers) and the Roman Curia .

1.1. Situating the Ecumenical Vatican Council and its hermeneutical effect.

Whenever we speak of the significance of this Ecumenical Vatican Council that was convoked by pope John XXIII to bring about change and renewal in the ecclesiological , ecumenical , political , we are referring to a remarkable transitional change in world Christianity. This Council was opened on the 11 of October 1962 and was closed on the 8 of December 1965. The council had four distinguishable phases . The introductory phase

was when the pope consulted and formulated a questionnaire that would initiate change and up-dating of the theology and the residual issues of Trent (1546) and Vat.I (1870) , namely : papalism , modernism , and curialism .

The second one is when the Council formulated the concrete programme from a response of 9420 pages of requests , wishes , and proposals from the Roman authorities , Catholic universities and episcopates from all over the world . During this period there was also the elections for the commissions which were to serve as responsible redactors to prepare , revise and present various schemata at the Council. The third phase was the actual general meeting of the Ecumenical Council that was officially opened by John XIII with an address - Gaudet Mater Ecclesia . The Fourth phase covers the actual promulgation of the acts of the Council as reflected in the 16 official documents . So when we speak of the Council of Vat.II , we are in fact referring to a historical ecclesial event through which the programme of renewal within the Church and its renewed understanding and approach to the modern world and other religions is officially portrayed .

The reception of this Ecumenical Council has been seen by progressive minded people as a Catholic action that is proper to our time . The concept and the implementation of the " People of God " ² has contributed to the emergence of pluriformity or heterodoxy and historical appropriation of the Bible texts by each local Church as a hermeneutical community. Compared to the dogmatic abstraction and individualism of Trent and Vat.I , there is now a greater sense of personal and communal commitment to Christianity .

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² . In terms of the biblical Tradition the notion of the 'People of God ' denotes the Church as the New Israel or the People of Yahweh . In Our Catholic doctrine it refers to the Church as a historical entity , L.G. 9-18 . This notion is also a confession and an acknowledgment of the Church as an empirical and historical assembly of believers . In this sense this biblical notion is inclusively ecumenical rather than exclusively denominational .

This marks a clear shift from the traditionally paternalistic and ahistorical catechetical teaching . The deepening of the faith communion and the acceptance of the common priesthood of all believers , and the renewal and adaptation of the whole pastoral activity within the Church is meant to reflect a realistic paradigm shift from a triumphalistic , juridical and clerical Church to a Christo-centric Church .

The greatest concern and the firmest objective that necessitated the convocation of this Ecumenical Council was pope John XXIII's awareness that the Church needs to be attentive to the " signs of the times " ³ and the urgency for renewal , if it meant to proclaim the Gospel of Christ . It is within this understanding of the Pope's concern that we come to understand his opposition against those who still favoured a more curial encyclical theology of the past. He perceived them as " the prophets of doom who are always predicting disaster , as though destruction of the world were imminent." ⁴ This was said as part of the opening address at the first session as an exhortation to the fathers to place this transitional change within its proper perspective and also inviting them to share in his vision fully.

This vision is well-portrayed in two fundamental documents of the Vatican Council II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) and Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes) . The emphasis of these two documents is on bridging the gulf between the Catholic Church (Christianity) and the contemporary society (the world) and

³ The usage of the metaphorical term 'signs of the times' is adopted from Mt.16:3. to emphasize a need for the Church to discern God's activity in history and this hermeneutics of history remains a permanent challenge in the evangelical mission of the Church. In the spirit of the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World , it refers to pastoral guidelines that are shaped by human beings and at the service of human beings in their particular context and their humanisation . It challenges the Roman Catholic Church to humble itself and learn the humanisation of humanity even from atheists and other religions (G.S. # 1 , 16 , 19 , 21 and 44).

⁴ Gaudet Mater Ecclesia , 1962 . . .

reshape the basis of our contextual Bible reading and ecclesiology as a Church . This is mirrored in the confessional, reconciliatory and ecumenical theological approach of the Vatican Council II .⁵ The affirmative and humane option for the poor is a clear testimony of the Church as becoming the efficacious sign or universal sacrament of salvation within human historical context.⁶ This pontifical assertive move is not merely a perishable attempt to befriend the world but a programmatic renewed vision and true portrayal of the renewed identity of the Church .

1.2. The community with a renewed vision and identity.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern World , as an official teaching , reflects a clear shift from an ahistorical universalistic Catholic stand and begins to embrace its redemptive mission by its positive and historically-based pastoral approach to humanity. A remarkable expression of this is the statement:

the Church is resolved to show a sincere solidarity with the joys and sorrows of humanity. ⁷

This is in line with the renewed self-understanding of the Church as a Messianic People of God and a visible sign of communion with God and the communion of humanity. The Church has come to realise its mission to revitalise faith and encourage communion by its visible marks of ' diakonia and koinonia ' in our

⁵ Vatican II has a notably positive and confessional tone compared to the decrees for the Jacobites in 1442 at which the Church declared that no one remaining outside the Roman Catholic Church was in any way seen as a partaker in the community of the redeemed. They had to be received into the Roman Catholic Church : an ark of salvation in this damned world .

⁶ Vat.II , 1965 , L.O. § 48.

⁷ Vat.II, 1965 , G.S. , 1.

technologically and scientifically advanced world . The Church assertively takes up the mandate of letting Christ's light shine through it. "

The Church officially shows its clear stand and perception in its interaction with the 'world' as no longer seen in the Neo-Augustine view as a valley of death (*massa damnata*) that is contaminated and condemned . The Church does not intend 'cloistering' itself and remaining suspicious of the post-modern world , but perceives it in humanistic and communitarian terms. The Church is more aware of its call to work for peace , equitable justice and unity in space and in a particular epoch of human history . While "Gaudium et Spes" honestly appreciates modern development in various fields of human specialisation and innovation , it stands critically opposed to the root causes of underdevelopment or human exploitation that arises from political , economical , social and ideological ambiguities .

As a redemptive attempt , the Church has come to realise the need to help humanity to distinguish immutable realities from those mentally enslaving realities that need to change and must be changed . This is to be done with the intention to re-instate human dignity and empower humanity to reconstruct a political , social and economic order that equitably serves the common-good of all . If this is sincerely pursued , it could serve as remedial to religious escapism and the atheistic tendencies of the marginalised , (G.S.4,7). The main hermeneutical objective here is helping humanity even through human sciences to come to appreciate a biblically-based anthropocentrism (*Imago Dei*) rather than the fatal and manichaeian dualism which speaks of the human soul as imprisoned in the human body.

One of the greatest achievements of Vat.II is that it was not convoked with the desire to strategically win the favour of neo-capitalist society nor merely to settle a dogmatic dispute and restore internal stability like other earlier Councils, but it was called to mark an epochal shift from " the age old predominance of the Post-Tridentine pastoral and theological mentality [Roman Catholicism]. " 9

The general orientation and emphasis of *Lumen Gentium* is complemented by "Dei Verbum" that Scripture carries the original testimony of faith which is unique , actively obligatory and normative for the Church in all varying ages and circumstances .¹⁰ It is within this understanding that the Church as a community of believers needs to respond courageously to the proclamation and prophetic witness to God's salvific activity to humanity rather than being authoritarian , rigidly codifying Christianity and universalising and ideologizing the interpretation of Scripture.

1.3. The struggle for world Catholicism vs Vat.II's hermeneutical transition.

The assessment of Avery Dulles of the Extra-ordinary Synod (of the Bishops representing the Catholic Church all over the world) that met at Rome from the 24 of November to the 24 of December 1985 is seen as clearly meant to assess the reception and the effects of the deliberations of Vatican II . According to the two official documents ¹¹ that were a report on this extra-ordinary

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9 Alberigo , 1987 , 16 .

10 In practical terms , this means that Scripture , as a testimony of faith , has to empower us to guard against the socio-economical injustices and political problems that affect us as a local Church . This courageous response to the revelatory message and prophetic witness of the Third World Church to the redemptive activity has opposed by the *Aeterna Curia* . This authoritarian interpretation of Scripture and Christianity faces a danger of hermeneutical abstraction which disempowers the emerging theologies of the popular Church .

11 The Message to the People of God and The Final Report .

Synod , the unanimous judgement of the bishops attest that the renewal of Vatican II is " a great grace for the Catholic Church in the present century and remains the magna charta for the future " ¹²

These two official documents give a concise and up-dated synthesis of Vat.II with special focus on ecclesiology. In his article , Dulles has observed and identified two basically contending major schools of thought at this Synod¹³. One of these is led by German Cardinals Joseph Ratzinger and Hoeffner . As Neo-Augustinians , their perspective pictures the Church as a supernatural island of grace in a damned world.

In their pessimistic view , the image of the Church as " the People of God " and the Church's attitude of openness to the world has led it to contamination , materialism , consumerism , religious indifference and socio-political deformation . Instead of shared ministry between the laity and the hierarchy , they call for clericalism or a Tridentine sacral notion of priesthood. They put a very strong emphasis on the Church as mystery , invisible or other-worldly , and the supremacy of the Roman Curia or Magisterium . They strongly uphold individualistic holiness and the Catholic Tradition as the environment within which to interpret Scripture .

The other major school of thought is represented by Bishop Bernard Hurbert and Cardinal Basil Hume of England. Their view of the Church is based on a more incarnational , communitarian and contextual theology . " The communitarian school . . . wanted the Church to become more involved in the promotion of peace , justice and reconciliation. " ¹⁴

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¹² Avery Dulles , 1987 , 350.

¹³ Ibid , 349 - 363.

¹⁴ Ibid , p.354 .

For them , pluriformity is a feature of true catholicity . In line with this perspective , the episcopal conferences need to be invested with power to deal with issues like inculturation , participation and co-responsibility between the laity and the members of the hierarchy in the revitalisation of the Church . For this school , the Church is not meant to be introverted nor to retreat into itself , but to venture into ecumenical or interfaith dialogue . In its evangelising mission , the Church is also to take an assertive option for the poor and the marginalised.

In assessing the style in which the " Final Report " is written, Avery Dulles clearly sees it as " artfully constructed that the reader hardly perceives the transition from one [major school of thought] to another . All [views and thoughts] are woven together with great skill that the document reads as a coherent whole "¹⁵ . This Extraordinary Synod has been used as a yardstick or yet another opportunity by the present Pope John Paul II and the Roman Curia have used to measure the extent of ecclesiological reforms, hermeneutical innovation and the effects of both Contextual and Liberation Biblical Hermeneutics in the whole Catholic Church. If one critically looks at the four crucial issues that the Synod dealt with , it becomes clear that the Neo-Augustinian school is beginning a strong struggle for world Catholicism. The Milwaukee Journal Review of the book entitled The People of God by Penny Lernoux epitomises the theme of this book in the following words:

"The radical reforms of the Catholic Church initiated by the Second Vatican are under severe attack - by the Church itself. Today , the socially progressive churches of the United States and the Third World are pitted against a Eurocentric and

¹⁵ Ibid , p.356 .

repressive Vatican in a struggle that will affect the political futures of millions .

In " People of God " Penny Lernoux examines the frontline battles , from the communities of Latin American poor , the crucible of liberation theology , to the dioceses in the United States whose embattled bishops fight to preserve their independence of thought and action , to the inner councils of the Vatican , where interpretation of dogma conceals the raw exercise of power . In laying bare the institution and a faith in the midst of epochal change , Penny Lernoux tells a compelling story of persecution , conflict and hope ²⁶ .

This process of counter-reformation or the restoration of a Eurocentric Catholicism , that is now in strong motion , is aimed at silencing the progressive school of thought which is dominated by the presence of the Third World Church and at compelling it to a backstage performance by maintaining the doctrinal purity and reverting the whole Church back to the authoritarianism of the pre-Vatican II Church . The school of thought that is represented by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger postulates a hermeneutical perspective that consciously disregards the historicity and particularity of our African hermeneutical key as a Third World Church .

The unilateral composition of the Code of Canon Law for the Eastern-Rite Churches was prepared in view of enforcing uniformity on the universal Church also bears witness to the return of this pre-Vatican authoritarianism . The second example of this is a proposal for a universal Catechism to be used as the normative teaching (rather than just a general directory) in matters of faith and morals for the whole Catholic Church.

²⁶ This commentary is found on the outside cover of the book by Penny Lernoux of 1989 .

The new document (Universal Catechism) is evidently not intended to be a substitute for national and regional catechisms but to be a sort of model for them - possibly doing for the contemporary Church what the Tridentine catechism did for the Church several years ago . ¹⁷

The nature of these proposed issues raises a very serious concern for both the Contextual and Liberation hermeneutics in enabling the emerging theologies of the local Church to be Christocentrically redemptive rather than leaving them ideologically repressed by the Eurocentric encyclical theology.

The third crucial issue which provoked a serious tension between the two major schools at the 1985 extraordinary Synod was the assertion made by Cardinal Jerome Hammer (the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious) that the episcopal conferences (with special reference to those of Brazil , North Africa and England) have an excessive teaching authority whereas they are (in his Curial perception) not authentic representatives to make independent decisions on pastoral matters but are merely channels through which the deliberations of the Roman Curia get promulgated.

The fourth major issue was with regard to the endorsement of the Principle of Subsidiarity as an important and relevant principle in the Church life . This principle was first coined and set forth by Pius XI in his encyclical QUADRAGESIMO ANNO of 1931 to highlight the right and duty of the official body in the Church to deal authoritatively with the socio-economical problems by ensuring a peaceful yet graded hierarchical order among various class associations in society , # 80 . This principle was meant to serve as an alternative way of reconstructing a social order and to re-christianise Europe

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¹⁷ Ibid , p. 358 .

against the extremities of individualistic capitalism and collective socialism. These extremities were threatening the social order and Christianity as a religion during the period that was marked by the Great depression that was sparked off by the collapse of Wall Street in 1929 and the peasants revolution against liberal capitalism.

Within the spirit of Christian corporatism of Quadragesimo Anno, the principle of subsidiarity neither challenged the social and economic classification of society nor the existence of unhealthy nationalism and separatism within the Church, but tried to foster a peaceful collaboration of various classes, to repress socialist organisations and moderate the influence of special magistracy of various vocational or corporate groups # 83, 95.

On the basis of this right and duty of the Church in the reconstruction of a social order, the Church officials like Cardinal Julius Dofner of Munich have come to see the principle of subsidiarity as relevantly important in the Church. This is in so far as it

signifies that the higher instances and organisms must respect the capacities, the competencies, and tasks of individuals and communities in theory and in practise. In this way a healthy and vigorous life, adapted to the different situations, can develop.²⁸

In a careful manipulation of this statement the Roman curia as a higher authority in the hierachical order within the Church has assumed to itself the paternal responsibility of supporting the local Churches when it judges them as unable to handle a given problem. This is clearly reflected in the following statement,

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28. This extract is taken from the interview of Cardinal J. Dofner in 1968 that was published in Documentation Catholique, 66/1968, p. 789.

The ultimate judgment in matters of doctrine or in the teaching of the faith and of the moral law , without being withdrawn from the authority of individual bishops , by its nature falls primarily and per se under the competence of the supreme authority of the magisterium that is , the college of bishops under the direction of the pope , or the pope himself acting as visible head of the universal Church.¹⁸

This principle has been co-opted by the Roman Curia and the Pope (as the visible head of the universal Church) to enjoin the supreme authority and ultimate judgement on the interpretation of the Scripture .It is in this way that I see this principle as strongly marking a restoration of the paternalistic , monoconfessional and monocultural of Catholicism . The main ideological objective in preserving the primacy of the Pope and the Roman Curia obviously highlights a struggle for world Catholicism aimed at uniformity (rather than unity in diversity) of the universal Church . It is within this scenario that we come to understand the challenge that faces both Contextual and Liberation theologians , especially in the Third World countries. This shift actually marks the restoration of the monopolisation of Scripture by the Magisterium and , the Western academic experts are given yet another chance to mystify and ideologize the biblical texts for the mission continents : Asia , Africa and Latin America .

This move is made also to ensure that we (in the mission countries) are ideologically preserved within the womb of the Holy Mother Church (the Magisterium) . This imported curial orthodoxy is aimed at suppressing and aborting the emerging

¹⁸ Archbishop Carlo Colombo , In Giovanni Caprile , II Sinodo dei Vescovi 1968 , Roma , Civiltà Cattolica.

features of ministerial pluriformity and the historicity and particularity of Liberation hermeneutics in the Church.

Since the integrity and particular uniqueness of our Liberation and Inculturation hermeneutics hinges on our theological dialogue with African philosophy, we need to explore its richness as a philosophy. This exploration has to take into account seriously the anthropocentric and communitarian understanding of human life and life power within African philosophy. We as organic critical readers have to free African philosophy from remaining an offstage or a suppressed discourse by the individualistic and Cartesian Western philosophy. For instance, the celebration of life through dance as a central feature of African philosophy of diverse African cultures and societies has to be retrieved from being an off-stage performance and be affirmed as of great value.

In his comparative study of African and Cartesian philosophy, Henri Maurier concludes by saying :

... In Africa the human being is the centre of experience and philosophy, and not the cosmos, the things, being, the One or the future The African starts his reflection: ' We , I together with [others].'²⁰

This shows that the action of every 'primitive' African is communitarian and reflects intersubjectivity. These different philosophical orientations (i.e. African and Cartesian) also produce distinct culturally based biblical hermeneutics.

According to the Western theological interpretation of the anthropomorphic Jahwist version of the beginning of human life as found in Genesis 2:7, the highlight on God blowing the breath

²⁰ Donders, 1985, p.8, my emphasis.

of life into the lifeless human body is especially meant to emphasize the individuality and the immortality of the soul. The African interpretation puts more emphasis on the fact that humanity remains dependent on God in various ways .

God continues , so to speak , to blow life into human beings all the time . Our lives constantly-flow from God through our ancestors and parents , and through us , the living , the lifeline flows on to our children and the children of our children . Life continuously flows from its source - God - through the channel of our genealogical history to us and through us on into the future It is not only human life that continues to flow from God . All other life that is necessary to keep humankind alive , the life of the plants , the animals and the minerals [in their 'powers' also live] - it all flows from God .²¹

This example is not meant to impose a biased judgment on either of these interpretations , but rather to illustrate and highlight the difficulty of the African Christian Communities with the culturally-based imported hermeneutics of the West. The desire of the 'primitive' African to accept Christian faith and be baptised also necessitates a contextual and liberative hermeneutics that merge and enhance his/her cultural dynamics and dialectics , even if it affronts the arrogantly imposed missiological strategy of the Westerners.

This missiological challenge is well portrayed in the conversion experience of Vincent J. Donovan as a European missionary who came to plant or to impart biblical revelation and establish the Catholic Church among a 'primitive' African tribe , the Masai.²²

²¹ Ibid , pp.11 - 12 .

²² V.J. Donovan , 1970 , pp. 81 - 98 .

Donovan came to realise that he needed to allow the Masai tribe to give a new meaning to baptism as a christian rite of initiation into a homogeneous community of believers rather than merely saving one's soul . Donovan comes to learn a new contextual theology in the way Jesus is received within the Masai's context. Jesus is received as a

saviour , a liberator , a helper as an agent of salvation. Africans welcome Jesus into their lives believing that he will help them cope with day to day life-problems like food , drink , survival , children , education , health , economics , and the use of power.²³

The emphasis here is not on the effect of baptism in the life after death , but in the present reality of life .

1.4. Biblical hermeneutics : A zone of constant struggle.

I will now focus on the document that was issued and signed by Cardinal Ratzinger - the Prefect of the Congregation for Doctrine and Faith - on the 6 of August 1984 . The title of this document is : " The instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation' ". This document is an official attack on Latin American Liberation Theology . The authorial intention of the writer , Ratzinger , reveals the limited of perspective of a Eurocentric theologian who has never been as exposed to foreign missions and diverse cultures that are outside the European context , as Donders and Donovan were . The document strongly condemns the historicity and particularity of Liberation Theology which are conceived as posing a danger of hermeneutical

deviations and risks of deviations , damaging to the faith and to Christian living . ²⁴

²³ Donders , 1985 , p.18 .

²⁴ J. Ratzinger , 1984 , Introduction .

Liberation theologians like Segundo intrinsically differ with the dogmatic hermeneutical principles of the magisterium and are more inclined to adopt a Christian hermeneutical principle that reflects an affirmative and empowering critical reading of the Bible within the historical context of the marginalised. Segundo says:

The Vatican document poses a serious and painful question of conscience , above all for theologians committed to pastoral activity - which is the same as saying , committed to the living problems of those whom they serve . It is only by remembering that context , and making an effort to place oneself within it , that one can ascertain the sincerity which each response contains.²⁵

This clearly portrays biblical hermeneutics as a zone of constant struggle between the pre-Vatican II and orthodox theology of the Magisterium as reflected in the document written by Cardinal Ratzinger and the historical and contextual interpretation of the Christian faith that enjoys heterodoxy or pluriformity as reflected in the writings of lucid theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez.²⁶ This existence of two schools of thought within the Church to me seems to pose a serious hermeneutical challenge when compared to the Reformation period (Council of Trent - 1545-63) when the Roman Curia developed a hermeneutical strategy to oppose Lutheran Theology . The Tridentine condemnatory tone and a biblical interpretation that curtailed dialogue does not seem to offer fruitful prospects in our post-modern age.

²⁵ J-L. Segundo , 1985 , p.14 .

²⁶ See his article of 1981 : *The Irruption of the Poor in Latin America* . In *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* : Eds. , S. Torres and J. Hagenson , pp. 107 - 123 and also L. Boff, 1985 and 1986 .

The internal challenge of contextual and liberation hermeneutics by the organic intellectuals or critical readers from the marginalised communities necessitates a positive attitude and interactive exchange and hermeneutical transparency or an openness from the Magisterium as the official Teacher in the Church. I sincerely believe that such a humble attitude holds more future prospects for the contemporary Church, because the legitimacy of pluriformity or contextual theologies bring healthiness, richness and transparency.

This hermeneutical transparency will serve as corrective either to the alleged uncritical usage of Marxist concepts in hermeneutics of the marginalised and the rational biases of the infallible Magisterium. I am advocating hermeneutical transparency because it appears as if the Aristotelian metaphysics and its orthodox faith formulae that undergird the interpretive interest of the Roman Curia make it difficult for them as an official body to distinguish a selective utilitarian approach of liberation and inculturation hermeneutics in their respective usage of Marxism. This selective utilitarian usage of Marxism is remarkably different from dogmatic Marxism as used by Lenninists and Stalinists.

This selective utilitarian usage of Marxism has surely contributed in our Post-modern pluralism of both Contextual and Liberation theologies which remain corrective to the authoritarian and unilateral dogmatic position of the hierarchical Church as represented by the Magisterium that aims at domesticating and co-opting all emerging hermeneutical efforts of the 'mission' or Third World countries that give a new shape to Christian faith and existence. This hermeneutical paternalism

seems to be based on the assumption that Christian faith is in danger of being reduced to earthly humanism ²⁷ and a fear that Christian existence of the Third World will soon be captured by the Marxist ideology that is perceived to be carrying false promises of liberation and freedom of the poor and the marginalised within their historical circumstances ²⁸ .

My critical interest as awoken by the claim of Ratzinger's document that its interpretative interest is non-ideological , dispassionate (without pathos) and supremely authentic ²⁹ leads me into exploring the way some biblical texts of common interest (to both the Magisterium and Liberation theologians) are interpreted in the official document written by Cardinal Ratzinger. I am doing this in view of critically discovering and defining the hermeneutical interest of this particular theology.

Ratzinger's document sees the Exodus event (which is so often quoted and form the basis of Liberation Theology) in it's spiritualistic interpretation as apolitically religious and serving as revealing God's salvific purpose and plan . This salvific purpose and plan as conceived by Ratzinger is squarely directed against every attempt to read the Exodus as read by Liberation Theology . The document says:

The ' theologies of liberation ' make wide use of readings from the Book of Exodus . The Exodus , in fact , is the fundamental event in the formation of the chosen people . It represents freedom from foreign domination and slavery . One will note that the specific significance of

²⁷ Ratzinger , 1984 , IX : 3 , 10.

²⁸ Ibid , VII : 1 - 13 .

²⁹ Ibid , III : 4.

the event comes from it's purpose , for this liberation is ordered to the foundation of the people of God and the covenant cult celebrated on Mount Sinai. That is why the liberation of the exodus cannot be reduced to a liberation which is principally or exclusively political in nature. In this experience God is recognised as the liberator. He will enter into new covenant with his people. It will be marked by the gift of his Spirit (new life of grace) and the conversion of hearts (fruit of justification). ³⁰

The exegesis of Ratzinger shows a deliberate failure to seriously take into account the intention of the biblical authors , the socio-historical context and to understand the place and function of the exodus event in the life of Israel. Norman Gottwald gives a historical materialist reading of the Exodus event as based on the ideology of Yahwism of the egalitarian community set up by the newly freed peasants from Egypt together with those Canaanite peasants who had suffered under the oppression and tyranny of the Canaanite feudal system. From the start , this newly founded and consolidated egalitarian community reinforced their sense of being a people with a particular social identity . They lived with an optimum value in egalitarian relations (especially the liberty and a sense of equality they had found) as regulated by a covenant law or charter under one sovereign divine power . ³¹

³⁰ Ibid , IV : 3 - 4 .

³¹ In his book , The Tribes of Yahweh . , N.K. Gottwald gives a historical materialist reading that balances and serves as corrective to Ratzinger's spiritualist interpretive interest. Gottwald's mode of reading the Exodus event offers a better and concrete way of re-reading this text within Liberation hermeneutics as compared to the ahistorical interpretation of the Magisterium . Read especially pp. 692 - 699 .

The document of Ratzinger (the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) ignores the common emphasis of the three literary sources (Jahwist , Elohist and Deuteronomist) that shape the Exodus as a socio-political critique of a historical situation of a particular period in Israel's history. These three major literary sources all present the Exodus event as a historico-spiritual critique which reflects how God intervenes

in favour of the people who are already his because of the compassion he feels toward the inhuman situation in which ~~they are living and because of the desire to give them~~ their own land as promised to their ancestors . ²²

When comparing the anthropomorphic Jahwist version in Ex.3:7-9 with the Elohist one in Ex.3:16-17 and the Deuteronomist in Det.26:5-9 , I became more aware and fascinated by the complexity and hermeneutical versatility of the Exodus event . Yet this meaningful Exodus event that is so wide , complex and rich suffers under the reduced meaning as absolutely seen and narrowly interpreted by Ratzinger according to the version of the Priestly trajectory as a " Covenant cult celebrated on Mount Sinai" ²³

The exegesis of the document by Ratzinger becomes suspect of being defensively dogmatic when one reads texts like Amos 5:25 and Jer. 7:22 which denigrates any sacrificial cult during the forty years in the desert. Besides this exegetical bias , one is left with no doubt that the hidden agenda is to protect the Exodus event from being politicised . According to the theological basis of the document the 'sacred' remains opposed and parallel to the 'secular' .

²² Segundo , 1985 , p.44 .

²³ Ratzinger , 1984 , IV: 3 .

The document also deals with the prophecies of the New Covenant which Yahweh promised to Israel, Jer.31:31-34 and Ezk.36:26ff. One thing we need to notice is a spiritualistic and eschatological emphasis on the conversion of hearts or the interiorly individualistic meaning given to these biblical texts rather than their prophetic challenge to historical renewal in the realm of economics and the socio-political welfare of society.³⁴

This coherent theology of the Magisterium as reflected in Ratzinger's document reduces the prophetic and transformative challenges of these texts to our contemporary historical events into apocalyptic utopia. In this same process the document deliberately disregards the historical context (the social and religious life of the monarchy) of these prophecies, as its biblical interpretive interest focuses on the new Christological Covenant rather than on the hope the two prophecies were postulating during the Exilic period of Ancient Israel.

The book of Psalms has also drawn the interest of the Magisterium especially the Wisdom Psalms. This is because of their emphasis on individualism and the portrayal of the powerlessness of a person before the transcendent God. According to Ratzinger,

Psalms call us back to an essential religious experience : It is from God alone that one can expect salvation and healing . God , and not man has the power to change the situations of suffering. Thus the 'poor of the Lord' live in total and confident reliance upon the loving providence of God -Zec.3:12ff.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid , IV:4 .

³⁵ Ibid , III:6.

The Psalms as a collection of poetic hymns that were generally used in the liturgical worship both individually and communally can generally be categorised into the following principal trajectories: Thanksgiving , Lamenting or Wisdom , Praise of Law, Prophetic Oracles and Royal Psalms . The Psalms vary in their emphasis as they vary in their socio-historical circumstances. Some belong to the Davidic period , some belong to the Exilic and Post-Exilic period , and some are allied to the Wisdom writings of later times.

According to Segundo , the Wisdom Psalms arose in a context and era that lacked " actualization and concrete thought (as) Israel was becoming a 'religion of the heart' , of individual worship and piety." ³⁶ The Wisdom Psalms are dominated by the individualism , the finitude and powerlessness of a person in anguish as one stands in the presence of a transcendent God.

Though I am afflicted and poor , yet the Lord thinks of me . You are help and my deliverer ; O God , hold not back ! (Ps.40:18.)

It is within this understanding that we come to realise the reason why the theology of the Magisterium is attracted and favours this trajectory of Psalms. The document says :

The psalms call us back to an essential religious experience ; it is from God alone that one can expect salvation and healing . God , and not man , has the power to change situations of suffering .³⁷

The spiritual or religious fatalism that leads or meant to encourage passivity , instead of being actively committed to bringing a concrete and historical change in human suffering , is the ideological basis for the biblical hermeneutics of this official document.

³⁶ Segundo , 1985 , p.51 .

³⁷ Ratzinger , 1984 , IV : 5 .

The theology of the document also misrepresents and deliberately confuses the biblical meaning of poverty and the inhuman plight of the poor, as seen in the following extract:

Poverty for the sake of the Kingdom is praised . And in the figure of the poor , we are led to recognise the mysterious presence of the Son of Man who became poor himself for love of us .²⁸

The argument I am raising here is that the poverty of Christ as detachment flows from his own personal religious motivation . It is a commitment and an attitude that enriched and humanised his audience . This poverty is thus intrinsically different to the one which produces inhuman plight of the poor .

A comparative and critical reading of this biblical meaning of Jesus' poverty as detachment and the poverty of the poor that results from marginalisation , oppression , socio-political and economic injustice denotes the latter as an imposed dehumanising social condition. So being poor as a result of social injustice is not a Christian vocation as is the case with detaching of oneself from riches for the sake of the Kingdom of God , (Mat.20:13-22). The theology of the document seems to confuse the positive notion of detachment with the consequential negative oppressive poverty in its reading of the Beatitudes (Mat.5:3) . Segundo attacks this purposeful fusion . He says:

It would seem that the document attempts to say that God is present in the poor not because they are suffering an inhuman situation that strikes at the heart of one who loves them without limits , but because God sees in their poverty a marvellous quality - the same one that caused the Son of God to come down from heaven to earth. it is as if God were to promise the Kingdom to the poor , not to liberate them from their poverty , but precisely because

²⁸ Ibid , IV : 9 .

that poverty contains the divine quality that the Kingdom allegedly embraces and values."³⁹

The mysterious presence of Christ in those who suffer is alienated from historical reality. The document silently overlooks the inhuman condition of those who lack material goods as if liberation from poverty does not include a tangible relief from materialist poverty. The document's interpretation of the parable on the Last Judgement (Mat.25:34-46), generally focuses on those who stand in need of spiritual blessings from God. It says:

the radical character of the deliverance brought by Christ and offered to all, be they politically free or slaves, the New Testament does not require some change in the political or social condition as a pre-requisite for entrance into his freedom.⁴⁰

This extract shows a failure in the theology of Ratzinger's school of thought to see the expected Christian attitude (that ensures justice and being merciful) toward the poor and the afflicted as clearly evidenced and encouraged in Dt.24:14, James 2: 15ff. and 1 Jn.4:20. I am thus led to conclude that this Western ideologically based theology that condones social inequality and the poverty that is constantly being reproduced by social structures and that discourages any liberative hermeneutical initiative, is by its very nature aimed at taming and ensuring the victimization of the poor by the rich. This theology intrinsically enforces subjugation and ensures the dependency of the poor on the rich as 'Good Samaritans'.

³⁹ Segundo, 1985, p.58.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, 1984, IV: 13.

In terms of the biblical hermeneutics of this official document, the Church is a community that pays little attention to the structured mechanisms that reproduce historical conflicts that divide humanity . It also universalises all human conflict and discrimination as social sin . ⁴¹ This clearly forms a basis whereby the spirit of communion in the Church is understood as a human virtue that transcends social inequalities. Basing his theology on 'justification by faith alone', Ratzinger argues that The New Testament does not require some change in the political or social condition as a pre-requisite for entrance into this freedom [brought by Christ].⁴²

Any theological and pastoral path - especially Contextual and Liberation theologies - face an apodeictic judgment of the document that accuses them of gravely politicizing and reducing the Gospel to merely an earthly gospel ⁴³ and incompatible with the Church's vision of humanity . ⁴⁴ This Pre-Vatican II theology seems to impose a particular truth rather than allowing a transparent discussion on hermeneutical differences within the Catholic Church .

The document also reveals its hermeneutical insensitivity to the socio-geographical designation (First, Second And Third World) that corresponds with the economic , political and social status of various nationalities. It also ignores or lessens the impact of the epistemological violence which pervasively contribute to human misery and marginalisation of the Third World Church .

⁴¹ Ibid , IV : 14 .

⁴² Ibid , IV : 13 .

⁴³ Ibid , VI : 5

⁴⁴ Ibid , VIII: 1 .

To me it is a conscience binding pastoral and hermeneutical duty of the critical and contemplative readers of the Bible(both the laity and ordained ministers) at such moments of history that ~~they facilitate change and renewal of the function of the~~ Magisterium. The hypocrisy of the Magisterium to forget that it is humanly fallible, is in my opinion a sign of lack of respect for its very essential role of official teaching and theological orientation. It is also Vatican II's official teaching that every lay-person (not to mention the ordained ministers) take seriously and responsibly the obligation of seeking the most human solutions to the problems that arise in their historical contexts.⁴⁵ I will take the implication of this further and argue that , for the love of the Church and its redemptive mission , the laity needs to re-evaluate the prefabricated and deposited moral and dogmatic formulas instead of being passive recipients . So the Base Christian Communities need not to revolt and abolish the function of the Magisterium , but earnestly facilitate change and effect renewal in its function.

The moment of true witness has come for the Third World Church to engage assertively with the Western biblical hermeneutics which is complicity with Western economic interest and authoritative ideology . The monolithic and institutionalised hegemonic desire of the West is resolutely committed to accentuate the orthodoxy of economics and the neo-colonialist power of the West. Like the saying of Alfred North Whitehead goes: " When the Western world accepted Christianity , Caesar conquered ; and the received text of the Western theology was edited by his lawyers".⁴⁶ This neo-colonialist attitude is yet another effort to re-introduce and animate an effectively helio-centric theological discourse of the West and an unquestioned valorization and caricatural misrepresentation of the incipient theologies of the Third World .

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⁴⁵ Vat.II , 1962 , G.S. § 43.

⁴⁶ I heard this extract from a television programme on the debate on inculturation.

In this process , the active struggle of the disempowered , is gradually effaced and they are 'silenced' and subjugated or domesticated within the hermeneutical principles that are subservient to their curial hegemonic ideological orientation. In exchange for the intrinsically nascent inculturation and contextual theologies of the mission countries , the dominant classicist theology is brought in. In addition to this , the theoretician or intellectuals of the West are mandated to speak at and for the oppressed. These representatives of the Western ideology remain vigilant and suspicious of any biblical hermeneutics that injects a transformative class consciousness of the oppressed to speak , act and be conscientised in a way that challenges the false consciousness of the narrativized theology of the dominant. The dominant are happy to keep the mechanics and macrological texture of power as ideologically congealed in comments like ; " we are helping the Church of Africa to be theologically sound and independent" .

I am also aware of how the Roman Curia is gradually establishing a class of exegetical scholars who are originally born from the Third World , to work as interpreters between the Magisterium and the Base Christian Communities they are serving . At our priestly deanery meetings one can feel the comments , especially of those who have studied in Rome , that they are aboriginals in blood but their hermeneutical taste , opinion and morals simply re-present the interpretive interests of the Magisterium. This remotely orchestrated strategy of the imperialist Church of Rome ensures no change or redefinition of its idealistic and paternalistic sole authority in interpreting Scripture and so present it as universally applicable and normative . This strategy also ensures no redefinition of its version of human history which may put its ideological demystification and benevolent hermeneutics into question among the marginalised.

This is why I see a need to investigate what this Curial hermeneutics is refusing to say, while it constantly monitors and measures the 'silence' of the marginalised over whom it masters its ideology. The public performance of the marginalised in the 'mission' countries of the Third World is subject to elaborate and systematic forms of hermeneutical and socio-political subordination by the Church hierarchy. The ubiquitous subservience is ensured by the thick theory of false consciousness and the thin theory of naturalisation that justify the capitalist hermeneutics over the marginalised of the Third World Churches is enforced almost to an extent that they rarely speak and act sincerely in front of the representatives of Rome⁴⁷

My pastoral experience has clearly demonstrated this impact of false consciousness and subservience in people's lives here at Mhlabashane. I have really felt the hermeneutical challenge as the first African Priest-in-charge of Mhlabashane Mission - near Highflats - after a successive series of European missionaries (from Germany and Holland) who have all offered their best pastoral contributions. The first impression I got when I was being introduced and orientated in the pastoral activities by my predecessor, was that his homilies, general personal attitude, and social welfare activities reflected a culturally stereotyped hermeneutical chasm between himself and the congregation. The public performance or transcript of these two participants was negatively misleading by its inability to tell the whole truth of the struggle of power relations and interests of both parties who consciously and tacitly conspired in their self-misrepresentation.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ For a further reading, see the article of G.O. West; 1996, Forthcoming, *The Dumb do Speak: Articulating Incipient readings of the Bible in the Marginalised Communities*. In THE BIBLE and ETHICS, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press.

⁴⁸ I based this argument on J.C. Scott, 1990 (especially pages 1 - 44)

As a coping mechanism , the members of the congregation had learnt to remain acquiescent by sacrificing their sincere aspirations and frankness in response to the institutionalised public relations with their ministerially dominant priests . Their public performance as deceitful masked characters seem well captured in the old Jamaican slaves' proverb: " Play a fool to catch the wise". This clearly shows a manipulative tendency of the marginalised to yield to the hermeneutical principles and interests of their master priest for their own comfort and safety (e.g. free education of children in Catholic schools and free second-hand clothing) than openly avowing - both in non-speech acts and verbal expression - in his presence . Such stereotyped and ritualistic features of the public transcript prove it as an unhelpful guide to the authentic opinions of the subordinates.

Their deference and consent is only a tactic and a disguise they use in response to the 'expected' submission to the powerful , while they read and discern his real intention as a powerholder. The hidden transcripts of both the subordinated and the dominant groupings reflect a different reality as revealed in what James Scott calls their respective offstage speeches , gestures and rituals.

Compared to the public transcript where the subordinates seem to be accommodately deferential and accept the ideological imposition of the hegemonic power as a 'given' out of fear and vulnerability , the hidden transcript radically differs because it is an exclusive sequestered site that is particular to the subordinates' group . The hidden transcript is an arena of a communally based powerful resistance . The hidden transcript as a realm of comradeship and assertion , is so strategised that it prevails even in their outward silence in front of the most observant masters.

The theologians of the Third World , especially Latin America , (who have studied and been awarded academic degrees by Catholic universities under Rome) have a broader understanding of the congealed or solidified mechanics of power involved in the hermeneutics of the Roman Curia. They are more than critically aware of the mastery and command potential of the hidden transcript of Rome. As critical readers of the Bible from their historical context, they are refusing to reproduce a hermeneutics and its theatrical imperatives that represents the values and interests of Rome. They are assertively abandoning the role of being offstage or feigned performers ."

The organic intellectuals like Juan Segundo (1985) , Harvey Cox (1988) , Leonardo Boff (1985 and 1986) and Marcello Azevedo (1987) are postulating a new era where they unfold the long hidden offstage discourse which the marginalised of Latin America have been performing behind the direct observation of the "Propaganda Fide" . The hidden transcript of the marginalised ruptures and storms the public stage (by its representative critical readers) not just to demonstrate the evaporation of their subservience to an idealistic and imperialist hermeneutics , but it is also intrinsically an open defiance that aims at revealing a need for pluriformity and interaction between the uniform doctrine-based hermeneutics and contextual and liberation theologies.

The scriptural rendition of the organic intellectuals or aboriginal exegetes inherently represents the sequestered interests and aspirations of the marginalised society with whom they share the 'given' situation of subordination as imposed by the epistemological violence of the dominant. This is also what

⁴⁸ J.C. Scott , 1990 , p. 4 .

increases a sense of hermeneutical pressure in the consciences of the liberation theologians to vent out the spleen , that would normally be done specifically within the safety of the hidden transcript as a sequestered social site , in front of Rome .

When the subordinated critical readers consciously rupture the disguised constructive anger and obliterate the infrapolitics of their hidden transcript into the public arena , it directly shakes the foundational self-portrait of the dominant and the naturalizing strategy through which they euphemise their power over the marginalised . As part of this rupture , the paternalistic interpretation that keeps the status quo and the marginalised dependent and flattering the self-image of the elite(at the expense of their very own)is diminished.

The hermeneutical interest of the oppressed and marginalised that seem to be experiencing the insecurity of an 'endangered species' close to extinction is saved and allowed to emerge again (with its inherited subversive nature) through inculturation hermeneutics . The liberation theologians work like committed game reserve rangers who ensure the safety of the wild animals in their natural habitat in their quest to develop a contextual and liberative hermeneutics. Parallel to this image , the Magisterium seem to aim at co-opting and domesticating the hermeneutics of the marginalised with minimum sedition to make them subservient 'circus' animals . Without the resolutely committed critical readers from the marginalised , the mission countries will always remain as almost or absolutely theologically inactive and yield to the theology of the dominant that perceives any theological production of the marginalised as Neo-Marxist and so atheistic that it does not deserve the honour of being acknowledged as Christian.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Rahner , 1964 , VII: 6-8.

Any deliberate postponement of the hermeneutical initiative to empower the marginalised is in my opinion an insurrection directed against the charismatic character of Contextual and Liberation theologies . As it is now ; socio-economical imbalances , injustices and epistemic violence (superiority and inferiority biases) seem to be of lesser significance and the quintessential liberative factor is centred around the acceptance of the individualistic piety , as propagated through the doctrinal and moral teachings of the official teaching body in the Church . The caricatural and censorious attitude of the Magisterium is gradually closing the opportunities of hermeneutical innovation , theological creativity , pluriformity in ministry and heterodoxy. Uniformity is favoured more than unity in diversity.

The cynicism of the Magisterium seem to be aimed at compliance while it in fact encourages the contrapuntal attitude of writers like Juan Segundo (1985) and Harvey Cox (1988) . On the other hand , it may also lead the more subversive writers like Leonardo Boff (1985 & 1986) to a more elaborated ethos of offstage non-hegemonic discourse. So we need to constantly analyse the symbolic value , the maintenance , the socio-linguistical manipulation and the consequences of public transcript of the Roman Curia.

The transcendental hermeneutics that voluntarily *speaks at and for* the poor and marginalised seem to overlook the day-to-day annihilation experience of their dignity or personhood. It reflects a lukewarm perception towards the mortally insulted and the systematically oppressed who remain unable (either as mother or father) to defend and sustain a healthy family . The organic intellectual has then asks himself as to how can a marginalised

society internalise a doctrinal and transcendental hermeneutics that imprison them to a constant " [swallowing] of one's bile , choke one's rage and conquer the impulse to physical violence and solely confining a full throated emotional expression in the bliss of the backstage or hidden transcript. ⁵¹

1.5. Conclusion .

I conclude by arguing that the role of the organic intellectual (whether ordained or not) is more than just a necessity. Each resolutely committed organic intellectual needs to challenge the strategic prevalence of the Roman curia's ahistorical hermeneutics that guarantees the public transcript of passivity and subordination of the ordinary readers of the Bible - within which they suffer religious fatalism and a fantasized hope of reversal of their plight or apocalyptic visions of a world turned upside down . This imposed subordination is a matter of great concern because it has led to moral fragmentation and respect for the other . This assertive initiative of the organic intellectuals is not only meant to empower and enable the 'incipient theologies' of the Third World Church to emerge and be acknowledged , but it is also meant to give an opportunity to those agents of domination like the European missionaries and bishops (including the African ones) to speak out of conviction rather than affirming the hidden transcript and mask of the dominant as leading actors yet without being fully convinced and fully subscribing to the hermeneutical interest of the dominant in the public theatre ⁵². For the sake of renewal in the Church we need to convince them to take their stand .

⁵¹ Ibid , p. 31 .

⁵² Ibid , p. 11 .

Chapter Two.

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS IS A PROPHETIC CHARISM OF BOTH THE LAITY AND THE ORDAINED MINISTERS

2.0. Introduction.

In this chapter will focus more on the role of the indigenous or organic critical readers and their efforts to break the hermeneutical silence and passivity of the ordinary readers by their liberative indigenisation of Scripture and Christianity . This indigenisation also serves as a rediscovery of each local Church as a hermeneutical community of believers who contextualise the biblical message rather than conforming to the latinisation of the Roman Catholic faith . In this chapter I also assert that complementarity between universality and contextuality is not to be equated with uniformity that does not allow a multi-dimensional perspective of a biblical text as it encounters various cultures in the Church . On the basis of this assertion , I conclusively argue that the role of the critical reader is a charismatic and prophetic vocation that has to be constantly guarded against acculturation and idealistic theological abstraction . It is only then that this kind of critical reading can truly become a resource for conversion , up-building and renewal in the Church .

2.0.1. A Historical Background .

The International conference on the " Making of an indigenous Clergy in Southern Africa " reveals the kind of education and theological training received by locally-born ministers. As a preparation to their collaborative role as indigenous co-workers

with the European missionaries in the evangelisation of the vast African continent , they were trained and educated in Scholastic logic and criteriology and Aristotelian metaphysics

concerning being and essence and existence , truth and goodness and beauty and Aquinas' theory on how the mind manufactures intellectual concepts out of sense impressions.⁸³

After this philosophical training , the indigenous candidate would then be considered ready to enter the dogmatic theological mould in preparation for ministerial priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. So the indigenisation of priesthood that came as a result of pressure from Rome in 1917 to European missionaries - who were bishops, monks and priests of the time - inevitably produced "locally-born European minded clergy" ⁸⁴

The Romanization of ministerial priesthood was strongly accompanied by strict measures in 'white-washing' the African identity of the locally-born candidates and the strong presence of European missionaries holding key positions in the Church . Despite the fact that they were holding key positions it can never be denied that the evangelisation of the indigenous population was heavily dependent on the African catechists and the indigenous clergy .

The power-sharing between this minority of indigenous people and the majority of European clergy misrepresented the Gospel of communion and equality which they , as missionaries preached. The minority of indigenous priests felt treated like second class clergy. The Manifesto - " OUR CHURCH HAS LET US DOWN" that was

⁸³ P. Denis , 1995 , pp. 5 - 6.

⁸⁴ Ibid , p.10 .

compiled by courageous Black priests of Southern Africa in 1970 could be summarised in the following extract:

The African wants to rediscover his personality and identity. He wishes to develop all his faculties - mental, physical aesthetic We deplore as well as condemn the baaskap and miesiesskap of the White clergy and religious over their African counterparts. You will destroy our morale , personality and professional efficiency by the raw deal you constantly give us. We deplore your perpetuation of the false image of the African priest as a 'glorified altar-boy' who happens to share in the White priesthood.

This outcry also highlighted a hermeneutical problem that the colonial Church was unable to respond to and could not harmonise Christianity and Scripture with the aspirations and cultural heritage of the African . This hermeneutical deficiency was seen as discouraging and by its very nature a disregard for any conscious liberative and indigenisation of both Scripture and Christianity.

The locally-born pastoral theologians and lay critical readers had come to realise that the principal actors in the process of indigenisation are not those who uncritically conform to the Latinisation of the Catholic faith , but those who animate basic ecclesial communities to being a hermeneutical community of believers. These locally-born 'organic intellectuals' take it as their prophetic charism to empower the ordinary readers and for them , indigenisation is an incomplete empowering initiative if it does not produce a hermeneutical community of meaning-makers. So they see themselves as organic or contextual theologians whose empowerment is one that needs to produce an African inner dynamism that will in turn produce an African consciousness or assertiveness that affirms our identity as a local Church .

Indigenisation is thus empowering if it seriously takes up the challenges that arise from inter-ethnic or cultural encounters between Eurocentric and African interpretive interests.

In the same empowering process of indigenisation , the African critical readers need to rescue their respective religious beliefs that embody their cultural reality , like their religious communion with the dead , from being overrun by the Western Church . In their rescue operation of Christianity from being seen as an 'opium' for the marginalised , contextual theologians are also challenged to ensure the integration of Christianity as a religion in service of human life. It is within this context that I find Jabulani Nxumalo's view on the formation of the local clergy a realistic challenge:

The formation of the indigenous clergy is the penetration of the mind , heart and soul of the people evangelized . This recognises that an indigenous pastor is the most suitable person to evangelize his people , he knows them and will find suitable methods of penetrating their souls and injecting faith into the depth of their souls . It is this total

penetration of faith which remains our challenge

This is a challenge to the African clergy , for it is their task and no one else can do it for them.⁸⁵

This clearly shows that indigenisation is not merely to be seen as just a cosmetic change in leadership , but an intrinsic and qualitative transition from being mere recipients to being active hermeneutical contributors in the social welfare and redemptive contextualisation of Gospel values.

⁸⁵ J. Nxumalo , Sept. 1980 , p.4.

2.1. Complementarity between Universality and contextuality.

With special reference to the vocational identity of the ordained ministry, this hermeneutical shift of emphasis from merely 'saving souls' through administering sacraments (e.g. Baptism, Eucharist and Reconciliation) to that of Contextualisation of the Gospel values within a particular historical situation has brought with it both uncertainty and creativity. The hermeneutical historicity enables locally-born critical readers to advocate a methodological diversification or pluralism that unavoidably bring 'up in the open' the ideologically based hermeneutics of Rome through their non-dominating facilitation of Bible study and reflection. In the same process it brings to birth a hermeneutics that pictures the Bible as a locus and mediation of revelatory encounter of humanity with God. From this multi-dimensional perspective, the biblical text comes to nourish and inform the personal and communal spirituality of a particular hermeneutical community of believers. ⁵⁵

This holistic and world centred task of each practical theologian or critical-reader-in-context (applicable to both ordained and lay) in giving direction as a 'pathfinder' may be frustrating since it demands a clear cut option for him\her either to opt for the poor or to theologise in the abstract. This hermeneutical originality and contextuality as an adventure of creativity, is marked by a certain level of uncertainty that arises from the challenges it encounters from the biblical hermeneutics of the dominant oligarchy.

⁵⁵ S. Schneiders, 1991, p. 3.

For the ordained , this liberative and contextual hermeneutics should demand diligence and creativity that may dramatically differ from that he may have received during the seminary training. I do agree with J. De Gruchy in his belief that:

The global context of ministry [or to] minister at any place in the world without regard for how that ministry is related to God's comprehensive activity (Contextuality) is insufficient and can work against rather than with God.⁵⁷

Universality and contextuality need to be complementary of each other , so that the communion of the Catholic faith become concrete in each particular social locus :- the needs and the struggles of the People of God. Both universality and contextuality need to be kept in balance , in order to avoid any imbalance between two opposed extremes :- World Catholicism and the Congregationalist model of the Church as reflected in the theology of L. Boff (1985) ⁵⁸

The reciprocity between universality of the Church and its contextuality as emphasized in *Lumen Gentium* is meant to affirm the catholicity of each local Church .

In these communities , though they may often be small and poor , or existing in the diaspora , Christ is present through whose power and influence the One , Holy , Catholic and Apostolic Church is constituted . (LG.26).

The implications of this article throws a hermeneutical challenge to both lay and ordained critical-readers-in-context never to become captive to the interests of a particular racial or cultural group or social class but feel conscience-bound to enhance a reconstructive hermeneutics that is both liberative and

⁵⁷ J. De Gruchy , 1987 , p. 34.

⁵⁸ This complementarity between universality and contextuality will be the main focus of chapter 6 of this thesis.

contextual. I see this as a healthy avoidance of both neo-christendom and acculturation.

Acculturation becomes a threat by its very nature to any locally-born critical reader when his\her hermeneutical potential conforms to the cultural , social and political biases , norms and expectations which he\she consciously know to be unworthy of the liberative power of the Gospel and allow these influences to mould his\her critical reading . Jose Miguez-Bonino as an Argentinian liberation theologian warns against this danger which he sees as reflected in the theology of middle and the upper classes of Britain . ³⁹

This is why it is a conscience binding responsibility for each indigenous critical reader to apply the insights of the sociology of knowledge in keeping a constant vigilance against the social influence on one's attitude, perception and theological contributions. So by this clarification , I am arguing that contextual hermeneutics is never to be equated with acculturation or subservient adaptation which is as disempowering as the hermeneutics that is subservient to the interpretive interests of the dominant ideology.

It is against this kind of hermeneutics that I see both liberation and contextual hermeneutics as a charismatic and prophetic vocation that focuses on the struggle for human dignity, the empowerment of the poor and the marginalised and Christocentrically redemptive . A critical-reader-in-context needs to be as creative in the audacious task of hermeneutics like a 'pathfinder'.

Pathfinders are persons with a vision of what the

³⁹ J. Miguez-Bonino , 1980 , p.105 .

institution is to become , of where it ought to be in future. They are persons with passionate commitment , able to inspire others to share their commitment. ... Church members expect their leaders to be something more than problem-solvers and implementers. They expect them to be able to give guidance to their own reflection about who Christians are and what this Christian identity implies for their living practise in the world .⁶⁰

It is from allowing myself to be influenced by this view of J. Hough and J. Cobb that I conclusively assert that there are theologians who write interesting discourses and academic idealistic theological abstractions whose monumental works are remotely Christian and hardly empowering. Alonso Schockel is quoted as saying:

People ask us for bread and we offer them a handful of theories about each verse of John 6. They ask questions about God and we offer them discussions about the root of the word sedaga (justice in Hebrew). I am examining my conscience out loud, and the reply I hear is : the one must be without neglecting the other.⁶¹

On the other hand I also remain critically suspicious and even opposed to the Biblical hermeneutics, like that of the African Indigenous Churches . My critical suspicion and contention particularly focus on their claim that their 'academically unschooled' leaders to are more contextual than the academically trained pastors of the mainline Churches.⁶² Aware of the developments that are taking place within the African Indigenous Churches , I still feel that their biased attitude towards the

⁶⁰ J. Hough and J. Cobb , 1985 , p.60 .

⁶¹ A. Schockel , 1991 , p.70 .

⁶² ICT , 1985 .

critical readers of the mainline Churches has contributed to their 'incipient theologies' that have fallen into a 'ghetto trap'. Their fundamentalist approach to the Bible makes me wonder if they are at all self-critical in their reading about Jesus Christ and his redemption role as superior to that of Shembe or Lekganyane. My greatest concern arises from the way they seem to be caught up in a vicious circle of syncretic understanding of Christ as indicated here below .

Jesus is... viewed in a nationalistic sense. He is first and foremost [seen merely as] a Jew. Being viewed as a Jew, it is [thus] inconceivable that his blood can be said to wash away the sins and wrongs of all nations , when each nation has its own peculiar evils to contend with . ⁶³

The African Indigenous Churches speak of no proper need for scientific study of theology or locally-born-critical-readers-in-context because the Spirit is their Teacher and guide in everything . ⁶⁴ In response to this hermeneutical bias J. De Gruchy says:

Although theology has to do with the Word of God that comes to us in Jesus Christ to whom the Scriptures bear witness, it remains nonetheless a human enterprise , not least because it has to do with the meaning of the Incarnate Word in changing historical contexts.. Such knowledge does not drop from the sky , it arises out of the often agonizing and always fallible human struggle to know who Jesus Christ is for us today in our own situation and therefore what God requires of us here and now. ⁶⁵

⁶³ Paul Makhubu , 1988 , p. 52 .

⁶⁴ ICT , 1985 , p. 26 .

⁶⁵ J. De Gruchy , 1987 , pp. 57 - 58 .

I strongly believe that the up-building and renewal of the Church needs critical-readers-in-context to provide a critical or socio-historical reading that gives proper direction and purge the Word of God of any disempowering and ideological falsification . It is thus a necessary factor to think of Liberation and Contextual Biblical hermeneutics as a theological discipline and a conscious scholarly critical reflection on the socio-political dimension of human life.

The real theological task is not to prove the existence of God , for that must ultimately be a matter of faith , but to enable the community of faith critically to understand its faith and express answers to the questions : who is God, where is God to be found today, and what does this God require of us here and now ? ⁶⁶

2.2. Contextual hermeneutics as a resource for conversion.

After having established my conviction of Contextual hermeneutics as a liberative and prophetic charism , I am faced with the question as to how inculturation or contextual hermeneutics offer resources for conversion to and within a Base Ecclesial community. In simple terms , why should a critical-reader-in-context see her\his hermeneutical task as at the service of the poor and the marginalised ? I think we also need to look at how we can resourcefully offer our critical reading into broadening the perspective of the ordinary readership as compared to the traditionally catechetical and fundamental reading from the past.

In the article of Bernard C. Lategan ⁶⁷ we are exposed to an enlightening overview of the historical and methodological shifts

⁶⁶ Ibid , p. 55 .

⁶⁷ B.C. Lategan , 1984 , pp.1 - 17 .

of hermeneutical emphasis in the critical reading of the biblical texts. This is an important and necessary information in our contemporary pluralistic society which is characterised by religious freedom and freedom of research. In the last two centuries , some scholars have read

the Bible in a scientific way and exposing it to modern historical criticism , using findings of scientific archaeology , palaeography , linguistics and so on , not to mention the physical sciences and learning to appreciate it in a way that is quite different from that of the ordinary reader . "

These scientific discoveries and theories of evolution have strongly conflicted and contrasted the texts like the creation narratives of the Jahwist and Priestly traditions and the fundamentalist view of the ordinary reader who believes the Bible to be divinely inspired and having no error. This fundamental view is artistically interwoven with Catholic dogmatic teaching as clearly seen in its teaching on the divinity of Christ, his virginal conception and the 'four last things' - Judgment, Heaven, Purgatory and Hell. Many 'staunch' Catholic believers have in their simplicity and innocent ignorance , failed to see the deficiency of the fundamentally dogmatic Biblicism which was\ is the principle of interpretation within the encyclical theology.

Even from my own pastoral experience , I have seen and heard (in instances like confession and Bible study groups) how dogmatically 'intoxicated' the ordinary readers are by the perfectionism or exclusivism and polemic of the inflexible and tantamount deification of Scripture . It is because of this

" W. King , 1995 , p. 133 .

totalitarian and distinctly hostile attitude to other different critical reading that seem to have necessitated the existence of the official body like the Magisterium to be the sole arbiter over the interpretation of Scripture and ensure uniformity. A recent illustrative case is the subjection of Leonardo Boff to inquisition through which the Church silences whatever it judges as arbitrary interpretation.⁶³

This rigid fundamental view and aggressive attitude of the Church appear to have easily been co-opted to vindicate the ideological interpretive interest of the dominant. This is why the locally-born critical-readers-in-context need to analyze and liberate Scripture from being manipulated to an extent that it has finally become subservient to the interpretive interest and identity of the dominant. In addition to this, a contextual critical reader is also faced with having to assess the re-presentation or the resuscitation of biblical text as done by the fundamentalists for the sole purpose of maintaining the inerrancy of Scripture.

This fundamentalist resuscitation of Scripture needs special attention because it is always accompanied by an effort of trying to vindicate the inerrancy of Scripture at all costs, which inevitably leads to ideologically domesticating devices to smoothen out its rawness and ambiguity. The hermeneutical risk of condoning such a theology is that it brings to birth what S. Schneiders calls 'pious schizophrenia'.⁶⁴

It is this constellation of thoughts of the official Church and those of the dominant that makes the locally-born critical readers' assessment an absolute necessity. Our post-modern age demands contextual critical readers to reveal the possibility of

⁶³ See H. Coe, 1990 and Estabinger, 1995, XII, 4 and VI, 7, 10.

⁶⁴ S. Schneiders, 1991, p. 3.

confessing and accepting the authority of Scripture and live and experience biblical truth without surrendering to the dictatorship of fundamentalism . Since the Bible as the significant text and a symbol of the presence of the God of life , has shaped and continue to shape human history ⁶⁵ , needs to be liberated from being seen as a powerful tool in the hands of the oppressor and be made an inclusive and dynamic communication between God and humanity . As a diligent and resourceful reader, the critical-reader-in-context need to incorporate biblical criticism into faith-filled and faith-enhancing reading of the Bible.

It is a regrettable fact that there are some critical 'free lance' readers who read the Bible merely as an ancient document whose content interests them and who read it without necessarily acknowledging its relationship with faith and its practical bearing on their life , (e.g Amed Didat a prominent Muslim scholar) . ~~It should thus be seen as more challenging for a~~ contextual critical readers to incorporate their biblical scholarship into the understanding of faith and to the life of his\her Christian community .

From this angle , I would even argue that the 'baaskap' or subservient attitude in our biblical hermeneutics that submissively please the dogmatic defensiveness and preservation of the interpretive interest of the dominant oligarchy is bound to remain underdeveloped.

It is on the basis of such hermeneutical creativity and reasoning that I will argue further that each critical-reader-in-context is to feel challenged to take hermeneutics as a transformative fusion of horizons : whereby the world of the text contracts and

⁶⁵ G.O. West , Reading the Bible Differently , 1996 .

intersects with that of his\her in the event of appropriating its meaning to his\her participative world view.⁶⁶ In the words of Sandra Schneiders :

Integral transformative interpretation is an interaction between a self-aware reader open to the truth claims of the text and the text in its integrity , that is, an interaction that adequately takes into account the complex nature and multiple dimensions of the text and the reader. ⁶⁷

I do believe that such contextuality stands on firm grounds in discouraging the tendency of some ordinary readers of 'little faith' (like I have sensed it here at Mhlabashane) who have almost or conclusively dismissed the Bible as a pack of lies. Aware of the presence of such tendencies to the Bible , I am nevertheless convinced that a faith-filled contextual and critical reading would also serve as corrective to the view of systematic atheism which has its roots in the theory of evolution and argues that " faith in Christ is detrimental to human reasoning and divine revelation not only is of no use but even harmful to man's perfection." ⁶⁸

It is against this background that Catholic biblical hermeneutics has moved from a scientific or laboratory paradigm that seeks to come to an objective meaning of the text as highlighted in some parts of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. Catholic exegetes like Walter Wink have come to understand that the critical mode of reading behind the text that is restricted to form , tradition and redaction criticism to discover the factual meaning of the text as intended by its final author(s) is considered as inadequate if it remains an abstract reflection rather than unfolding the power of the text and inviting the

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⁶⁶ T.Long , 1992 , p. 50 - 64 .

⁶⁷ S. Schneiders , 1991 , p.3.

⁶⁸ Syllabus of Condemned Errors - 1864 . In J. Neuner and J. Dupuis , 1963 , p 39.

hermeneutical community to a renewed understanding in faith . By this Wink clearly shows the inadequacy of an argument that the interpreting biblical scholar remains absolutely detached , objective and neutral in his\her intention to find the meaning of the text . This argument is incommensurate since there is no innocent and historically fixed meaning of a biblical text . ⁶⁹

In line with Wink , Francis Watson also appreciates the hermeneutical shift of a critical reading of the text as it stands against fundamental theological interpretations (like that of the encyclical theology) of those who claimed to have discovered the ' meaning ' of a text as self-contained .⁷⁰ Watson challenges this modern structuralist view by a deconstructive method that asserts that each text has more meanings than just one. J.S. Ukpong also argues that

Within the framework of an inculturation hermeneutic , the biblical text is seen as plurivalent, that is , capable of yielding many different but valid meanings depending on the point of departure of the one reading it . ⁷¹

In problematizing the modernist metaphysical reconstruction within the literary paradigm , Watson dismisses this hermeneutical method by arguing that there is no criteria that could claim paramount position over others . He further pursues his argument by adding that there is no stable 'authorial intention' contained within the text itself. He strongly convinces us that :

The author is not a pure point of origination , but a site traversed by an uncontrollable , uncontainable variety of linguistic and practises and the appearance of determinate

⁶⁹ W. Wink , 1973 , pp.1-17 .

⁷⁰ P. Watson , 1994 , p.80.

⁷¹ J.S. Ukpong , 1994 , p.9.

meaning on the face of the text is a logocentric illusion concealing the heterogeneity out of which it is generated and which it vainly strives to master.⁷²

In addition to this , the nature of this modernist metaphysical reconstruction paradigm proves itself inadequate to cope with historical anomalies of the reader and thus fails either to empower or to serve as a resource for conversion.

Watson also draws our attention to the modernist Christian ~~metanarrative~~ that seems to totalise towards uniformity rather than allowing plurality and particularity as accommodated within post-modernism . Instead of foundational totalitarian and triumphalistic hermeneutics , Watson calls for an unstable insecure " particular discourse [that is constantly] competing, interacting and co-existing with others . " ⁷³ Justin S. Ukpogong also rejects this in the quoted words of David Tracy saying :

There is no innocent interpretation , innocent interpreter and no innocent text. ⁷⁴

The particularity of a Christian community (as opposed to a superannuate) discourse or theology is intrasystematic in a sense that its own communally produced narrative is foundational to them and may not be thought to be more supreme and truthful than any other . So , instead of confrontations to establish who is right and what is true for all , Watson rather speaks of a fruitful dialogue among community-based theologians as derived from a post-modern theory of indeterminacy .

Rather than holding on to ossified hermeneutical dogmas (or what Ukpogong calls the traditional Western transcultural mode of

⁷² F. Watson , 1994 , p.80 .

⁷³ Ibid , p. 82 .

⁷⁴ Ukpogong , 1994 , p. 5 .

reading) , I propose that we create a genuinely different paradigm that frees us from the hermeneutical 'dependency syndrome' on the paternal Church and one that allows us to become creative and hermeneutically adventurous . We need to deconstruct and 'de-Northernise' the concept of a transcendent God to an immanent God about whom we 'read with [our] own eyes' ⁷⁶ and who speak to each community prophetically anew.

Within this context, I understand Watson as figuratively speaking of the role of a post-modern organic intellectual as speaking a new tongue in assimilating and communicating the prophetic divinely inspired meaning of a text for the common-good of and within a particular community . ⁷⁷ The hermeneutical function of a critical reader within a community of faith is to en flesh the Word of God in the context of human experience and relationships as a spiritual resource of nourishment, up-building , encouragement and consolation , (1 Cor.14:3) .

I think this is what Timothy Long refers to when he speaks of a *real - reader - response criticism* . According to Long , the key concept is basically 'dialogue' between the historical context of the text and the inescapable historical consciousness and cultural background that shapes the reader's perception and understanding. Long also sees himself as a suspicious and political reader of Rev.2: 18 - 20 whose understanding is not only restricted to the narrator's view , intention and pastoral style as compared to the 'first time hearers or receptors .'⁷⁸

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For a detailed reading on the effect of this dependency syndrome on the poor and the marginalised , read K. Murnberger's article : *The Dependency Syndrome in Marginalised Cultures and the Liberative Potential of the Christian Community*.

⁷⁶ J.S. Ukpang , 1994 , p.1.

⁷⁷ F. Watson , 1994 , p.81.

⁷⁸ T. Long , 1992 , p. 409 .

In line with this , J.S. Ukpang says:

Interpreting a text within the present context emphasizes the point that a text is not an archaeological specimen but a living reality capable of coming into interaction with a contemporary context to transform it and forge history; and that to interpret a text means putting into interaction our world and our personal being to address and question them. ”

The *real-reader-response criticism* according to Long has no element of an objective real reader who knows all and takes control of meaning ; interpretation becomes an event whereby the prejudice of the reader is rehabilitated from an egoistic and solipsistic cognitive judgement and evokes respect for the text . This rehabilitation of a prejudiced real-reader as necessitated by his\her goodwill gives birth to intersubjectivity or 'fusion of horizons' between him\her as a self-disclosing real reader and the historically embedded text . The end result would be what Long calls *re-identification* or conversion rather than just a matter of an objective competent reader who simply finds textual meaning as " what is 'there' in the text" ⁷⁹ In practical terms, this engagement with the text is not a matter of discovering something in the text , but an engagement which reflects the actual reader's contemporaneity with the text of antiquity.

Long advocates a strong proposal that since our biblical hermeneutics gives the voice of the text an immense privilege, we need also to look at how the real reader is dispossessed in that same process . I think he expresses a sincere need that a critical reader's freedom be safeguarded against pan-objectivism

⁷⁹ J.S. Ukpang , 1994 . p. 6.

⁸⁰ T. Long , 1994 , p. 400 .

in which the individual is overwhelmed by the message of the text and surrenders to it out of some compulsive necessity. So, as a way of bringing about a more radical sense of conversion, he and post-structuralist thinkers like G.H. Gadamer and P. Ricoeur (though differing in their approaches and understanding of the relationship between the real reader and the text) believe that

the reader is a maker of meaning of the text . In the same process , readers necessarily make profound impact on the meanings of the texts they use - in fact becoming part of these texts in the act of reading . ²¹

2.3. Conclusion .

The evangelisation of the indigenous population is heavily dependent on the African critical readers , especially in the way they deal with hermeneutical challenge and harmonising Scripture and Christianity with the cultural heritage of the African . The prophetic charism of these organic critical readers is proven as integrally empowering in the way it empowers the nascent hermeneutical reading of ordinary readers .

No one is as challenged as these locally-born organic readers in this whole process of injecting Christian faith into the African psyche and to acknowledge the African interpretive interest . On the basis of this argument I strongly assert that the role of these organic critical readers is of crucial importance in facilitating , through their non-dominating empowerment , Bible study sessions in a way that helps ordinary readers to own the biblical message and also partake with the local Church in the very experience of revelatory encounter with God within their own context .

²¹ Ibid , p. 396 .

This reconstructive hermeneutics of locally-born critical readers has to be both contextual and liberative . It has to be liberative by remaining vigilant against a 'ghetto mentality' that may co-opt it to conform with the cultural , social and political biases that infringe on the subversive power of Scripture as a 'revelatory text' that is meant to emancipate , empower and foster personal and communal responsibility . This reconstructive inculturation hermeneutics has also to be contextual rather than being a mere adaptation of or being absolutely subservient to the interpretive interest of the Roman Curia by initiating and enhancing the interaction and contracting of the Bible as a 'revelatory text' with our world view and ideology . I strongly believe that such an intersubjectivity or personal and communal interaction with the Bible , as a locus for re-identification and conversion , is crucial in also re-appropriating the Bible as a 'revelatory text' that is primary, integral , transformative and a faith enhancing resource for our South African spirituality .

Chapter Three.

CRITICAL MODES OF READING THE BIBLE AS A MEANS TO EMPOWER THE 'INCIPIENT THEOLOGIES'.

"*Firstly*, there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. *Secondly*, there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. *Thirdly*, there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. *Fourthly*, we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal."⁶²

3.0. Introduction

After having shown how crucial it is for a critical-reader-in-context to advocate a contextual Bible study process that empowers and leading to conversion, I feel I also need to show how critical modes of reading the Bible could be creatively implemented in the process of empowering and informing the theologies of the Basic Ecclesial Communities. In short, the issue is : if critical readers are converted from merely being pan-objective readers into being contextual critical readers, do they have something to offer through their skilful and innovative usage of the critical modes ?

As a critical reader I feel faced with this question because I feel the need to bring about an explicit empowerment in the emerging theologies of the poor and marginalised . This hermeneutical challenge is triggered by the prevailing motto of MASAKHANE through which the Government of National Unity aims at helping and involving communities to create a better environment and living conditions for all . Since this Contextual Bible study is clearly meant to serve as a theological resource in building a *better South Africa together* , it is thus bound to be historically particular to our context. This resourceful critical reading is also bound to be different from the universal, polemic and spiritualistic interpretation of the Sacred Scripture.

In pursuing this objective , I base my Catholic hermeneutical argument on the hermeneutical breakthrough that was achieved by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical entitled : "Providentissimus Deus" that was published on the 18 of November 1893. Besides the dogmatic element in this encyclical , I see it as having contributed in liberating Catholic Biblical hermeneutics from mystical and pious fundamentalism . This encyclical was an integral epistemological venture into liberative and critical theological creativity ."⁹³

In my assessment , the focus of this encyclical was not to anathemize / condemn the application of scientific criticism or modern rationalistic science in biblical interpretation. It is an official document that openly encouraged Catholic exegetes to acquire genuine scientific expertise and correctly use these technical skills resourcefully as a means of constructing a biblically based Christian faith in response to atheistic tendencies and quest for certainty of modernism."⁹⁴

⁹³ Pope Leo XIII , 1893 , § 22.

⁹⁴ Ibid , § 10, 17 to 20.-

This encyclical initiated a radical change in the defensive theological character of the time as seen in its emphasis on Catholic exegetes to study ancient languages (e.g. Hebrew and Greek) and its remarkable interest on scientific resources like the genesis of the text , philological grammatical approach , comparative study of motifs, structural analysis and the history of the interpretation of the biblical text."

The kind of hermeneutics I am postulating within the Catholic Church is also an innovative effort based on the fundamental aim of the encyclical that was written by Pope Pius XII : *Divino Afflante Spiritus* and was issued on the 30 of September 1943. This encyclical is remarkable for its effort towards diffusing a dichotomous distinction between scientific and mystical exegesis." I also admire it as a response to allay fears of some Catholics (especially in Italy) who felt completely uneasy about this modernist hermeneutical shift of emphasis. Through the study of literary genres of various Sacred books (Pentateuch , Wisdom , Apocalyptic and Prophetic Literatures , Gospels and Pastoral Letters) the Catholic exegetes moved from a perception of God of the Bible as the Absolute Being whose Word is absolute to seeing God as incarnately with us (Immanent God).

It is in line with this great Catholic tradition of appreciating and discovering hermeneutical research and a positive acceptance of possible contributions from the human sciences (e.g. Psychology , hermeneutical philosophy , and sociology) that I feel comfortable within this spirit of openness to various critical modes of reading the Bible differently today . If contextual biblical hermeneutics has the mandate to ensoul incipient theologies by its facilitative role of appropriating Scripture (*Dei Verbum* # 21,24) , then the role of the critical-reader-in-context is of crucial importance.

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85 Ibid , article 22.

86 Pius XII, 1943 , articles 21 and 42 .

3.1. Critical modes 'unleash' an empowering multi-perspectival reading of the text.

Though the first impression may be that these modes of reading the biblical texts are competing , the main thing is that rather than being seen as competing , a reader needs to see each one of them as having a particular function and purpose in bringing some clarity to the text . Instead of being prejudiced to see these critical modes as opposed or one right and others as out-dated or even wrong , we need to realise that each mode may be appropriate (and others subsidiary as they naturally overlap) in illuminating the relevance and beauty of the text being studied.

What has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself , conceived in a dynamic way as a direction of thought opened up by the text . ⁸⁷

3.2. Uncovering textual meaning\ s in the Bible.

The disputes that have led to scholarly division over the meaning or the plurality of meanings of the biblical texts has become an issue of great interest in hermeneutics. Stephen Fowl, for instance, focuses his attention on how hermeneutically sophisticated and self-reflective scholars like John Barton interpret the Bible to uncover the \ a meaning of the text by applying one of the critical modes.⁸⁸ Gerald O. West points out three critical modes of systematic uncovering the meaning or

⁸⁷ P. Ricoeur , 1976 , p. 92 .

⁸⁸ S.B. Fowl , 1990 , p. 379 .

the plurality of meanings in a particular text; i.e. Reading behind the text , the text itself and in front of the text ."

Fowl believes that the divergence of these critical modes of reading and uncovering meaning in the text is distinguishable in the various positions assumed by schools of theology in universities worldwide. For instance, the hermeneutical interest of the school of theology in Germany will present a different textual meaning to that of the Institute for the Study of the Bible affiliated to the School of Theology in the University of Natal . The present state of affairs now seem to be a scholarly disagreement and confusion on textual meaning or meanings . In the light of this , Fowl comes to agree with Jeffrey Stout that the term 'meaning' is hermeneutically ambiguous compared to it's informal usage in our ordinary conversation.

For this reason , Fowl adopts Stout's pragmatic position that instead of resolving the issue of what the meaning is , there seems to be " no way of adjudicating between competing conceptions of textual meaning." ⁸⁹ He therefore convinces us that the actual remedy comes with an alternative of " explicating these disputes in terms of interpretive interests." ⁹¹ The focus on the interpretive interests [e.g. Feminist , socio-political Liberation and dogmatic Fundamentalism] clarifies what appears as the many unresolved tensions among various schools of thought in the field of biblical hermeneutics. Their intrinsic tendency ~~to challenge and broaden the culturally limited meaning of the~~ text as written by its author sets the biblical text free from being restricted and allow it to nurture the experience of God in the local christian community .

⁸⁹ C.O. West , 1993 , Chapter 2 .

⁹⁰ S. Fowl , 1990 , p. 380.

⁹¹ Ibid .

My South African historical-materialist interpretive interest as particular and clearly defined could yield a different meaning to that one of the Roman Curia . One common factor though, is that each one of them is socio-politically constituted within the historical/ ideological context of the interpreter. It is on the basis of this assertion that I join forces with Fowl in objecting to any claim of hermeneutical and paramount integrity by an ahistorical and transcultural biblical hermeneutics of the Roman Curia over our nascent reading as a local Church .

The notion of a ~~supercommunity~~ or global 'polis' as the scenario within which each scholar has a social responsibility , is in my opinion not concrete and realistic. Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza and John Rawl who advocate this concept are strongly contested by two prominent ethicists: Alasdair Mac-Intyre⁸² and Stanley Hauerwas⁸³ . These two ethicists are opposed to any feature of what they would call the enlightenment illusion which speaks of social responsibility in abstract and ahistorical terms . This critique of Hauerwas and MacIntyre reflects their lineage with the Aristotelian concept of 'polis' . Fowl strongly argues that it is within a community that interpretive interests become a historically-based social responsibility. This community could be a neighbourhood Bible study group in a city or a basic Ecclesial Community in the sub-urban area.

In support of this contextuality and particularity of the interpretive interest as a social responsibility , Krister Stendahl sees an advantageous value of a biblical hermeneutics that enjoys freedom from any imposed dogmatic biases of an

⁸² A. Mac-Intyre , 1984 , Chapter 5 .

⁸³ S. Hauerwas , 1980 , pp. 357 - 393 .

ecclesiastical body . On the other hand , he strongly warns against a biblical scholarship that enjoys a counter-productive freedom and aloofness from a particular community of faith . He says

As a Divinity School we cannot be responsible in our work if we lost our roots in the communities of faith in our land."⁴⁴

To me , this contextual hermeneutical challenge which faces us as scholars is meant to impel our assertive move to interpret the Scripture through the critical modes in a way that makes the ancient text come alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation.

In the following material I will be showing the diversity of interpretive interests or critical modes and how they bring about multi-perspectival meanings of a particular text.

3.2.1. Reading Behind The Text

This mode of reading a biblical text is a means through which a critical reader tries to *reconstruct* the socio-historical background of the original author/s with hope of coming to the original intention and the historical interpretation of that particular text. Socio-historical interpretation sees meaning as born or constituted within the framework of authorial intention , extra-textual reality , genetic context and the original intended readers or recipients . This is important since it reflects the text as a historical narrative rather than just a contextless text. The historical critical interpreter comes to establish as to who the most probable author is , to whom and

⁴⁴ K. Stendahl , 1977 , p.63.

under what circumstances or subject matter the author was concerned about. It is this historical data that enables the interpreter to reconstruct the mind-set of the author based on probabilities from which he \ she would make sense out of a text.

The main objective in reading behind the text is not just to establish an authentic text , but

the idea of origin and growth is basic to what a text is according to traditional historico-critical thought . [For instance , the Gospels as narratives] are products of sources , which have not only been used by compilers of these texts , but might have undergone changes and developments in the process of transmission and eventual inscripturation. ⁸⁶

Another aspect of this mode is to determine the sources that presumably lie behind the text. In the case of the synoptic (seeing together) Gospels we can speak of the 'Quelle' or the 'Source' of the sayings of Jesus. This highlights the fact that beside remarkable differences (especially in the wording , order of material , style and theology) and inconsistencies , there is a common written source from which each individual compiler reworked for his own (kerygmatic , apologetic and edifying) purposes in their presentation of the development of Christology. This is clearly evidenced by the various versions of the story of Jesus and his family in the synoptic Gospels (Mt.12:46-50 , Mk.3:31-35 and Lk.8:19-21)

One other feature of great interest in this mode is how , for instance , the early Christian literature was transmitted in

⁸⁶ W.S. Vorster , 1991 , p. 21 .

certain forms . A text takes a different form and meaning in every context. It is an answer to a question or a response to a particular situation. Each time a text is read in a different context or situation with new questions , the meaning of the text will be appropriately new . Let us take the versions of the parable of the lost sheep . In Matthew 18: 10-14 , the parable is addressed to the disciples. As leaders of the Church , they are exhorted to care for those who have gone astray in a special way. The version of Luke (15:3-7) presents the parable as directed against the pharisees who were opposed to Jesus' attitude to sinners. Through it Luke wants to emphasize that God's care for the lost is the reason for this specific attitude of Jesus.

This strongly highlights an established bond between form , content and situation from which a particular form originated. These details are a clear indication that individual units like this had their own life of transmission and that they were used in different situations by the primitive Church in a particular epoch and *sitz im leben* (i.e. for cult , didactic , kerygmatic and mission purposes). In the light of this

the 'authors' of the Gospels can therefore not be regarded as real authors. The Gospels are the products of a process of evolution within the community as a collective institution , the generating force behind the process of transmission. Not individuals , but the community is the creative force behind the Gospel traditions. They transmitted and even created the Jesus tradition that we now find in the written Gospels . The authors of the Gospels are regarded as compilers , collectors , tradents , and exponents of their respective communities.*

* Ibid , p. 27 .

For instance when we speak of Mark's Gospel we are in fact speaking about the socio-historical religious ideas and theological influences which were circulating in the area and period when he wrote his Gospel.

On the basis of this redaction criticism data I strongly argue that there is no justification in speaking about either the 'most original' or 'pure' form or version of the synoptic Gospels. Through the analytical approach of this mode, we are even exposed to the fact that the sayings, the figurative speeches of Jesus and the biographic apophthegm were used and re-used together with events (exorcisms, healing and miracles) in his life in many different situations for different purposes. From this perspective, one can see that early Christian traditions have been transmitted in particular ways, and their application sheds light on theological trajectories in the primitive Church.

The evangelists as responsible for the final form of the written Gospels did alter the tradition source by either omitting or adding new elements for it to fit their own theological intentions and purpose than being an accurate history. So, the biblical texts are not necessarily to be seen as a historical record of the actual words ("ipsissima verba") or biographical factual deeds of Jesus in our contemporary sense of the word, but a subjective narration of the birth and growth of the Church and Christianity. In this regard, we can speak of the New Testament as a text of a historical construction from scanty and insufficient manuscripts which by their very nature are a painstaking endeavour between fact and fiction whose end result is probability.

As a conclusion to this analysis of the mode I conclude that historical reconstruction only helps us in so far as it provides a sketchy historical background of facticity and objectivity against which a text could be read.

The following comparative redaction study on the cost and conditions of discipleship according to the various versions of the synoptic Gospels reflect this quite distinctly . I have chosen these versions on the cost of discipleship as an example of dying and rising because they bear a theological implication for the life of the Church which has to keep a healthy balance between the maintenance of the Christian biblical Tradition and the creative contextuality of the biblical message as an evolving God-story throughout human history .

3.2.1.1. The Version of Matthew.

In two versions of Mathew's Gospel (10:38-39 and 16:21-27) the evangelist puts more emphasis on the call to discipleship as demanding each one to 'take up his(her)cross' . The cross as a Christian symbol reflects the extreme extent of personal renunciation for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. The cross or crucifixion as a method used in Roman law to execute rebels and slaves is given a symbolic significance as an oxymoron of life and death.

Matthew understands these sayings of Jesus in the light of the unconditional and prompt response of the disciples to follow Jesus (Mt.4:18-22 and 9:9-13.). They are to share this commitment even to a point of sharing in the sufferings and death of Christ. The structural form of this Gospel reflects an alternately narrative and discourse that is meant to present Jesus as the Messiah and the Church as the true Israel . The values of this

Gospel enforce patriotism among the Jews that is based on a life-style and righteousness that radically exceeds the restrictive legalism of Jewish law. For instance , in Mt.10:34-39 the Jewish loyalties and affection(e.g.honouring one's father and mother) in the family as the centre of one's existence are seen as of lesser significance when compared to self-denial through martyrdom .

The intended Jewish readers of Matthew's Gospel are advised that they are to proclaim openly the mystery of the Kingdom , now only whispered . Those who now bear faithful witness will be vindicated before God in the day of judgement; conversely , those who now deny Jesus will be denied ' before my Father' in the last day." ⁹⁷ The self-denial and one's courageous taking up of the cross is paradoxically equated to his/her full solidarity with the Messiah who was to die and rise again (Mt.16:21.).

3.2.1.2 The Version of Mark.

The Marcan version as we have it in Mk.8:34-38 is based on Peter's failure to grasp the significance of Jesus' own martyrdom (Mk.8:31-32) . This served as an example to encourage the early Christians during Nero's persecution of Roman Christians , especially between 64 and 68 A D. According to our contemporary scholarship⁹⁸ , this Mark is identified as a missionary companion of both Peter and Paul and as Peter's interpreting disciple . He had neither heard nor participated in following Jesus , but simply wrote and arranged Peter's teaching and testimonies of the Messianic Secret (the concealed Messiaship as embodied in Jesus and in his kerygmatic activities)as accurately as he could remember them.

⁹⁷ B.C. Lee , 1980 , p. 623 .

⁹⁸ L.P. Flaxige, 1980, p. 644.

As the probability of the manuscript sources suggests , Mark is said to be a prominent member of a Gentile Christian community whose writing reflects the cultural transitions and tension between Palestinian Judaism and early Gentile Christianity , particularly those in the Roman Empire . This is clearly demonstrated in Mark's cryptic way of expressing the cross as a symbol of redemptive suffering in Christian life .¹⁹ The emphasis is not on Christ's own predicted crucifixion , but as a symbolic mark of one's repentance . The theme of repentance and self-denial for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel he preached was a matter of urgency since the parousia and the end of time was believed to be certainly imminent.

The prevailing belief was that those who were being persecuted for the sake of the Gospel in the present age of peril and human strife were soon to experience the full realisation of the Kingdom of God. In the Parousia , the Son of Man would overpower human enslavement to sin and misery and all those who believed in the Gospel would be graciously rescued , (Mk.1:14. and 9:1.) The writing skill and the hermeneutical interest of Mark plainly reflects no high regard for the twelve Apostles. In the figure of Peter , the Rock , the Apostles are not seen as the best guides . As conservative Jewish Christians , the Apostles are unfaithful to the Gospel, Mk.8:38. By tenaciously holding on to traditional Jewish laws like circumcision and food laws that are not that significant for believing in the Gospel, the twelve Apostles are seen by Mark as spiritually blind .

3.2.1.3. The Version of Luke.

The cost of discipleship in this Gospel as we have it in Lk.9:23-26 is part of a build up of Jesus' public ministry that climaxed

¹⁹ Ibid .

in utter rejection by the Jews, through crucifixion in Jerusalem , (Lk. 9:44,52) . Luke as a historian of profound faith and broad learning wrote his Gospel after the fall of Jerusalem (70 A D). His theology reflects a diminished hope for an imminent Parousia which Mark seem to have been suggesting , (Mk. 9:1). Luke speaks of discipleship as the Church's ministry that would bring about full accomplishment of the prophetic ministry of Jesus. For Luke, the kerygma of universal salvation stretches indefinitely from post-resurrection period to a remote future. The glory of God is thus revealed in the pro-active yet patient witness of the Church.

In this context Luke adds " daily" to the Marcan source on the call that is directed to all disciples who take up their cross and follow Christ. This emphasis of "daily" with special reference to bearing the cross is also meant to shift the emphasis from an eschatological moment through martyrdom , to a day-to-day spiritual self-denial in following Christ.

Discipleship demands following Jesus on this way of suffering. The call to take up the cross daily may reflect as many have claimed, a post-resurrection effort to spiritualize the demand of martyrdom and express in Jesus' own crucifixion the realisation that suffering is of the essence of the Christian life. ¹⁰⁰

In conclusion to this section on the mode of reading behind the text , it becomes clear that an organic critical reader could be a valuable asset in helping a Christian community to engage better and more appropriately with the Bible as a historical text .

This affirms and develops the community's understanding that God is at work in history and society. ¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ W. Baird , 1980 , p. 687 .

¹⁰¹ G.O. West , 1993 , p. 33 - 34 .

3.2.2. Reading the Text Itself.

This mode of reading the text focuses on the way language is ordered and structured to produce a particular meaning of the text. Through other exegetical tools like a philological grammatical approach , structural analysis of the text and a comparative study of motifs , a critical reader carefully tries to understand the meaning of the words and of the way they are put together in sentences according to the rules and their grammatical connotation . This is with special reference to symbolically used words (i.e. spirit and flesh , light and darkness , wisdom and Logos in the Gospel of John) and idiomatic expressions which give a clearer meaning of the text like the discourse of Jesus to the Samaritan woman on 'living water' Jn.4:10 and that Nicodemus was to be 'born again' Jn.3:1-21.)

Such close attentive reading gears the mind of the critical reader to read the Gospel of John ,for instance, according to its own rules, and so come to grasp its characteristics and theological meaning/s . A comparative study of motifs as part of this close reading also enables the reader to situate key words like Logos ,truth and wisdom within the context of the Gospel of John as a unit text of the Hellenist world.

In the following paragraphs I will demonstrate the essence of inter-relationships of the narrator , the narrative discourse , the main and minor or decorative characters and the implied readers. My interest lies in their interactive involvement in communicating the author's ideological / theological perspective. As part of the structural analysis of the text I will focus on the way my chosen text is arranged .

In my critical reading I will be identifying the linear course of events in this narrative . I will distinguish its parts: its initial situation , the plot or middle part and the end or the turning point . The exercise of sub-dividing a text into small units enables me as a critical reader to see how the constellations of units are concentrically related . This will also help me to see how they share a particular social context and network of textual themes and ideas within the narrative. I will also endeavour to show how the author , technically uses the characters in rhetorically creating elements of surprise or suspense in the narrative.

I have chosen to read Jn.11:1-54 to qualify some features of this mode. In order to do justice to the relationships within the text . I feel I need to situate this text by identifying the section to which it belongs within the whole Gospel . This text belongs to the second part (the book of signs) of the Gospel. It is structured both as a narration and discourse in presenting Jesus as the Light that shines in darkness . Jesus' ministerial preaching and miraculous deeds , as the main character , are presented within John's theological perspective as demarcating between faith and unbelief (Jn.6:66-69).

This second part of the Gospel has seven themes and signs through which we come to a clearer assessment as to how the redactor/narrator (John) has contextualised and deconstructed the pre-Easter traditions into his post-Easter particular (Hellenist) perspective . In other words , through this mode of reading the text as it stands , we are in a better position to closely assess the re-interpretative and creative manner or the structures of enunciation through which John has editorially processed , hermeneutically re-arranged , modified , eliminated or abbreviated and expanded his sources .

As a result the Johannine Christ (The Word became flesh) is presented radically and differently in comparison with the synoptic Gospels .

In (John) we find no parables , no simple moral instruction , no controversy on the terrain of law and the practise that caused the people of Galilee to hail Jesus as the prophet. Instead , we have allegories , involved symbolism , a technical and subtle vocabulary and a series of magisterial pronouncements .¹⁰²

The evangelist has certainly taken into account the deep cultural structures that characterise the Hellenistic milieu in which he lived and in which his Gospel was intended to circulate . This text is the seventh sign under the symbolic dual theme of "Life and Death" . It is a narration of Jesus' last Journey to Jerusalem, (Jn.11:1-12:50) . I am critically reading John 11:1-54 as a symmetrical unit . I have a vested interest in the discursive technique of rhetorical criticism as a means to measure John's authorial authority and the usage of his persuasive argument to arouse and engage the imagination and the attention of the implied reader by his irony , context of conflicting values of the main character, Jesus , and the minor characters (e.g. disciples , Martha and the Sanhedrin) For the sake of clarity I feel I need to point that

By 'implied reader' one means the reader which the text presupposes and in effect creates , the one who is capable of performing the mental and affective operations necessary for entering into the narrative world of the text and responding to it in the way envisaged by the real author through the instrumentality of the implied author.¹⁰³

¹⁰² B. Vawter , 1968 , p. 417 .

¹⁰³ Pontifical Biblical Commission , 1994 , p. 41 .

Jn.11:1 - 54 as a rhetorical unit or macro-text could be subdivided into three polyphonic rhetorical units . It begins by showing Jesus as a protagonist and bearer of the theological perspective of the narrator. Jesus comes out of hiding and returns to the public scene of life and death ,vv. 11:1-16. The middle part or plot narrates the events from the arrival of Jesus in Bethany, which was four days after Lazarus' death, up to the moment at which Lazarus was , vv.17-44. The turning point or the final sub-section of this text is a rhetoric that this miraculous act of Jesus (as God's agent) led many to belief in him and others who had witnessed this had out of unbelief and hatred forced Jesus back into hiding (vv.45-54).

This structural analysis shows how form and content are intertwined in revealing the priority of the macro-text's technique to move the characters (e.g. the mourners and the disciples) in the story and the reader of this narrative. This is an affirmation that the Bible is not simply a statement of human truths , but

a message that carries within itself a function of communication within a particular context , a message which carries with it a certain power of argument and a rhetorical strategy. ¹⁰⁴

3.2.2.1 John 11: 1 - 16

In this seventh sign , John gives a visual proof of Jesus as a Life Giver in fulfilment of his own words as seen in Jn.5:27-28. It also serves as a supreme sign of the resurrection at the end of time . In a comparative study of this text and the synoptic versions of the dead being raised to life (Mk.5:35-43 , Mt.11:5

¹⁰⁴ Ibid , p. 40 .

and Lk.7:11-17,22), I resonate with John's special style and form as seen in the way he expresses his ideas and feelings . What emanates from this analysis is that the implied reader as well as any Christian believer who reads this text is meant to be co-opted by the mood and voice of the narrator. In line with this , a critical reader reads and hears this text according to the theological influence of the narrator . So , he/she is conscience bound to develop a critical consciousness to read and interpret this text in a particular manner . Thus , the text is defamiliarised and respectfully secured from arbitrary or simplistic appropriation.

This first or initial stage rhetorical unit (Jn.11:1-16) highlights an interaction between Jesus and his disciples. This interaction is triggered by the message from Martha and Mary that their brother Lazarus is suffers from a fatal sickness . When Jesus speaks of this sickness as not to end in death (v.4), he is not despising the fatal effect and possibility of Lazarus' death as a result , but the emphasis is on the fact that the glory of God would be displayed through this illness,(v.4.) . The delay of four days to Jerusalem may be linked to a recent attempt to stone and imprison Jesus (10:31,39 and 11:7-8) .

In response to this previous attempt on his life and fatal illness of Lazarus , Jesus mentions that it is now the *kalros* for him to be glorified as the Son of God through this forthcoming miraculous deed . This Johannine Christ (as the Light that shines and overpowers the spiritual darkness that has made humanity to reject God , Jn.1:5) embodies the ministerial presence that enkindles the light of faith to humanity . It is also a ministerial presence that inaugurates the realisation of the Kingdom of God now (vv.9-10).

The certainty of Lazarus' death is first pronounced by Jesus in a rhetorical way that was misunderstood by the disciples as a naturally health-giving 'sleep' (vv.11-14). In verse 15, John's rhetorical style makes strong use of Jesus as the main character as obviously expressed in the following words: "For your sake I am glad I was not there, that you may come to believe" (NAB). The theological intention of the narrator is not to reveal what appears as Jesus' antipathy to Lazarus' death as his beloved, but that this occasion of raising Lazarus from death to life was to confirm the faith which the disciples had already acquired from preceding miraculous signs (2:11, 4:43-54, 6:1-15 and 9:1-34).

This, according to John, is what emotionally engaged the disciples (as seen in the words of Thomas) to decisively choose to go with Christ back to Jerusalem, even if this meant death, (v.16). So, the disciples return with Jesus back to a potentially dangerous zone in Jerusalem. Through this, they were expressing their unconditional willingness to share a common destiny of death with hope of coming alive with him in his resurrection. Through this, John rhetorically engages both the implied reader and hopefully any Christian believer who reads this text in his/her context.

3.2.2.2. John 11: 17 - 44.

The second rhetorical unit begins with the arrival of Jesus and his disciples at Bethany, four days after the burial of Lazarus and it ends with the untying of the resurrected Lazarus. In this unit, I analytically read with special interest the verbal exchange between Jesus and Martha (39-40). The delay of this messianic miracle by four days is a hermeneutical strategy of

John by which he prepares the mind of the implied reader to ascertain the fact that , as the Jewish popular belief that the soul and body are separated after three days , Lazarus was really dead .

Since this miracle surpassed any human rationality and squarely demanded decisiveness for faith among the people of Jerusalem present at the scene , Jesus is presented in this event as taking a great risk of facing up to the challenge of disbelief and rejection as it had already happened (Jn.10:31,39) . In the actual dialogue between Martha and Jesus , Martha responds to Jesus' assertive conviction of raising Lazarus in a conventional belief in the final resurrection or at the end of time . This is contrasted by an emotionally engaging response of Jesus in verses 25 and 26.

In this sub-division , Martha is a character who represents every Christian believer. The theological implication of this rhetorical strategy is to inform every believer that everyone who is alive and believes in Jesus would still experience physical death as a natural end of human existence in space and time , but the projected faith and hope in the resurrection to come is already taking its effect now. A believer is living in an already realised Kingdom of God .

So , even if a believer dies like any human person , he/she shall live. Belief in Christ is a key event to the manifestation of God's miraculous power (v.27). This is theologically meant to openly challenge and discredit the scepticism and unbelief of the pharasaic Judaism of Jesus' time. All this points to the conviction of John , that : " Once you believe, you will see God's glory " (v.40) and that the judgment of this world is now.

It is pre-eminently the time for that judgment of which Jesus has continually spoken about (3:17-19 and 5:22); a time for the prince of this world (the evil one) to be thrown out.

Lazarus represents every believer who loves Jesus and is loved by him - whom the Lord will raise at the last day . So also Jesus' words 'take away the stone' (vs.39) and 'unbind him , and let him go' (vs.44) speak not only to the historical event of Lazarus' resurrection but more deeply to every believer's condition : Release him from the stony heart of sin ; let go to life in God.¹⁰⁵

3.2.2.3. John 11: 44 - 54 .

This final sub-division is also the turning point of this text. It narrates a response of belief by many people of Jerusalem and the reactionary anger and unbelief of a minority some of whom were members of the Sanhedrin. By this narration the narrator shows it beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus had squarely chosen death than being pre-occupied with self-preservation even to betraying the integrity of his mission of establishing God's Kingdom here and now.

The works of the public life were a subject of intense emotional involvement for the God-Man , and that their consequence was to be fully understood.¹⁰⁶

My special focus is on the irony of the argumentative controversy among the council members of the Sanhedrin and its final deliberations . This decision is of great interest to me because it is a politically expedient conclusion. The crucial dimension of the rhetorical strategy of John in this turning point unit is

¹⁰⁵ M.H. Shepard , 1971 , p. 720 .

¹⁰⁶ E. Yawter , 1968 , p. 447

to highlight Jesus' miraculous works which are seen as so detrimental as to bring national embarrassment (vv.47-48) . The adversaries of Jesus do not question the validity and redemptive significance of his public career or ministerial presence , but view it from a politically engendered perspective: " If we let him go on like this, the whole world will believe in him . Then the Romans will come in and sweep away our sanctuary and our nation" (v.48) .

The irony in the prophecy of Caiaphas , the high-priest is shown by John as a cynical advice: "Can you not see that it is better for you to have one man die [for the people] than to have the whole nation destroyed" (v.50) ?

By sacrificing an innocent man, however much disliked by them , the council reckons that it can save its own position and prestige - indeed can save the whole country from war and destruction. ¹⁰⁷

The fear of the Romans invading Jerusalem and the whole country is exposed as an empty argument since Jesus had never led any revolutionary attempt against the Roman rule nor had shown any intention of this-worldly Messianic exaltation. In fact his death (2:18-21) expresses God's surpassing love for the world. Through this 'happy fault' the gift of eternal life is abundantly given to those who believe in Christ.

The self-preservation that is typically shown by the Sanhedrin is clearly presented in the irony of the text as rejection of eternal life. Unbelief in John's rhetorical strategy is seen as self-condemnation . The Sanhedrin was passing judgment on itself and heading together with its associates to deception and

¹⁰⁷ M.H. Shepard , 1971 , p. 720 .

illusion . Selfishness , individual's false love for him\herself that will not permit him\her to sacrifice him\herself ends by destroying him\her . Thus every Christian believer is faced with a paradox of dying to self in order to bring life and also be true light in a darkened world , (Jn.1:5,9) . For John , faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ is the principle of one's immortality.

In conclusion to this subsection , I feel that my critical reading has been illumined by the internal relationship of the motifs and the characters within this text . The structural subdivisions have also helped me to identify the theological perspective and the linear course of events and the essence of the text . Through the powerful usage of his rhetorical strategy to arouse and engage the imagination of the implied reader , John manages to co-opt us by the voice and the mood of the text into a deeper understanding . In this way one's engagement with the text is also guided against arbitrary or selective reading and instead , 'contract' with the world of the text .

3.2.3. Reading in front of the text.

3.2.3.1. Introduction.

This model is not so much concerned with the socio-historical background nor a 'careful' reading of the text . Its main focus is not to interpret each biblical text in its final composite form but read it in the light of metaphors , symbol and themes that unfold the plurivalent wealth of meanings as born by the text. This model accepts the final form of the Bible as an authoritative expression of its Christian faith and a valid norm of life for our time . For instance , it does not see the New Testament as a text being culturally bound to the Graeco-Roman psycho-socio-religious context. G. O. West illustrates this in

his critical reading of patriarchal text units (I Tim.2:1-7 , 8-15 , 5:1-4 and 6:1-2) that have also a flavour of the legalism of early Catholicism .¹⁰⁸

Each literary genre and composite text is perceived within the single plan of God . The scholars whose critical reading is aligned to this like Brevard S. Childs (1979) , James A. Sanders (1984) and Severino Croatto (1987) view the text as having a dynamic meaning rather than just one final and fixed meaning. This mode is based on a hermeneutical principle that a text of antiquity has no single original meaning , but in every one of its encounters with a hermeneutical community of believers , who appropriate it to their social context and lives within a specific tradition , it delivers a new meaning . This is clearly illustrated for instance , by the plurivalent of meaning of the Song of Songs in the Patristic period , in the medieval monastic circles and the mystical writings of St. John of the Cross respectively . The same is evident in the narrative of the rich young man which has yielded a different meaning in various spheres like ascetical , mystical and liberation hermeneutics in our Catholic tradition.

This clearly affirms that by reading in front of the text the meaning of the text is not found in its origins or in its textual detail , but in its central thrust, which can be detected in the major metaphors , themes , and symbols of the text So readers merge or fuse their world with the world of the text through a process of dialogue with the text . In this process of dialogue between the questions , needs , and interests of the

¹⁰⁸ S.O. West , 1993 , chapter 3.

readers and the themes , metaphors , and symbols of the text both the reader and the text are transformed.¹⁰⁹

In the following material I , as a critical-reader-in-context, will read 1 Tim.2:1-8 as one unit among others which has a strong highlight of the value of prayer in Christian life within the general scope of the New Testament . I also read this text from the base of a Catholic tradition . The symbolic theme of prayer in 1 Tim.2:1-8 has more emphasis on the inclusivity of both individual and communal prayer.

3.2.3.2. The symbolic theme of prayer in I Timothy 2:1-8.

Our prayer life is a conscious alignment to Christ's consistent pattern or life-style. Jesus as our teacher and model of prayer is shown in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk.1:35-38 , Mt.14:23 and Lk.4:1) as always having allocated prayer prior to any daily activity. Within the Catholic tradition , Vatican II speaks of prayer as a Church's identity mark of vigilance and humble submission to Christ (L.G.10,12,40-41). In line with the Apostles' plea : " Lord teach us to pray " (Lk.11:1) , prayer is seen by the Church as the fountain and source of the whole apostolate of both the hierarchy and the laity , especially through their communal active participation in the sacred liturgy.

The various types of prayer (i.e. praise , thanksgiving , petition and contrition) are tabulated in this text as a pastoral directive of a Christian community *in* the world but not *of* the world (Jn.15:18-19). It is to exhort them to consider prayer not merely as an activity of the mind nor just to ask anything from God , 1 Tim.2:1 . The emphasis of this text lies

¹⁰⁹ Ibid , pp.43 - 44 .

in exhorting the Christian community to take prayer more than just an activity of the intellect , but " the raising of one's mind and heart to God." ¹¹⁰ This ultimately leads to refashioning of one's mind in accord with the will of God. The accordance of oneself with " the mind of Christ " (Phil.2:5) brings about a personal spiritual refreshment of mind and a harmonious and balanced order within oneself.

In my critical reading of this text as bearing the symbolic theme of prayer , I see inclusivity of prayer as effecting the peace of Christ: " a peace the world would not give" which in turn purifies , cultivates and trains the mind to view this world and other Christian (the marginalised and the dominant) from the perspective of God and eternity (1 Tim.2:1). For a person who has entered this realm of inclusive prayer and its transformative effect on him/her , can affirmatively co-operate by praying for all fellow human beings , that they also experience God's unconditional universal salvation . One could be doing this in gratitude to God for his/her own salvation.

The very nature of this universal prayer imbues one with a God - centred motivation to pray even for his/her civil authorities with an apocalyptic hope that one day they would "come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim.2:4). This is in line with the challenge Christians are facing in Rom.13:1-7. Christian conduct , good works - including prayer - and a martyrdom spirit of endurance (that is to be reflected in their obedience to the dominant civil authorities) are to be a prophetic statement (1 Pet.2:9-10). The main emphasis here is that , no matter how unjust and fierce the persecution of the Christians by the civil authorities could be , they as Christians are to contribute their

¹¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas , *Summa Theologiae* , II-II, 83,17 .

best in the development of love within the community rather than pursuing useless conjectures of vengeance.

3.2.3.3. Conclusion

The Christian challenge lies in the paradox that , since the government of the day looked at Christians with suspicion , they needed to disarm the civil authorities by obedience and even pray for them . Such a stable "public transcript" is conditional and conducive to the spread of Christianity in the empire , including the very oppressive civil authorities (Mt.5:44 and 1 Pet.2:11-25) .

The trajectory of inclusive prayer as a demand on each Christian is not merely to be a hypocritical externalism as was the case with the pharisees , but a reflection of absolute inner sincerity of a devout Christian (see Mt.6:5-8 and 1 Cor.14:5). The total dedication and transparency before God (see James 1:5-7) is for us one of the spiritual dimensions through which we portray ourselves as sharing in the common priesthood of all believers (1 Pet.2:11-25 and 3:15-16) Through this inclusivity of prayer metaphor we are exhorted to share in the realisation and spread of the God's Kingdom of truth , holiness , grace , love and peace (L.G.36) .

3.3. The general conclusion

I am quite aware that this thesis is written from research done from many articles , theses , books and projects within biblical hermeneutics as a pro-actively developing discipline . My aim , however , is to argue on the basis that though hermeneutics is an academic endeavour , yet it aims at being a liberative effort

to empower our youth , workers and the marginalised . My objective as evidenced in my previously demonstrated usage of three critical modes of reading the Bible is to bridge a gap between critical readers and ordinary readers and also encourage co-reflection and complementarity.

My demonstrative reading of these personally chosen biblical texts has been done to enable the unsuspecting ordinary readers to come to a certain level of consciousness that the usage of language , form and (kerygmatic and didactic) expressions are all human techniques which have been used by a finite human author/s. In my opinion , this should pave a way towards a meaningful appropriating of the biblical text and empower the ordinary readers who are highly intoxicated by the terminology of the theology from the Western world . The typically South African tendency of Catholics being co-opted and allowing their incipient theologies to be undermined by the Roman Curia is something I continually argue against . These issues will be tackled further in the next chapter.

I see it as crucially important for us as Catholic critical-readers-in-context to honour Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics as an empowering tool through which we are able to initiate particularity in our South African theological terminology . For this kind of hermeneutics to become a liberating praxis , it needs to relocate its hermeneutical assumptions into the history and culture of the indigenous ordinary readers . A new contextual biblical hermeneutics would be one that ideologically and theoretically bears a liberating theological standpoint from the hermeneutical captivity to the ideological assumptions of Western civilization .

I am not just arguing for an emergence of a critically opposing hermeneutics to the idealist epistemology of the Magisterium , but also one that effects transformation of ideological concepts and the superior and inferiority complexes of the West and South Africa respectively . Contextual biblical hermeneutics needs to unlock this and highlight the fact that the Bible is *ab initio* an ideological product from its very canonical inception and throughout its historical interpretation and appropriation . For instance, the (Q) source of the sayings of Christ has been subjected to the (ideological) interpretive interests of the Evangelists , this is why we have a Johannine Christ and a Matthean Messianic Christ .

In my demonstrative study of the three basic critical modes of reading the Bible , one of my main objectives was to analytically clarify as to how historically confined each text of antiquity is a true heterogeneous reflection of the material world , linguistic codes , social systems and realities of the community of its particular origin. It is after establishing this fact that one can propose a contextual hermeneutical affinity or appropriate 'fusion of horizons' of the world of the text and that of the reader. In this process the sociological idealism encoded in the universally and uniformal dogmatic hermeneutics of the Magisterium is proved as unredepmptive and almost sterile in a historically contextual meaning . It is such a hair-splitting academic endeavour that empowers the emergence of incipient theologies among the poor and the marginalised readers.

This biblical hermeneutical effort is not a romantic and uncritical appropriation of the text , but a prophetic engagement of the text with our cultural , gender and political sphere which in turn unlocks plurivalent yet valid meanings borne by the text.

Biblical hermeneutics , thus proves itself to be an essential key factor in arbitrating between the paternalistic claims of the Magisterium as speaking for the subjugated Third World Base Ecclesial Communities whose actual theological voice is constantly silenced and is hardly heard in it's actual vibrancy.

As a concerned critical reader with the present state of hermeneutics being a zone of constant struggle , J.Cochrane says:

The initial step required is an act of deconstruction : first, by way of a recognition and admission of [the Roman Curia's] linguistically and ideologically shaped subjectivity , in order to clear space for what otherwise cannot be heard ; second , by deconstructing the context of the speech of the [Third World Base Ecclesial Communities] in relation to [their] linguistically and ideologically shaped subjectivity. ¹¹¹

In this double pronged hermeneutical project of decoding the fundamentally spiritualist hermeneutics of the Roman Curia and encoding the 'incipient theologies' of the marginalised , we are in fact affirmatively empowering the marginalised to articulate further and own a critically appropriated biblical text. In this process , the ordinary readers actively partake in discovering Contextual biblical hermeneutics as a lens through which they read a text with 'their own eyes' from their own psycho-socio- religious context . In practical terms , this means that we deconstruct the epistemological lens through which Jesus , for instance , was presented in Western ideological standards and then reconstruct a Messianic Christ of the Bible who affirms African heritage as equal to any other culture through inculturation hermeneutics.

¹¹¹ J.R. Cochrane , Forthcoming , p. 13 .

My assessment of the Institute for the Study of the Bible as presented in G.O. West's writings reflects a biblical hermeneutics that is done from the perspective of the poor and marginalised . It is not a hermeneutics that is cut-off and non-committed , but organically involved in the context and with the community for whose life the Bible study results might be significant. It is for this reason that the importance of self-consciousness , understanding and limitations of a scholar who is doing contextual hermeneutics within a particular community is crucial . My concern is to guard against a relationship that is structured in terms of expert and non-expert or producer and consumer of biblical meaning.

The ministry of a trained reader has an important prophetic role to play , especially if ordinary readers have come to accept that they cannot easily or never correctly and deeply understand what the text means without knowing what it meant within it's historical-sociological environment ¹¹²

One other aspect of our biblical hermeneutics as a prophetic charism , is to allow the raw humanity of Scripture to appear. This involves the exposure of those texts that are either rarely read or never read in Church or in Bible study groups , like 2 Sam. 21: 1-14 , Ps.137 and Gen.22 . Nicholas King speaks of such texts as flesh and blood stories about the real human beings and a God-story. King continues to say that there are many unedifying texts in the Bible ; but this , he asserts , is because all complexities of human life are there . As critical-readers-in-context we do not need to 'refine' or 'disinfect' or 'sanitize' the Bible because the end result will be a thoroughly tedious and fragmented hermeneutics . This is with special reference to the critical mode of reading the text as it stands. ¹¹³

¹¹² See I.J. Mosala ,1989 and W.K. Gottwald ,1979 .

¹¹³ N.King ,1995, pp.134 - 135.

I have also discovered in our parish Bible study as to how defamiliarization as a technique of reading the text itself could yield a renewed understanding . At one of our Bible study sessions which I had been asked to facilitate and offer a reading , I offered a reading from Mt.8:18-22 which I think was fitting to the theme of the day . By pointing out digressions , causal disruptions and contrasting elements as a way of bringing about a new strange perspective over an acceptable and familiar meaning , I felt that the I had achieved my aim of problematizing and impede the ordinary readers' non-jaded and routinized interpretation of the text. Defamiliarization as a device enabled the ordinary readers to engage with this text and also stripped away the film of familiarity .

For instance , in our co-reflective reading of this text under the theme of discipleship , the catechumens came to understand the cost of discipleship and its impact on one's life. I pointed out to them that it was a Jewish pressing responsibility and a highly valued sacred duty to bury one's father who has been your provider from birth , and how in full knowledge of this Jesus deflates it as a duty of lesser significance when compared to the absolute resolution to follow him. In this regard , defamiliarization serves an aesthetic function through which a critical reader reveals an element of surprise and the strange world or historical context (norms , values and practises) that evoke an intersubjective and healthy dialogue between the world of the text and the particular context of the ordinary readership.

With special reference to the mode of reading in front of the text I do support the argument that , though the Bible is not all written by Christians ,it is nevertheless a gift of the Church to itself. I say this because of my faith conviction that

each community has power to produce an ethical and spiritually empowering meaning that is particular to them , even if the Bible as a text is a product of a far distant past. This is the area of humble specialisation of an enabling and facilitating ministry of a critical reader . It is within such a hermeneutical arena that a critical-reader-in-context needs to affirm the joy of the ordinary readers in handling the Bible and reading it "through their own eyes". It is out of such organically enabling reading that the Bible will take its rightful place as the "Word of God" in empowering both critical and ordinary readers and in answering their existential day-to-day questions.

Chapter Four.

INCULTURATION HERMENEUTICS AS A VEHICLE TO A REALISATION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH AS A PEOPLE OF GOD.

" If I lack love and justice , I separate myself completely from you , God , and my belief in God ,in love and in justice , and to believe in these things is worth a thousand times more than saying your name." (Cardinal Henri de Lubac)

4.0. Introduction.

In this chapter I intend to tackle the issue of empowerment of the ordinary readers who already have a feeling of a hermeneutical crisis between their materialist interpretive interest and the erudite language of the fundamentalist dogmatism of the official Church. From the community prayer services , like those for rain , peace and funeral night vigils , the ordinary readers read the Bible and own its message as a source of inspiration , consolation and mutual up-building . The Bible is no longer treated as a finished monument , but in their communal reading they constantly discover insights we critical readers in our pan-objective reading have failed to unravel. The ordinary readers simple reading is gaining strength and they are producing a new theology of hope within the Church as a People of God ..

This hermeneutical shift is enriched by the prophetic presence of the indigenous bishops , priests and critical readers from the laity . They serve as catalysing agents in promoting a consciousness of the masses by consolidating and organising them into a people with a clear identity in the Church.The Church does

not simply become an ark of salvation in a damned world , but it allows itself to be a Christian resource among other community-based organisations that make up the social fabric . Through its contextuality and particularity , the local Churches of the poor do not claim God to be their own as against others , but its prophetic presence and theological embodiment of the concrete historical religious context reflects it as the People of God.

The role of contextual critical reading in this regard clearly becomes one of promoting a biblical hermeneutics that fosters communion and participation of the ordinary readers to be active participants in being producers of their own history . In this respect , the role of the critical-reader-in-context is not to romanticize and rationalize or to be a biblical 'producer and executive director' of the struggle of the poor , but rather to enable them to own their theatrically staged liberation struggle in communicating their own experience of God and the 'secrets of the Kingdom' (Mt.11:25ff) . It is on the basis of this that we can rightly speak of the Third World Church as the evangelisers of the Third millennium of Christianity.

4.1. Can we speak of the South African Roman Catholic Church as a Third World Church ?

The present reality of our South African situation is now regarded by many head of states , political leaders (with special reference to those of other African countries) as 'the hope' of the whole of Africa . South Africa is seen as relatively stable in economical terms and technologically advanced . With the democratically elected multi-racial Government of National Unity

already functional , it is viewed as far better than other African Countries . Yet the South African Catholic Church is still a young , missionised , conquered and colonised Church . I consider it a hermeneutically potential Church . It is only that this potential is mostly spent on merely adapting imported theology from the First World countries. Its intact conquest as a Third World Church is proved by its imposed or uncritically imported theological teaching , priestly formation programme , universal catechism , liturgy , canon law and personnel. Though South Africa may be politically independent , its Roman Catholic establishment and ecclesiology is culturally dominated by the social order and world view of the First World (Western Europe and North America) . The Catholic Church in South Africa seems to remain both eclectic and acquiescent in its dealing with the Roman Curia . The Roman Curia as an established centre of power and authority responds to this by paternalistically ensuring a financial support to the South African Church as a daughter Church of the Third World .

In the light of this reality , I as a critical reader feel faced with a hermeneutical question : as to whether there is any basis from which we could assertively speak of the South African Catholic Church as a Church in a theological sense. In simple theological terms , are the seeds or values of the Gospel hermeneutically owned and nurtured by a South African Spirituality ? I do not yet see much originality or a hermeneutics that has been developed from the local perspective that is unique to South Africa . Instead , I see ourselves as a South African Roman Catholic Church constantly running the risk of congenital malformation under the Roman model or the latinity of Scripture and Christianity.

The Christian latinity of the Church of Rome appears hermeneutically 'allergic' to letting go of Scripture and Christianity to contract and fuse with our socio-economical context and the African soul . As the uniformity for the sake unity as channelled through the carolingian reform choked off the evangelising efforts that sought to incorporate the innovative indigenisation of Scripture and Christianity , the official Church of Rome assumes to itself the same acculturation reflex as at the first cultural encounter of the Gospel and the Gentile world (Gal.4:1-6 and Acts.15:6-11) . The Judaizers or Judeao Christians seem to have been haunted by the inevitable possibility of intra-ecclesial intercultural Christian faith that was soon to reshape their monocultural religious , social and political life .

Like in this great historical and cultural meeting of Jerusalem and Athens , African cultures also need to impact the Gospel in their response to it. Instead of this happening , we see the Roman Curia as a coherent body embarking on a coercive discipline and a quest for a centralising power to ensure a Western monocultural Christianity and absolute uniformity in biblical hermeneutics which tends to down play the very universality of Christianity and Scripture that inculturation hermeneutics seeks to inaugurate and nurture .

This hermeneutical dependency is filtered through normative dogmatic teachings that are aimed at achieving uniformity in language , law , religion and uniting the whole Church into a single world diocese . We allow Rome to colonise our hermeneutical potential as a local Church . This may still be an effect from the historical reality that the South African Roman Catholic Church received the Christian faith at the time when

Pope Leo XIII was pushing for a renewal of Thomism or Scholasticism. This brought a remarkable theological impoverishment and an extremely deficient soteriology . The missionaries as heralds of the Gospel inevitably carried this predetermined and crystallised hermeneutical strategy in their zeal to win 'pagan' souls for Christ . The dichotomy between faith and socio-cultural sphere produced a scenario of a Christianity and Scripture that are radically remote and different from the concrete understanding of life by an African. The cosmic and social ties of each individual person were condemned as pagan when compared to the baptismal rite through which each individual was saved from being an idolator.

Through this 'thick and thin' situation of our socio-cultural impoverishment as a result of our acceptance and belief in the superiority of the Western Christian God , the Church of Christ was nevertheless established in South Africa . It has , however , remained existentially fragile , infantile and hermeneutically dependent. We have received a classicist and polarised faith that is incarnately European-Greek in both the mental and cultural sphere. This predetermined and crystallised hermeneutical strategy has frozen the possibility of an authentically African Christian thought and theology.

The missiological paradox is that the system of the zealous missionary expansionism has yielded spectacular growth of Christian communities , a plethora of vocations to the priesthood and religious life and a great devotion and frequent administration of the sacraments . Despite all this , the pyramidal structure of the Church and its sacralised notion of priesthood have plunged the Church into serious spiritual emptiness that lacks the scriptural prophetic dimension . This Western presentation of the Gospel has kept us childish and with an imposed inferiority complex that has stripped us of our cultural autonomy and moral wisdom .

The clear fact is that we have received a Western incarnated Gospel from a strongly imperialist culture rich in material possessions . Since the West was ideologically , politically , economically and technologically rich compared to the 'primitives' of Africa , it has failed to release both Christianity and Scripture from its Western orientation . The critical-readers-in-context are faced with the challenge to bring out and up in the open this scandalous compromise and hermeneutical deficiency that has up-held social injustice and aggravated underdevelopment . The reality of the dominant and the dominated is directly against the Gospel of solidarity and communion or the African theology of 'ubuntu' . This dialectical empowering process of dialogue between the First World Church and the Third World Church cannot be expected to be fruitful unless the two are prepared to agonise in bringing a 'Nicodemus rebirth' of an almost two thousand years old Christianity and let it rediscover its youthful vigour in the hearts of all.

4.2. The conscious re-appropriation of the Bible by the poor.

In my early days of pastoral activity here at Holy Trinity Parish - near Highflats - I discovered that the Church community was amazingly divided or regimented according to associations (i.e. St. Joseph , St. Anne , Legion of Mary and the legion of the Holy Childhood of Jesus). Each member feels him\herself as a worthier Christian through the membership to any of these associations. Some individuals would even join two or more of them to prove themselves as more dedicated.

The members of these associations would meet either to celebrate a feast-day of their patron saint , to pray a novena or to console the bereaved. If the Bible happens to be read , their

sharing only confirms their catechetical knowledge and almost nothing new. This is because the Bible has always been seen by the staunch Catholics as too Protestant . In their infantilism, they have remained dependent on enlightenment from a priest whom they see as the bearer of the true Catholic faith.

The Pastoral Plan of the SACBC of 1989 and the Lumko Missiological Institute have realised the dangers of our hermeneutical deficiency as perpetrated by the monopoly of the official Church over Scripture. The Southern African hierarchy has become more aware of how it has served as a mechanism to expropriate the ordinary readers through its dogmatic subservience to the Roman Curia . Their erudite language in translating the Bible and their interpretation has led the ordinary reader to recoil back into silence and dependency . This pan-objective hermeneutical key to interpretation has reduced the richness of symbolism and poetry of the Bible to scientific concepts.

A new age has dawned in the realm of hermeneutics as ushered in by the poor and their organic intellectuals. They have formed evangelising groups within the existing structures of the Church. As common interest groups of the poor from the lowest strata of society , they are expropriating their ideological biblicist expropriators . They have regained a long abandoned hermeneutical key : their lives , experiences of God and their daily struggles.

Their reading of the Bible becomes an interaction between God and them as a community . They are beginning to bring their life and the Bible together. With the empowering presence of the critical-readers-in-context , who offer them the necessary biblical data , they begin to reflect on their own life situation

in their reading . These local Churches begin to discover God's calling in a new way through their struggles . The shift of axis of interpretation from the overly spiritualised and fundamental dogmatism to one that mirrors their own life process has deconstructed their perception of the Bible as a finished monument and an oppressive tool in the hands of the powerful.

The Basic Ecclesial Communities are communities of faith and action whose basic commitment is to the cause of the poor for the sake of liberating Scripture and Christianity in concrete terms. They see life , Scripture and prayer as inter-related within the evangelisation mandate of the Church. The atmosphere is that of interpersonal acceptance : giving a feeling of joy , freedom and brotherly and sisterly warmth . There is no formality , but there is an atmosphere of sincerity and the joy of the simple which is conducive for a heart-to-heart spiritual healing that enables them to rise above their hardest oppressive social conditions of life. From this off-stage and secure environment , each one experiences the quintessence of the Gospel in its innermost and truest sense.

In this community the idea of active participatory democracy and communion as expressed in co-responsible dealing with problems they are facing in life and utter respect for one another's view is foundational to it. Through this acknowledgment of the other, they are also retrieving the long hidden image of the Church as a community of believers (Acts 2:42 - 47). This helps them to be a dynamic mobilised community that moves from merely struggling for survival to being an influential force in changing the social structure of society. As a cellular Church within the universal Church , it effects the intra -(faith) and extra-(concretising the Gospel values) ecclesial nature of the Church

as being the hearer and doer of the liberating Word. The Word of God thus becomes the vital energy source of contextual liberation and salvation.

Nowadays , the Bible study and sharing sessions have become a practical mode of rectifying the intrinsically dislocated hermeneutics and the dogmatically enclosed biblical meaning of the text . The ordinary readers now explicitly want to get a deeper and contextually born meaning of the significant role of the serpent, for instance , in the narrative of the fall of humanity into sin (Gen.3). In their renewed interest in the Bible as the Word of God , they are eager to find a socio-historical background , for instance that would enable them to engage the book of the Apocalypse more appropriately .

This necessitates the mutual collaboration of the organic intellectuals and the ordinary readers in producing an understanding and meaning that is concretely meaningful and relevantly challenging in a lived reality. The hermeneutical or theological reflection comes to yield fruit when the community as culturally conditioned recipients interacts with the cultural world of the text and allows a concrete mutual bonding . Amidst their material poverty and dehumanisation , Scripture serves as a spiritual re-enforcement , stimulus for hope and courage .

The Post-Synodal exhortation , " Ecclesia in Africa " of John Paul II (1995) seems to highlight a stage whereby the supernatural theology of the Magisterium is a limiting framework within which liberation and contextual hermeneutics could be of service to the welfare of the whole Church. Anything the Magisterium judges as subversive in challenging its principle of uniformity and sole authority over Scripture comes to be

judged as merely a socialist class struggle without any biblical foundation ¹¹⁴ "Ecclesia in Africa." seeks to reduce the tension between its Eurocentric theology and inculturation hermeneutics to a common denominator of uniformity. It seems to deny in the open its lack of contextuality and particularity which has led our local Church to a crisis of theological identity .

This given situation within the Catholic Church calls for more committed organic intellectuals to reinstate the Bible as a source of inspiration in the Christian communities of faith . We need practical theologians who would give direction and enhance the nascent Church . The ordinary readers need a necessary allowance to grow their own faith and their own character from their own soil. The ramifications of this sense of contextuality and particularity may in turn evoke a new whole way of seeing and grasping life.

I am raising this probability because I have had a first-hand experience of this . In one of our parish Bible study sessions, I was quite humbled and touched by the creative and transformative imagination and sense of novelty , gratitude , joy and commitment that goes with the Bible reading of the ordinary readers. I was evangelised and fascinated by their interaction with the symbolic language of the reading from Apoc.3:14-22 . The ordinary readers discovered insights that I had never thought about. In my critical reading I discovered my own academic blind spot (Mt.11:25-26 , I Cor.1:26-28) .

The preferential option for the poor has become what I would call a 'trademark' of our Church in South Africa and the whole

¹¹⁴ See Ratzinger , 1985 , VIII :5. and Ecclesia in Africa , especially under the sub-title , Evangelisation and Inculturation # 64.

Catholic Church . As clearly declared by John XXIII in his opening address (Gaudet et Mater) of the Second Vatican Council, the Church is and wishes to be the Church for all , but principally the poor. But are we to expect this declaration to become true despite the reality that our Catholic Church is accustomed to having small active minorities and large inert and silent majorities ? Can we as a local Church of South Africa expect the official Church of Rome to effect a redemptive ecclesial renewal when it still teaches without 'listening' to the Third World ? How fair are we to ourselves as a local Church by uncritically consuming a middle-class ideologically based theology and teaching that is produced outside our context and without realistic consultation ? Is our life as Church to remain an object of anthropological study by the First World theologians who confuse real facts about who we are with their ideological interests ?

These questions all boil down to one fact that our South African Church as part of the Third World Church is struggling with trying to balance politics and religion which are jealously looking at each other with suspicion throughout human history. The irruption or the storming of the hermeneutical arena by these organised and mobilised ordinary readers is a process that marks the end of their passivity and religious fatalism . Their contextuality challenges the official Church that provides doctrine without joining and understanding them.

The Base Ecclesial Communities (BEC's) thus become a locus where ordinary readers practise an analysis of their own liberating praxis , using their own praxical mode to combat mechanisms that constantly produce their oppression and misery. This move up-roots pretentious scholarly neutrality and encourages organic

intellectuals to place their service into giving a better grounding to the text's meaning for us . This re-introduces a healthy combination of faith , community and historical reality into the process of interpretation . In the very same process , the local Church puts the Bible in its proper place :its human life first and then the Bible as God's Word that speaks to us within our historical reality.

The incarnation or enfleshment of the Scriptural word in various cultures simply means that its in-born specificity and its cultural origins come to fuse with our human condition , language and literature . To me this contribution by an organic critical reader is both enriching and constraining . Taking Christ's own incarnation as an example clearly shows us how crucial it is for the Good News of the Kingdom to touch the hearts of the recipients within their particular cultural and social conditions. The organic critical reader has to facilitate the process of the fusion of horizons of the text and our own context in order for us to experience a more intimate encounter with God's word .¹¹⁵

Through this refreshed meaning of the Word through inculturation hermeneutics , Jesus comes to us with a cultural specificity arising from the literary , linguistic , social and religious background that is different to our own. On the basis of this argument , we need to be allowed to read and interpret Scripture differently from the Jewish , Hellenistic , Greco-Roman and European cultures . By this I do not mean that we cannot appreciate and incorporate some of the values and mythological character of the above-mentioned cultures as having served as vehicles in the transmission of God's word to us . I also do not

¹¹⁵ T. Long , 1994 , pp.395 - 411.

vote for the demythologisation of culturally conditioned myths and symbols of the biblical world and their power to express some truth . What I am arguing for is concreteness and originality in our biblical hermeneutics .

Our inculturation hermeneutics is confronted with a challenge of situating Jesus , the New Adam , and the Scriptures in general within our own cultural origins and helping the ordinary readers to appreciate anew the difference of that whole epochal and cultural world from ours .¹¹⁶ This will inject freshness , dialogue and solidarity between the text and the real-reader. This gives us a better grounding to experience the spiritual nourishment and deeper communal sharing on the biblical text . This in turn will enable us to transmit this experience of God with conviction through our own symbols and myths to the next generation .

As our freedom of response to the Bible is not culture-free , but culturally conditioned by our social situation , our response has also to reflect artistic originality .¹¹⁷ As an example of this , I would say , we do not necessarily need to feel bound to understand the narrative of the woman with haemorrhage as the Marcan community did (Mk.5:21-34). We need to allow our communal artistic originality even to yield a different response to that found in the scriptural text , if by so doing we effect more of a sense of owning the experience of God through Scripture . It is not a 'mortal sin' to understand any scriptural text differently simply because our historical context differs radically from that of the author of the text . G. O. West clearly shows this in his reading of 1 Timothy specifically focus in front of the text.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ L. Roff , 1984 , pp.89 - 96.

¹¹⁷ P. Richard , 1984 , pp.10 - 15 .

¹¹⁸ G.O. West , 1993 , pp. 57 - 58 .

In the process of owning the biblical message , we are in dialogue and even reshaping the very meaning of the text by bringing it into our socio-historical reality. This frankly means that we take Scripture to our reality of economical exploitation and cultural discrimination among ourselves as the local Church and by the universal Church that has become a channel of Western superiority . This superiority of the Occident is accompanied by the Post-Christian philosophical pessimism that claims God to be absent in the world or even dead.

The critical-readers-in-context among the ordinary readers of the poor Church are faced with working also for the incarnating of the Christian message within their particular cultural context in such a way that their experience of God through the Scriptures evokes a response of faith through elements that are proper to their culture: their liturgical expression and other forms of culturally reformulated Christian tradition , like moral values. This calls for what I would call double fidelity to both the world of the text and our historical context . Our philosophical, anthropological , sociological and theological formation should serve as complementary to 'keeping our ears to the ground' and also serve as tools of criticality in discerning and evaluating our historical reality (eg. ancestral traditions).

As communicators of this divine message , we as critical readers are not simply there to preach this message in words or writing from luxurious offices with long and loaded bookshelves full of European theology ; our whole life and thinking has also to be reshaped by the theology we produce. This means we do not speak to impress or to win favour or get our books easily marketed , but that we communicate it with the cultural integrity it deserves and for the benefit of the ordinary readers .

This inculturating of the Word of God should be less subservient to mere uniformity through centralising dogmatism , but it has to portray a clear identity in assimilating the 'essence' of the Gospel message and transposing it or make it digestible and meaningfully empowering through a different hermeneutical key and language that this local Christian community will understand. By this I mean to emphasise the need for a fresh impact of the Word and the empowerment it has to deliver to the hopes and spiritual aspirations of this particular ecclesial community.

Instead of remaining learned theorists who simply give a reconstructed probable picture of the world behind the text and abstracting the meaning of the text , we need to affirm a re-reading of macro-biblical texts (eg. Paul's household codes found in the pastoral letters to the Colossians and Ephesians) that gets beyond mere authorial meaning as if it's the only meaning and help our local Church to discover the truth God wants to communicate to us. In honour to this role of non-dominating facilitation and collaborative reading with the ordinary readers, we as organic critical readers have to be consciously aware of our key role as informed readers of the nature and the origins of the Bible as a composite text and also be concretely sensitive to the situation of our own contemporary social patterns in order to bring about a more egalitarian South African society.

The realistic question is : if the poor and the marginalised are reclaiming and contextually re-appropriating the Bible from the pan-objectivist expropriators of the West , how do they , as a hermeneutical community of believers interpret it to other fellow South Africans who are not necessarily Christians , yet share the same yoke of exploitation and grief from structural violence ? This also raises another challenge to our local Church ; that

contextual and inculturation hermeneutics do not just remain as a religious matter within a community of Christians , but as a liberative divine message it bears elements of political and social implications for non-Christians as well.

4.3.Inculturation hermeneutics facilitates the option for the Church by the poor.

The Basic Ecclesial Communities act as catalysing agents in promoting a consciousness of the poor by organising and consolidating them . The organic critical readers inject an axiological dimension to this biblical and Christian based empowerment which enables the ordinary readers to dialogue better with the Bible as a composite text. This also challenges the critical readers to practically stop being loyal disciples and adaptors of theological jargon of the paternalistic Church and give priority to the values and interests that are of common significance to the Church of the poor. Through this shift , the practical theologians of the people enable them to discover and proudly put up in the open and feel themselves to be a people who equally feel good to be who they are. It is on this basic assumption that their religious expression has to come to reflect the extent to which they now own the biblical message and allow it to shape their social identity and ethical character in a fragmented world .

Through the missionary mandate of attentive listening of local Church hierarchy to several institutions (i.e. political parties), residents' associations that make up the social fabric, they stop claiming to be opting for the poor but let the poor opt for the Church . By this clarification I mean to highlight the

dialectical impact of and on Christianity : firstly , the Church has to effect a revolutionary process in political and ethical practises of society . The second movement is the impact effected by the active presence of the poor and marginalised in the Church . This active participation marks an end of anonymity and passivity and the beginning of an ecclesial way of expressing themselves before God .

The effect of this dialectical impact is a resolute rescue operation of Christianity and Scripture from the aristocratic form that is being given by the feudal system of the nobility of the West. As we will see later on , this inculturation hermeneutics builds on principles of participation and communion , has a strong challenge to the legally defined and hierarchically organised functionaries that perpetuate bureaucratic type of power structure . In its quest for inclusivity and theological co-reflection on its community-based power structure , the holders of hierarchical positions come to be seen as focal points of unity in the Church and also of fidelity to the Gospel .

So it is an inescapable challenge for inculturation hermeneutics to bring about an embodiment of the theological reality of the People of God and a new way of being Church within a concrete historical religious context . Heterodoxy or theological pluralism can no longer be dissociated from even the most orthodox Catholic theology . Historicity and cultural particularity can also no longer be separated the human reality of life as an arena whereby the text and the reader contract . We can no longer empty Christianity of its contextuality and place it outside the human world of experience nor afford to inject a theology dependent on politics without hope for the

poor. We need to enrich and empower the poor in their quest to resurrect the whole Church , even if this biblical hermeneutics runs the risk of being labelled as " corrupting whatever was authentic in the general initial commitment on behalf of the poor" ¹¹⁹

The official Church's option for the poor needs to be an actualised participation in the life of the poor and suffering so that it will be in a better position to identify the mechanisms that produce their poverty . This solidarity of the official Church with the poor would enable it to assess and give priority theological attention to the causes of exploitation and domination and also reinforce their political and social liberation concretely . Finally , this also implies a need for the re-definition of the task of biblical hermeneutics and theology in the Church's mandate to producing a contextual Good News.

The credibility of the Catholic Church's mandate in South Africa will not mainly be on the basis of its fidelity to the Magisterium's hermeneutical orientation (World Catholicism through conformity and uniformity) , but on the way in which it creatively confronts the whole issue of the poor among the People of God . The whole hermeneutical argument basically boils down to two basic questions . Firstly , why does the Church of Rome give us bread before the Gospel or ensuring ecclesiastical financial viability while retarding our evangelical and hermeneutical maturity as a local Church ? Secondly , why is it not breaking the bread of the Word with us by moving from generalisations of one triumphant theology to an inter-cultural

¹¹⁹ J. Ratzinger , 1984 , VI : 10.

theological dialogue whose authentic search is of a universality that finds expression in the plurality of theologies at the service of one Biblical Tradition ?

The whole Church seems to be experiencing a Pauline Damascus spiritual metanoia through the prophetic presence of the poor: it recovers its sight and looking at reality from the Christological perspective , (Acts 9:1-19). The Universal Church cannot deny the effect this new vision and way of being Church. If at all it does deny it , I would label that as profoundly anti-Gospel and anti-Christian . Through communal service , integral promotion of justice , Christianisation of humanity by a clearly defined preferential option for the poor and a historically-based sense of building the Kingdom of God , the Church of the poor is saving the whole Church from sinful degeneration and being historically irrelevant .

By these clearly named signs of a new vision and way of being Church , the Church thus proves itself truly symbolic of Christ's own resurrection .

When Christ makes himself known , a historical movement arises. The Church that comes into existence is not simply the depository of the truth *about* the resurrection of Christ but is itself the very expression , at the historical level , of the newness that has come in Christ . ' Without new life , without the ability to love and the courage of hope in the lordship of Christ , faith in the resurrection would decay into belief in particular facts , without any consequences' .¹²⁰

¹²⁰ J. Sobrino , 1984 , p.87 ..

The kenosis and the resurrection of Christ has brought two realities into existence : Christ who out of fidelity to the Father had suffered and died as a person is raised by God as the first fruit of the dead (1 Cor.15:20) and now He is giving life to the Church . This has an implication for the Church's self-understanding and mission . This resurrection of the Church by the poor does not imply that our Catholic Church was once dead or irrelevant , but my metaphorical usage denotes the unexpected and unimagined newness in contextuality and a clear return to historicity or inculturation of the Gospel by the poor.

The Church of the poor is challenged to actualise a 'Nicodemus rebirth' and a break away from the egg-shell of the Western ideologically based theology of the official Church of Rome . This does not mean to usher a physical schism but a pastoral and hermeneutical shift , so as to ensure an integral sense of originality in attaining the fullness of communion and authentic unity in the Church . This hermeneutical re-establishment or originality by the Church of the poor has in turn to trigger a break away of the First World Church from producing ideologically based hermeneutical principles and theology which conform to the mechanisms of structural violence and economic oppression which seriously jeopardises its mandate to give spiritual sustenance to the world .

The sociological internal weakness that must be recognised and strongly rejected is the pietist manipulation and domestication of ordinary readers , if the poor are to speak and own the experience of being the Church . For this reason then , the Church of the poor has strongly challenged rather than receiving uncritically a resurgence of a rationalistic and individualistic theology that is spearheading a powerful return to the relationship of the individual with the transcendent God.¹²¹

¹²¹ J. Ratzinger , 1985 , IV , V and VI.

The Church of the poor has to become the protagonist in history, society and theology in the eyes of the Roman Curia's option for the poor . This implies a true vision of reality of the poor from their own social position . The powerful hermeneutical voice of the Curia has to appreciate and enable the poor to discover their strength and creativity in fundamentally transforming the society within which they live and suffer marginalisation .

The official Church of Rome has to base itself on a new hermeneutical key of dying and rising , by remembering that the risen Christ they also preach is the one who had suffered and died . This in my opinion necessitates a clear move from dogmatic certainty and a depository of a limited factual knowledge about the risen Christ to a mutual discernment and adventurous theological innovation . Our theology has to denounce proselytising through ideological power and nurture this nascent Church which embodies hope for the poor . Through inculturation hermeneutics , this Third World Church of the Third Millennium comes to catch a glimpse of the risen Christ. The preferential option for the poor should not mean that the poor become the privileged group over their oppressors , but it should mean that the Church finds its structure , organisation and mission from the viewpoint of the poor .

By the positioning of the poor at this state of discovering their hermeneutical potential and creativity , we are actually giving a concrete direction and meaning , and deconstructing an idealised and sacralised perception of who the poor are among us. This will be a practical expression of the solidarity of the Church with the poor and a tangible sign of it's kenosis and true rebirth. The Church of the poor does not claim a transfer of power from the hierarchy to themselves as a social class but their main concern is to initiate a radical change of the notion of

hermeneutical power as a mediation of the Christian reality about God .

As a logical question to this , we ask ourselves as to how this Christian reality influences our theological thinking and understanding . In addition to this probing we also ask , as to how this Christian reality concretely influences the theological primary concern and the liberative character of our inculturation hermeneutics . Does our inculturation hermeneutics prove itself to be an epistemological break away from the scholastic transcendental theology that bases its theological understanding on concepts rather than with an existing reality ? If at all this epistemological break away is achieved , will its effects influence theological disciplines like systematics , pastoral and moral theology ?

In its facilitating role in enabling the poor to opt for the Church , inculturation hermeneutics has to become a practical and ethical option of liberating the character of our theology from abstraction . This kind of hermeneutics engenders responsibility and practicality on organic critical readers . They no longer look at theology as solely an academic discipline they arbitrarily decide to enrol in , but organic critical readers embark on certain theological themes as forced upon them by reality .

In our case here in South Africa , the critical-readers-in context are to become responsible and practical theologians not of pure thought or in search of pure doctrinal truth but the real need is to respond to issues of inculturation and ecumenical dialogue to end the scandalous denominational and social class

divisions within Christianity . This Christian reality compels us to choose either way : of whether we leave the ordinary readers in a superimposed immaturity of feeling too powerless to think and liberate themselves and simply accept almost without criticality what outsiders think is right for them - infantilism or we are resolved to help them unravel every form of externally imposed religious concepts and dogmatism and inject a new concrete way of thinking and acting ?

I am convinced that our theology has to co-opt existential philosophy , anthropology and sociology in order to have a holistic or a more inclusive understanding of reality . It is also my conviction that the most evangelical way of resurrecting the subversive , pastoral and liberating character of theology from being seen as a carrier of the utopia for the poor , is by injecting a radical openness to the real world . At the time when the integrity of curial theology is in doubt and being discredited as authoritarian and obscuring the meaning of Christian faith , the Gospel of communion and ecumenism ; inculturation hermeneutics is to function as a new interpretation that restores the meaning of faith and as a source of real liberation .

Inculturation hermeneutics has to re-orientate theology from merely being an intellectual discourse (theo-logy) into being at the service of the building of the Kingdom of God here and now. The importance of the Church of the poor as a genuine communitarian and social reality within which they articulately live their experience of God is crucial . For this reason , there is no need for the Church of the poor to pretend to have an experience of God that is universal in character nor claim this experience to be more valid as compared to others .

4.4. The Church of the poor as the New Israel.

The poor and the marginalised are like the New Israel in terms of Matthew's view of the Church . The Church of the poor does not claim God to be their own as if He is against others . Within their clearly defined political-religious sphere and as a consolidated people they committed themselves by a covenant through which Yahweh became their God and they became His People (Ex.6:7 , Ezk.11:20 and Jer.7:23) . Through their presence as the 'remnant' of Yahweh all peoples of social classes and nationalities become people of God (Rev.21:3). In line with this, the early Christian community formed itself into small communities with a clear consciousness of their Christian identity , (Acts 2:11 and 15:14) . What transpired in the emergence of these communities is not a common culture (e.g. Judaism) nor a metaphorical meaning of the People of God , but within each Gentile culture Christian faith took a new shape and expression.¹²²

This biblically-based historical notion of the People of God is inherited from Israel . The important link here is that the subjugated poor and marginalised tribes and clans that had suffered oppression under the city state of Egypt and those from the city states of Canaan became a people . They established a federation or alliance to deal with economic social , political and religious factors in order to consolidate themselves so as to be able to defend themselves .¹²³

¹²² J. Pixley , 1984 , pp.17 - 24 .

¹²³ M.K. Gottwald , 1979 , pp.692 - 699.

This emergence of the People of God was not merely in view of the material needs and stability , but it enabled these tribes to become a liberation movement with a theologically well-defined political - religious objective . The fact that they had organised themselves adequately to resist the religion that was imposed by the political-military hegemony of the city states , is of hermeneutical importance . It was only then that could identify God as their protector . This religious belief made them feel gratuitously chosen by God for a special purpose (Jos.24:1-24 and Ex.6:7) . They historically became organised as a people before actually becoming the People of God in a theological sense.¹²⁴

In terms of the Gospel of Matthew , the early Christian communities initially came to understand themselves in historic-soteriological terms as a new People of God . Their anthropomorphic understanding of God's liberative activity as transmitted through myths , legends and narrative about human infidelity and sin is a proof of God's continuous fidelity from the days of the Old testament . This subversive , ruthlessness and rawness of Scripture has been lost somewhat as Christianity spread to and through cultures and epochs .

In these unavoidable circumstances , the concept of 'the People of God' got politicised when Christianity became the state religion of the dominant . Christendom produced a metaphorical understanding of the concept which dehydrated it of its originally encoded significance of the Church as the visible and participative community of the baptised .

This concept reached its apogee when the regime of Christendom was effectively installed: the occupation of

¹²⁴ J. Pixley , 1984 , pp.17 - 24 .

all geographical and cultural space by Christianity , producing a society ideologically and also politically led by the hierarchy of the Church working with the secular rulers . The *populus tuus* of the liturgical texts referred to the faithful gathered to worship , but its historical presupposition was the regime of Christendom , in which the faithful were hegemonised by the hierarchy within a clerical framework . ¹²⁵

Within the established institutional Church , the concept of the 'People of God' became synonymous with the laity in the Church who were simply to submit dutifully , obey and conform to the promulgations of the ordained ministers as bearers of sacramental power and in control of all means of religious production . The Ecumenical Council has prepared ground for this renewed sense of being 'the People of God' within the Church . Within the hermeneutical principles of Vat.II , communion and greater participation , the Church as the Messianic People of God is exhorted to incarnate the Word of God in its various cultural contexts (L.G. # 10 - 12) and the local Churches to offer their charismata at the service of the common-good and the building up of the universal Church (L.G.32). This clearly demonstrates the official Church of the mid-1960's as aware of a need to shift from a metaphoric or mystified designation of the Church and the sacralised notion of priesthood to a more historical - materialist and communitarian sense .

This opens up the space and justification for the organic critical readers to engage the ordinary readers in being producers of their own history . This participation and communion

¹²⁵ L. Boff , 1984 , p.92 .

of both the ordinary and the organic critical readers implies that they allow themselves to be spiritually enriched and evangelised by one another as they gather around the Word of God. As a dynamic Church of and from the base , they are committed to bring about liberation from poverty , socio-economical injustice and marginalisation . They are resolved to accomplish their apostolic mandate of seeking the realisation of equitable justice , liberty of faith expression and effecting the reality of the Church as an assembly of all peoples on their way to the final Kingdom .

4.5. The evangelical radicalism of the Church of the poor.

The liberative impact and influence of the BEC's within the traditional and systematised form of Christianity cannot be measured by quantitative criteria . The BEC's as the locus of self-expression of the Church of the poor and the marginalised create new areas of spiritual growth by their radicalism . It is a locus where the poor and marginalised are pastorally mobilised to be profoundly prophetic in effecting a religious consciousness that in turn brings about a transformed and revolutionary Christianity .

This transformation becomes a visible reality when the statistical gauging of the Catholic faith is rendered as of secondary importance if compared to the ecclesial creativity of the poor . It is this creativity of the believing people that effects an ecclesial renewal dimension within which they read the Bible , spontaneously pray and celebrate their faith explicitly and publicly . In my opinion and religious optimism , I believe that such a Christian self-expression is a locus of religious awareness , political autonomy and liberating inculturation . In

short , this new self-understanding and creativity of the BEC's becomes the best expression of the true depth of how the poor and marginalised have come to own Christianity and Scripture .

If we take this re-identification of the poor with Scripture and Christianity seriously enough , then we come to realise the fact that without true penetration of the organic critical readers into the religious consciousness of the ordinary readers , we cannot concretely speak of a genuine social and political transformative process and Christian identity of the poor as constitutive elements of the Church in South Africa .On the other hand , we can also not justifiably claim to be realistic to ourselves in speaking of the participation of the poor ordinary readers in the internal transformation of the Church and their attempt to build a new society without their mobilisation to be a people who are aware of their social identity and their basic needs .

Through the complementarity between critical-readers-in-context and the poor ordinary readers , there has to be a religious consciousness that makes them feel capable of transforming an abstract Catholic faith into a liberating Christian witness . This prophetic identity of the poor among the 'People of God' needs to inject a critical internal transformation that in turn subjects their ethnic and social biases like chauvinism and revengeful militancy to scrutiny . Through a practical methodology of inculturation hermeneutics (which comprises a solid biblical hermeneutics , spirituality and social identity) the local Church as a hermeneutically potential community has to recover its Christian vocation of calling humanity to submit itself to a positive critique and a process of conversion and integration into a People of God .

The practicality of this Church of the poor does not depend so much on their militancy and anti-hierarchical Church tendencies nor conforming silence , but on their communal proclaiming and celebration experience of God's liberating activity in their historical potential to bring about liberation . In this respect, the role of an organic critical reader is not to romanticise or to be a biblical 'producer and executive director' of the struggles of the poor but rather to enable the poor to own their theatrically staged liberation struggle in communicating their own experience of God and the " secrets of the Kingdom" , Mt.11:25.¹²⁶

Cardinal J. Ratzinger and his school of thought (which includes our present pope) have to be made aware of the inadequacy of their transcendental and theocratic-based system of domination over the "mission" continents (Asia , Africa and Latin America). Our South African inculturation hermeneutics as a theological effort from the 'base' has to be a spiritual force that deletes idolatrous roots of oppression and initiates a prophetic perception that allows a better habit of listening , seeing and touching the presence of God in the history of liberation of the poor and marginalised .

Ignorance and ideological hindrance of this liberation of the poor and an individualistic and pietist mechanical encounter with God has to give way to our dramatic re-appropriation of the Bible and the charismatic experience of God . This symbolic presence of the poor and marginalised has to reshape our local Church's pastoral action of liberation which does not exclude the ecclesiastical institution , but one that aims at resolving the

¹²⁶ This could be another way of evangelising the Neo-Augustinian school of thought that pushes for the resurgence of World Catholicism .

conflicts and internal contradictions within the Church and renew that institutionalisation radically .

This symbolic presence of the poor among the People of God is an evangelical and spiritual enrichment to the Church , because it directly declares the pastoral strategy of the official Church as no more the centre of hermeneutical gravity and the only 'actor' in the theological arena . The BEC's as the Church of the poor are intrinsically an expression that the paternalistic claim of the Church as either opting for the poor or being the 'voice of the voiceless' ¹²⁷ gets declared as extinct , since the poor are now storming the theatrical stage¹²⁸ of hermeneutics and demonstrating that God is bringing an evangelically transformed Christianity through their sacramental presence and identity in the Catholic Church of South Africa .

4.6. The process of decoding and encoding within Inculturation Hermeneutics .

The poor and marginalised have to analytically decode or decipher the interpretive interest that serves as a basis for the ahistorical biblical hermeneutics of the Roman Curia in order to Christianise anew or re-evangelise the pastoral policy of the conventional Catholicism that puts more emphasis on inflexible moral teachings , liturgical uniformity and doctrinal orthodoxy at all costs . Inculturation hermeneutics has also to serve as an encoding strategy . This strategy has to impact on and reshape the missionary mandate of the Church of saving souls through the 'ex opere operata' administration of the sacraments .

¹²⁷ See John Paul II , *Ecclesia in Africa* , # 70 .

¹²⁸ J.C. Scott , 1990 , p.11.

The nascent Church of the Third World is now embracing the challenge to encode a contextual\cultural biblical hermeneutics that serves as a basis for openness to the social reality : an ecclesial and cultural Catholicism which injects a fresh Christian maturity in faith , incarnate prophetic witness , charismatic and innovatory ecclesial expression . This Church as an expression of the Second Vatican Council aggiornamento is founded on communion of faith , charity (as a social political action and hope) and liberation in serving the poor and facilitating the conversion of the oppressors . It is a concrete way of forging communion amongst the People of God and becoming a living sign of salvation .

Since this Church model has emerged from a people who are in the process of finding their own spiritual and materialist liberation, it is not a Church for the people , but a Church of critical communion with the institutional Church that comes to life from the historical struggles of the ordinary people for a Christocentric transformation and liberating faith . This Church remains fervent and critical in its quest to bring about a basically communitarian ecclesial model of the Church that bears a biblical kerygma which serves as a seed for a renewed evangelised society . It is on the basis of this assumption that I believe this Church to be a primitive cell of a 'Base Ecclesial Community' that is indigenous , communitarian , prophetic , liberating and missionary in character . In the words of Azevedo,

The poor , then , are not just the starting point or a touch-stone for looking at the world and divine revelation. They themselves take part in the process of perceiving and reflecting on both . They will be agents who transform reality , the qualified *proclaimers and evangelisers* who show people what the content and living out of revelation is in community of believers known as Church . ¹²³

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¹²³ M. Azevedo , 1987 , p. 187.

These BEC's as components of the Church of the poor see authentic holiness and integral spirituality as emerging from a holistic Christian faith and life . Through inculturation hermeneutics , the divisive barriers like the sacral notion of priesthood are being removed . The process of the humanisation of the Gospel or historical materialist reading of the Bible has become a deconstructive approach by which the poor and the 'voiceless' are regaining confidence and are assertively speaking for themselves.

Through inculturation hermeneutics , the marginalised and the destitute who were once up-rooted from their own culture are repatriating the Church and instilling a new basic spirituality that leads yet to another level of Christian conversion . During this period of a " People's Government of National Unity " in South Africa , the Church also needs an authentically 'People oriented' hermeneutics which seriously engages the BECs as reconstructive makers of history . The BECs as a new way of being Church are faced with a challenge of being a *communion of communions* that enables humanity to regain the God-given task of actively participating in shaping its own future as *co - creators* with God .

The evangelical principle of the poor (that God is known to be alive through their faith experience , his power and love through their life of perseverance and his glory through their martyrdom) leads us to a prophetic belief that they will save the world from total damnation in their simplicity . They will save Christianity and the Scripture in spite of being the humble and outcasts of society . Since they will be doing this without any ulterior motive to prove themselves right or better , but simply taking their rightful place in the Church , they do not seem to be aware as to the value of the service they are rendering to the welfare

of the Church . This great value is actually re-invigorating , re-processing and re-defining the task of Christianity and theology.

4.7. Conclusion.

A new way of living together as Church in South Africa is being tried out as its contribution in the emerging new South Africa. As fervent bearers of the Gospel to the world , we see no conflict in the purgative fusion between faith and our culture. We are more than aware of the reality that the newly unfolding 'rainbow nation' is in need of a new hermeneutical key and contextual way of being Church . In this arena , theological practise has necessarily to become a collective or communal endeavour and no room for a sole instructing , thinking , and directing theologian , but a room to be people who theologise together .

This is what proves our local Church to be stable and solidly rooted in the social life the community . On the basis of this assertion , I will even argue further that a young Church does not have to remain infantile but need to strive constantly for hermeneutical maturity , and so gradually to constitute an integrally mature representation of the Church of Christ in concrete terms . This means that , even if it may be financially unable to be self-supportive , it nevertheless remains essential that it incorporates contextuality and its cultural particularity to the spiritual life and its concrete needs as a Base Ecclesial Community .

We need to be aware of our catechetical , liturgical and spiritual dependency without modification on the Roman ecclesiastical productions . It is within this realm that I find

the role of organic critical readers as crucial and irreplaceable in creatively helping us shape the emerging Church of South Africa that is free of Christendom overtones and hermeneutical proselytism by Rome.

Our organic critical readers have to make us more aware of Christianity as the divine economy rather than an ideology . Christian faith has to take the joys , genuine longings and sorrows of this community and liberate it from the domination of the West , by resourcefully interpreting and appropriating Scripture into the very experience of injustice which oppresses them . This includes the entangling the image of God from the theocracy of the West and reflect a God whose divine economy is correlative with human deliverance from dehumanising misery and pain .

During this *moulting* process of the sacralised perception of God, and the Church of the poor becoming a messianic sign of our time, the role of the organic critical reader truly becomes one of decoding or bringing up in the open the impact of Western ideology on faith and encoding African contemporaneity as a new characteristic of this new theology . It is after such a hermeneutical effort that our Church will become a well-informed Church and one that is practically committed to making us a redeemed and redemptive community within our South African cultural heritage .

Through the process of decoding and encoding , the ordinary readers in the BECs stop being clients in the Church and truly become witnesses of Good News . The materialist approach of reading the Bible marks the liberation of theology from academic abstraction and pan-objectivism of university confines on the one

hand . On the other hand , the presence of the Spirit that constantly unlock the evangelical potential of the poor also liberates them from passivity . The work of God's Spirit is disclosed by the pro-active presence of the unconditional love and forgiveness of the poor to their oppressive brothers and sisters in the Church . Through this experience , the proclamation of the Gospel via the historic process and involvement of the poor in the liberation of society seem to transcend the mundane social conflicts arising from superimposed ideologies . Their cultural and mental poverty thus becomes the spring of evangelical witness and a source of rebirth and hope among the People of God .

Chapter 5.

THE LATINITY OF SCRIPTURE THROUGH TRADITION AND PROSPECTS FOR INCULTURATION HERMENEUTICS.

5.0. Introduction

In the last chapter I dealt with hermeneutical challenges that are facing the Third World Church (both the laity and the hierarchy) as the evangelisers of the third millennium of Christianity. This practically means that , even if the Third World Church may still be young , missionised , conquered and colonised , it has nevertheless to strive to be a Church in a theological sense . Our South African Catholic Church , for instance , has to strive that the Gospel values are deeply planted in the hearts of Africans .

This squarely means that our South African Church ensures a doctrinal and social ethic from Christianity and Scripture which reflect an African understanding of life . In this respect , inculturation hermeneutics has to serve as a theological locus for an authentically African thought and spirituality . Our double fidelity to the world of the text and our historical contextuality should serve as a basis for reshaping our Christian faith , social ethic and a new way of being Church .

Here in this Chapter I basically argue that the task of this newly emerging inculturation hermeneutics is to produce a

contextual theology which strongly impacts and liberate theological disciplines like systematics , pastoral and moral theologies from a biblical interpretation that has domesticated the Bible . In our Catholic faith and doctrine the metaphorical linguistic expression of the Bible as the Word of God is cloistered or encircled by theological terms like revelation , inspiration , authority of interpretation , infallibility , inerrancy and normativity . ¹³⁰

The understanding of the Word of God within the confines of dogmatic fundamentalism and infallibility seems quite problematic. The polycultural character of the Scripture as the Word of God seems to suffer within the interpretive interest of the magisterium . The magisterium overlooks the fact that its biblical interpretation and meaning of the Scriptures is limited by its cultural , historical and other socially determined peculiarities .

We also come to realise the double binding effect of the Roman Curia as supporting inculturation in principle , but in its official writings like Ecclesia in Africa it leaves the whole issue of inculturation within the strictures of mere adaptation of its promulgations . If inculturation as both the " ultimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and --- the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures " ¹³¹ has become an urgent issue in the eyes of the Holy Mother Church of Rome, why does her criteria with regard to this inculturation not include respect for the primitive or not yet evangelised cultures as a priority step ?¹³²

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¹³⁰ Vatican II , 1965 , Dei Verbum § 10 - 11 .

¹³¹ John Paul II , 1995 , article 59 .

¹³² The phrasing of this above article implies that cultural transformation precedes the insertion of Christianity rather than the insertion or integration of Christianity to protect this cultural transformation . This seems to imply that the daughter Churches of the Third World are to undergo an authentic cultural transformation -according to the criteria and conditioning of the Holy Mother Church of Rome before Christianity could be confirmed as integrated with their particular cultures . To me this evangelisation strategy seems to be hostile to particularity and contextuality in its predetermined criteria of what authentic cultural values in the evangelised cultures of the Third World .

In the light of this analysis , I strongly assert that inculturation , the theology of the Church as Family (that avoids all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism) and an organic pastoral solidarity ¹³³ will all reflect nothing else but a hermeneutical imbalance if the respect for the particularity of non-evangelised cultures is not seen as a priority in the evangelisation of various cultures . This state of affairs raises the question as to whether African culture will ever be given an opportunity to be original in its dialogue with the Word of God. This hermeneutical deficiency has created a personal interest within me to explore the assumptions that undergird our Catholic biblical theology . I also feel a need to pursue a biblical interpretation that facilitates a fruitful dialogue between the Bible and ourselves as a local Church with a specific history , world view and spirituality .

The challenge we are tackling with inculturation as our critical tool is to create an originality in our biblical reading of the text and to evade bad esoteric elements of the Occident which have subjugated and suppressed our African psyche , traditional moral values of the family , clan and society . By this return to cultural originality , I do not imply an uncritical resuscitation of the cumbersome customary practises which J. Nxumalo refers to as " obsolete elements of the archaic African religion " ¹³⁴ , but a cultural linguistic expression of the Word of God from which we are able to produce new concepts of the Bible and let its message take root in our life as a local Church. The emphasis on the biblical message by our cultural originality has to yield a Christianised culture whose aspirations and moral values are strongly penetrated by a contextual critical reading of the Scriptures .

¹³³ John Paul II , 1995 , articles 50 to 63.

¹³⁴ J. Nxumalo , 1995 .

If we are to let God speak to us , we need to hear God speaking in our maintained yet evolving language . For this reason , our ~~inculturation hermeneutics~~ has to go beyond a mastery of the lexical polysemy and systematic latinity of the Word of God and begin to tease the imagination and originality of both the critical and ordinary reader to engage fully with the new possibilities offered by the text .

Language as our primary mode of communication thus truly becomes a medium of encounter with God and mutual experience of personal disclosure and sharing a world of meaning with God (*kenosis and conversion*). In other words , our language becomes a paradigmatic model for understanding divine revelation : we share a life born of communication between us and God through our linguistic expression . This language of inculturation hermeneutics must be sure not to fall into the trite or worn out and repeated formulae of soteriology , ecclesiology and christology .

This language truly becomes a vehicle through which the reader interacts anew with the biblical text . This newly discovered linguistic and hermeneutical key is by its very nature bound to embody and bring some reality beyond that perception of God as invisible . In the same process , inculturation hermeneutics also unlocks the mystery about God and enables the interpreting readers to participate directly in the presence and power of the God being revealed through the Scriptures . In practical terms, the Scriptures , as the meaningful and symbolic self-disclosure of God in history , have to re-affirm our identity , worth and destiny .

In response to this self-disclosure , each local Church as part of the " People of God " , has to come to understand its own history as a story of relationship between themselves and God .

The theophanic kenosis of Jesus as the Word of God , then comes to be understood as both the ultimate expression of divine and human encounter . This historical relationship between God and ourselves as a local Church also illumines our perception of the Bible as a 'revelatory text' that bears a plurivalent actualization in different socio-historical contexts and epochs (Jn.20:31) . Thus the Bible is not to be seen as a ' carrier or a container ' of Good News , but it is in itself Good News .

5.1.The role of the Bible in our Catholic tradition .

The role of Scripture as a normative 'revelatory text' to our Catholic way of doing theology within our culture and Church polity raises a number of questions in the field of systematic theology . This way of doing theology specifically challenges the circumscribed usage of the Bible within the hermeneutical framework offered by the magisterium . I raise this issue because the Curia has domesticated the sensitivity and creativity of the systematic theologians or dogmaticians and the exegetes within one particular mode of interpreting the Bible . This has also affected the direction and emphasis on their collaborative role of interpreting Scripture in accordance with Catholic tradition.

Within the context of conciliar decisions , the valued tradition of the teaching Fathers , the influence of Scholasticism and the Bible , a systematic theologian and an exegete may simply become manualist theologians whose role is to produce and propagate universally applicable dogmatic, doctrinal and moral formulae . For these theologians of the Congregation for the Defence of Faith , the Bible is recognised as the 'soul of theology' in so

far as it affirms the accumulated apologetic heritage of Catholic tradition . Their biblical interpretation of scriptural texts is mainly to establish a sound defense for Catholic denominationally exclusive doctrine by biblical allusions .

The insights of these manualist theologians who serve the Roman Curia into biblical literature , literary forms and socio-historical background of the Bible are eclipsed by the accumulated apologetic heritage of the Roman Catholic tradition. This trend pervades quite prominently in encyclicals like *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) and *Vigilantiae* (1902) by Leo XIII , *Divino Afflante Spiritu* by Pius XII (1943) and *Dei Verbum* by the Vat. II of 1965. Thus Scripture has remained functional rather than normative to our Catholic tradition.¹³⁵

Inculturation hermeneutics is born out of this hermeneutical state of affairs and with the confidence of its youthful vigour and originality , it has to confront this Catholic tradition . The biblical insights of the critical-readers-in-context as arising from post-modern philosophy , psychology , and the very history of the Catholic tradition make the revision of the strictures in the field of our ecclesiastical hermeneutics absolutely necessary . This revision of the role of the Bible in our Catholic tradition has to be a theological enterprise of inter-disciplinary exchange among exegetes , systematic theologians and ethicists . This kind of cross-pollination has to move theology from an essentialist theology of immutable dogmatic truth claims to cultural historicity .¹³⁶

¹³⁵ D. Ritschl , 1971 , pp. 113 - 120.

¹³⁶ Ibid .

This revision and cross-pollination implies a conscious re-interpretation of the dogmatic formulae (that have come to us as deposited Catholic faith) and moral teaching in the light of the particular challenges of our time . One of these challenges is the spiritualist biblical hermeneutics of the Roman Curia that claims a constitutive yet disempowering sole authority in determining the Church's proclamation of the Biblical Christian message . It is within this reality that I strongly contend that the liberating interest and hermeneutical creativity of collaborating organic intellectuals and ordinary readers have now to be proven by their clear epistemological break from the naive biblicism which conforms and instil the thought forms , culture and the capitalist ideology of the West .

The credibility of our inculturation hermeneutics lies in its appreciation of the Catholic traditional teaching without remaining its prisoner in the way it handles the socio-historical issues . Our understanding of the Bible should never remain as just the glorification of the past modernist and scholastic age, but it has to become an epistemological liberation which allows a fruitful dialogue between our socio-cultural world and that of the biblical text .

If our teaching office of interpreting Scripture is to be authentically Christian. ¹³⁷ then the exclusivism of monocultural interpretation demands serious attention . In a polycentric cultural world , the role of the magisterium in the interpretation of the Scriptures is not necessarily to be seen as the work of the chosen few , but it should rather be seen as the work of the whole 'People of God' in their respective social contexts .

¹³⁷ Vatican II , 1965 , Dei Verbum , # 10 .

Any new understanding and explanation of the Scriptures can never be seen as mature only in so far as it complies with the interpretive interests of the Curia . It is my belief that since the Roman Curia is subservient to rather than above the Word of God , it is also fallible and historically conditioned even in its spiritualist interpretation . On the basis of this argument, biblical hermeneutics is never to be seen as within the constituency of our dogmatics and morals but it has to be seen as a foundational discipline from which all theologies emerge .

The diverse theologies , ecclesiologies and soteriologies we find in the New Testament writings like those of Luke-Acts, John , Paul and James are to serve as examples for the complementarity between exegesis and pastoral theologies . From these examples that shape our apostolic Christian Tradition , we need to take a lesson from them as there is a need for polycentric inculturation hermeneutics that reflect diversity of ~~biblical theologies~~ rather than just one universally applicable ~~doctrinal theology~~ .

We need a divergence in biblical hermeneutics that appreciates and enhances theological pluralism which has accompanied the 'People of God' from the days of the Yahwist and the Priestly schools of thought . Without this theological and contextual particularity , our biblical hermeneutics will fall short in articulating issues of ethics and spirituality of our time and context. Instead of investing our critical reading of functional specialisation within our denominational Catholic tradition by resuscitating and verifying its uniformity , we need to try and articulate the faith experience of God among our own community. The normative character of the Bible as a 'revelatory text' has to ensoul our creative polycultural theological investigation and analytical critique of our historical reality .

Our ecclesial doctrine has to move from generalisations of one triumphant culture to an honest search for the true universality and rediscover pluralism and dignity of theology through inculturation hermeneutics . Pentecost , as symbolic of the new assembly of believers and a normative narrative for all Christians , affirms the diversity of languages and cultures . It has given a positive understanding to the mythological narrative of the tower of Babel . The diversity of languages and cultures is no more seen as a divine punitive act , (Gen.11:1-9). The kerygmatic and didactic nature of the Pentecost event affirms the different Christian expression of universal love , the regard for the uniqueness of the other and a break through the socio-cultural barriers that kept humanity apart .

Inculturation hermeneutics has to take a lesson from this great diversity , liberty and creativity of theological reflection that characterised the early Church . This unity and universality has to serve as the basis for an intra-ecclesial polycultural dialogue . This dialogue between the young Churches of the Third world and the Roman Church of the West (which is encumbered by centuries of tradition of seeing itself as the Church) has to bear prospects for the reshaping of our doctrine , moral codes and rituals . Genuine dialogue has to liberate these theological features of the Church from the Western patterns of thought which have petrified them as untouched and sacrosanct.

Our main resource has to be the needs , struggles , questions and life-tensions of our community . Our creative proclamation or prophetic ministry of theologising can thus be no way of proving our fidelity to our European masters , but it needs to be conditioned by our historical cultural identity . It is within this hermeneutical empowerment that our critical analysis , dialogue and creative reading of the Bible will unveil the hidden

theocracy in the curial theology and the institutionalised ideological mechanisms of oppression of the West . It is in the context of our real situation that we come to appreciate our newly formulated faith expression in the light of the Christian Tradition . Finally , I am convinced that it is within our own context as a faith community that the sacramental and doctrinal life of the Church has to be consistently re-thought and reformulated so that the core Christian Tradition may continue to be maintained, while its outward expressions vary and local implications change in accordance with the changing circumstance.

5.2. The Moral authority of Scripture and the ethics of reconstruction.

Ethical theological reflection as a significant dimension of inculturation hermeneutics is also determined and relative to a particular time and particularities of each local Church's history and traditional values . Since the integrity of all ethics depends on their adjective qualification in order to be a fuller expression of a social and historical character of a particular community , I qualify mine here as a Christian social ethics of reconstruction . Though theological ethics as a discipline deals with issues of right and wrong in matters of social justice , constitutional human rights and freedom , virtues and sin and rules and duties , the historic particularity of each community is of crucial importance . This is simply because it gives concrete meaning to these human ethical issues .

The ethics of reconstruction is made crucial by two factors in our Catholic Church . Firstly , the Church has justified and maintains a universally relative ethics based on unchangeable

principles . The Church ensures their validity or absoluteness by its claim that they are sanctioned by God . The assumption that serves as a basis to this is the fear of the official Church that without this absoluteness , Christian ethics will be exposed to arbitrariness of other cultural beliefs and practises .

Most of our moral theologians have written pastoral books to confirm this sacrosanct hermeneutical key as if it is the only valid interpretive interest and mode of reading the Bible . They have succumbed to the theology of the Roman Curia that has created a canon within the canon for the sake of its uniformal ethical code . The presumption is that the integrity of the ethics of the universal Church lies in its abstract concepts . The deficiency of this convention curial ethical code is that it is founded on the modernist hunger for absoluteness and institutional codification .

The second factor that needs special attention during this period of reconstruction , is the dualist understanding of ethics as a separate entity from cultural particularity . This has had a serious effect on our legal and justice system ; it has led to a kind of personal and communal abdication from responsibility and moral laxity . Each individual now chooses and makes up an emotivist moral judgment based on prima facie individualist pleasure and aesthetic preferences . This has led to a kind of state where each one takes law into his/her hands .

The reality of an ahistorical moral code of the Roman Curia makes it indispensable that moral authenticity requires us to accept the moral values , principles and virtues that constitute our cultural formation as a people to shape us rather than each one's emotivist arbitrariness . We first need to accept the fact that a universalistic fragmented Christian ethic or a conceptual

simulacra of morality which lacks contextuality or cultural context from which it derives its significance is not effective. I strongly contend that it is because of this lack of historical particularity of our fragmented Catholic ethics that there is no way we could resolve our intra-ecclesial moral conflicts between the first world and the third world .

Besides the challenge to arbitrate between the two interpretive biblical basic interests of these moral claims , we need to deal with the magisterium's hunger for absolute moral truths as if they are " out there".¹³⁸ This ahistorical universality of our theological ethic as the Catholic Church seems to share a common ground with moral theories and practises like emotivism , existentialism and situationalism which secure morality on rationality .

This individualistic morality has made us feel absolutely autonomous , determined and free even to the point of failing to remember our African moral code which emphasizes our environmental and biological link with nature , clan and society.

To be a moral agent is , on this view , precisely to be able to stand back from any and every situation in which one is involved , from any and every characteristic that one may possess, and to pass judgment on it from a purely universal and abstract point of view that is totally detached from all social particularity . Anyone and everyone can thus be a moral agent , since it is in the self and not in social roles or practices that moral agency has to be located . ¹³⁹

The question we may ask is whether there is a justifiable foundation for such a meta-ethical reflection or transcultural

¹³⁸ S.Emmermans , 1993 , p. 6.

¹³⁹ S.Emmermans , 1993 , p. 10 .

Christian ethic whose principles of moral judgments are free from historical communities.

The moral teaching of the Roman Curia as based on Cartesian existentialism seems to discard the biblical historicity and erase the politics and ethics of remembering (tradition) in favour of an impersonal universal interpretation of Scripture. This has turned the one , catholic and apostolic Church into a people or inhabitants of an imaginary and fictitious world ¹⁴⁰ The modern radicalism as embodied in academic history , sociology and existential philosophy have impacted on our Catholic moral teaching and produced a somewhat hedonistic and value-neutral viewpoint which has remained largely invisible yet powerfully influential . It is under such a value neutral moral viewpoint that the poor and the marginalised have suffered without any hope of ever developing a remedial psychological and hermeneutical nostrum or empowerment to depose their religious fatalism and the constantly produced mechanisms of oppression .

Ideological contention on moral claims between the oppressed and the oppressors has an interminable character . Our moral claims are now based on individualistic pleasures and aesthetic preferences . Because of this , our moral claims even as family and community members reveal a clash of antagonistic interests. Our lack of some common basis or Christian social ethic turns our moral conflicts into unargued arguments . One ends up questioning the validity of this individualistic moral pluralism and one becomes suspicious of its fragmentation effect on our African morality .

¹⁴⁰ see A. Mac Intyre , 1981 , p. 3 .

When we speak of justice , love , mercy and duty as moral virtues and values within our contemporary Catholic moral heterogeneity , we realise the unresolved tension that emanates from the fact that our extinct cultural particularity results in a loss of the sound meaning and concreteness of these concepts. It is like our language of morality has moved from stable cultural particularity to a state of anonymity and disorder . With particular reference to our Catholic moral teaching , we seem to base our moral argument on original sin and its universal effect on the biblical interpretation given by St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas. We fall into their hermeneutical trap of abstraction which was presumed to transcend their cultural and social milieus in which they lived and thought . This is why our moral disagreement as a Third World Church with the Roman Curia are not easily resolved.

The unresolved disagreement between the ahistorical and spiritualist interpretive interest of the Roman Curia and the socio-political and cultural historical interpretive interest of the Third World Church on the Exodus event highlights the problem as intrinsically a hermeneutical one rather than ethical .¹⁴¹ The purely eschatological and universal application of Scripture on our Catholic moral teaching seem to obliterate the ecclesio-cultural diversity and provide a rational justification for the policies , economy and superiority complex of the West over us as a Third World Church . ¹⁴²

This socially disembodied moral teaching , as shown by Segundo, seems also to obliterate any clear distinction between the manipulative and non-manipulative social relations . As a result, the hermeneutical basis for the moral teaching of the Roman

141 Juan L. Segundo , 1965 , pp.43 to 50 .--

142 see Pope Paul VI's encyclical of 1967 : *Populorum Progressio* # 7 and 39 .

Curia does not take seriously the reality of Western economic exploitation of Third World as a means to attain their own purposes . In addition to this , the hermeneutical key of Cardinal Ratzinger and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith clearly reveals its attempt to align the attitudes , feelings , preferences and spirituality of the Third World with its own neo-colonialist ambition. What counts as valid and authentic interpretation and doctrinal " truth about Jesus Christ , truth about the Church and truth about mankind " ¹⁴³ is what befits their curial bureaucratic rationality and managerial power .

Inculturation hermeneutics serves as an ideological critique and a liberative mechanism that empowers the ordinary Bible readers to openly denounce the pseudonymous form or character role-playing of passivity and submission in the Church as encoded by the theocratic magisterium . This empowerment enables the poor and marginalised to become a hermeneutical community whose communal interest in the Bible is to become moral representatives of their own culture . Inculturation hermeneutics is consciously restoring the social identity of our African traditional culture within which each one of us identifies him/herself as a morally responsible person. This implies that there is no ghostly personality outside one's social embodiment and there is no justification for a universal moral responsibility .¹⁴⁴

If our quest is for a morality that represents our communal aspirations , can we do this within the prevailing hermeneutic that overlooks historical transformation and focus on a self-congratulatory teleology or happiness after death ? Can we allow the idiosyncrasies of the Roman Curia's hegemonic interest to continually displace our-traditional morality which is

¹⁴³ Ratzinger , 1994 , V , 8 .

¹⁴⁴ S. Kasserwas , 1983 , p.6.

constitutive of our distinctiveness and communal coherence in our understanding of moral virtues ? These moral concerns serve as a basis and a challenge for us to discern God's Commandments from our contextual reading of the Bible and our experience of God .

This moral concern also calls for a re-reading or re-appropriation of the Bible today that is different from the fundamentalist doctrinal and mechanical application of the textual meaning . Carlos Mesters clearly demonstrates this re-appropriation of the biblical meaning of a text when he refers to one of his Bible study groups comprising of Afro-American blacks and other farmers . Their contextual theological reflection on one of the Old Testament texts that forbade the eating of pork because it was declared unclean , yielded a conclusion contrary to the prohibition of the eating of pork , (e.g. Deut.14:8 and Lev.11:1-8).

Their socio-historical critical reading of the text revealed God's concern as primarily the preservation of human life from the most probable life danger that could arise from eating pork around that time in Israel . Mesters and his Bible group discovered that eating pork " was prohibited in God's name because people's lives had to be protected " and so they were strongly convinced that through this same text God is ordering them to give sustenance to the life of their children by feeding them with the piglets . Since they know how to take care of pork meat from a life endangering contamination , they are eating pork. ¹⁴⁵

So inculturation hermeneutics has to affirm our contextual socio-historical reading of the text as a cultural community of character in order for us to hear God addressing us within our own concrete struggles of life . The example of Mesters clearly demonstrates the utmost importance of the integration of the biblical text , the community and the real life context . It also attests how through this religious experience " the Word of God becomes a reinforcement , a stimulus for hope and courage. " ¹⁴⁶ It is only then that the local Church as a hermeneutical community moves from biblical abstraction or pan-objectivism to real life and owning their ideological reading of the text .

This contextual reading also proves that the moral authority of Scripture as an interpretation of Israel's religious tradition cannot be accorded a final and definitive status since it directs our attention to the mediated religious tradition of Israel's respect for human life . In line with this , the possibility and the necessity of remoulding the biblical insights as born within the religious tradition of either Israel or/and the apostolic writings of the early Church is crucial in ensuring their rightful place as a Bible Tradition and a source of life-giving power to each local Church .

Stanley Hauerwas argues that since biblical literature attests to the indispensable significance of the " courage of the community to constantly remember and re-interpret its past " , so it is our political task to free the narratives of Scripture from their cultural biases and confinement of their meaning to the authorial intention .¹⁴⁷ It is also on the basis of 'the politics and ethics of remembering ' as a hermeneutical community that we need to liberate Scripture from overly-spiritualised

¹⁴⁶ Ibid , p. 6 .

¹⁴⁷ S. Hauerwas , 1980 , p. 356 .

concepts and the sophisticated hermeneutical skills of the Roman Curia . We need to come to appreciate the moral significance of Scripture as a guide to our contextual perspicuity of a text .

If our inculturation hermeneutics fails to identify the socio-historical inadequacies of a biblical text and re-appropriate its meaning from the neo-colonialist curial theology , the moral authority of Scripture will remain problematic and subservient to the theology of the West . Once we depend on the sole interpreting authority of the Roman Curia on how to use Scripture ethically , we could also fall into the perception of the Bible as a finished and sacrosanct monument and thus fail to let it nurture and reform our social identity as a community and our personal character as members of a Christian community whose memory and witness is formed by Scripture.

The canon is [thus] not an accomplishment but a task , because it is a challenge to be the kind of people capable of recalling stories of our fathers and mothers on which our existence continues to depend . ¹⁴⁶

Inculturation hermeneutics has to serve as a means for us as a local Church to rediscover how Scripture should function to form and guide our cultural self-understanding , habits , language and communal traditions . The moral authority of Scripture in this respect is not to ensure a uniform biblical hermeneutics, but simply provides us with a basis for common religious tradition and allows room for communally reasoned and shared interpretive interests as arising naturally from our diverse historical traditions . This moral authority of Scripture as a cumulative process of classically expressed models for understanding the God-story of continual guidance of Israel and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid , p. 367 .

the Church is not contrary to reason but essential in critically testing our current social and cultural concerns and justifying our goals in terms of our communally shared Christian social ethic Tradition.

I am also convinced of the assertion made by Hauerwas that the moral authority of Scripture , cultural tradition and change are necessary elements of our biblical interpretation . Without the re-interpretation of Scripture and adjustment of our cultural tradition to our historical context , we cannot achieve change and continuity nor discover a new meaning to biblical non-repeatable events . The elements of change and continuity are of critical importance in our re-appropriation of the biblical Tradition and purifying it of its cultural inadequacies if it is to shape our communal theological reflection and ethical character as a Christian community . On the basis of this argument , I assert that moral authority of Scripture is therefore not to be seen as an externally imposed divine command against our will as a community of believers , but it has to be seen as proceeding from a continued common life of the 'People of God' that has been passed on to us through biblical Tradition which constantly calls us to what we have not yet become .

The moral authority of Scripture " must always continue to act as a witness to the truth if it is to be legitimate . [This moral] authority , therefore functions at those points where tradition of a community engages in the discussion necessary to subject its politics to the search of and judgement by the truth".¹⁴⁹ The integrity of this biblical authority is measured on its merits in guiding our theological reflection and cultural identity to learn from what Israel and the early Church found to be true in their formative historical struggle to find new life.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid , p. 361 .

This clearly demonstrates that our moral self-understanding will never reach infinite or infallible interpretability , but it must accommodate the challenge to accept a creative tension between preservation and multifarious re-appropriation as a permanent feature of our biblical ethic . If my argument is integrally sound , then I would find it disempowering to subject my contextual biblical ethic to a doctrinal fundamentalism which overlooks the biblical authority as the testimony of the Church that provides us with the resources necessary for us to be a community sufficiently so truthful that our internal dialogue with one another and experience of God is transmitted from one generation to the next as a living memory.

Our critical reading and theological ethics will remain a hypostatic discourse if it lacks particularity and concrete application to a common life peculiar to a local Church . Our theological perspicacity has also to depend on our historical ability to remember and interpret our cultural traditions as they are mediated through the morality of our community .

The moral significance of Scripture , therefore , lies exactly in its power to help us remember the stories of God for the continual guidance of our community and individual lives . To be a community which lives by remembering is a genuine achievement , as too often we assume that we can ensure our existence only by freeing ourselves from the past. Through Scripture we see that at crucial periods in Israel's and Church's life questions about how to remember the stories were not just questions about 'fact' or accuracy , but about what kind of community we must be to be faithful to Yahweh and his purposes for us . ¹⁵⁰

Our critical reading of the thematic biblical morality as shining through the Decalogue (Deut.6:21-25), the sermon on the Mount (Mat.5:3-12) and admonitions from pastoral epistles is not a treatment of these as sets of cut and dried rules or admonitions that are justifiable in themselves . This biblical ethics does not only make sense when it is remoulded and codified as Catholic doctrine . This biblical ethics simply reveals the spiritual life as growth and development . The personal maturity of every member of the community is possible only when each one of us accepts him/herself as a social being whose identity finds meaning in relation to other Christian commune and our life together as Church. It is within this historical context that our Christian ethical reflection edifies and sanctifies us to live as a Christian community of character , engaged in telling , hearing, remembering and living the God-story more faithfully .

The moral virtues like forgiveness , truthfulness , love (Gal.5:22 - 23 , Eph.4:25-32) and Christian values like marriage, respect for life and justice are transmitted through the linear process of the biblical ethics within which we learn how to be a people morally capable of rendering a character worthy of continuing to carry the story of God as attested by Scripture. Our ethical character as a hermeneutical community of believers depends on a contextual critical reading of the Bible that does not repress or domesticate even the rawness of sub-plots like Ps.137:8-9 , 2 Sam. 21:1-14 and Rom.13:1-7 because their very nature remind us of sin and unrighteousness . Their rawness actually qualifies the God-story as genuinely historical . It is actually this rawness that should encourage us to go on trusting in this rendered character of God .

On the basis of this argument I remain critical to the textual selectivity , fundamentalist arbitrariness and apologetic usage

of Scripture as it transpires in the curial theology of Cardinal J. Ratzinger . This reductionist manner of interpreting Scripture seriously harm its life as a narrative or 'revelatory text'. The polycentric theologies of the third world and the first world are all to be seen as the affirmation of Scripture as a text from which our ecclesial morality is based .

This is a hermeneutical responsibility of each contextual and inculturation hermeneutics to restore the moral authority of Scripture as above our Roman Catholic denominational tradition rather than leaving it subservient to the Occidental ecclesiastical tradition . This simply implies that it is our theological task to reinstate the authority of the Bible and liberate it from our Catholic dogmatism whose imperialist theological discourse seem to hide a profound unwillingness to be subordinate and be guided by it .

5.3. The general conclusion.

The clear reality is that the Occidental type of Christianity has found itself confronted by other cultural and social systems from Asia , Africa and Latin America . The nature of these polycentric and multi-cultural Churches highlights the fact that the West can no longer claim itself as solely embodying the very essentials of Christianity , doctrine , life and piety . The West can also no longer rely on reinforcing a system of cultural uniformity and ecclesiastical denominationalism . The only healthy possibility lying ahead of the whole Catholic Church is one of solidarity and mutual exchange in terms of biblical hermeneutics and local theologies .

The Roman Curia has to distinguish the perception of Europe as the economical centre or the navel of the world from being theologically the interpreter of Scripture . The very fact of

theological solidarities that are taking shape among the Third World Churches clearly declare the Eurocentricity of Christianity as having been counter-productive . These theological solidarities are by their very nature an assertion that we , as polycultural Churches cannot , afford to let neo-colonialist expansion over-run the prospects of contextual and inculturation hermeneutics and our new way of being Church . Since this kind of hermeneutics has enabled us to regain our cultural heritage, assertiveness and empowered us to articulate our strongly imprinted experience of God , it can thus not be over-run .

Inculturation hermeneutics has to stamp out hermeneutical dependency on the uncritically imported European christendom because any failure to do this will be fatal in that Christianity could remain an opium for the poor in a sense that it will be a colonialist oppressive means which constantly befriends the poor to their fate and cultural up-rootedness . In my opinion , Ratzinger's biblical hermeneutics seems to enforce an ecclesiocentrism that affirms structural domination and the economic system of the West . This kind of biblical hermeneutics also seems to desensitise the hearts of those in power , filling the yearnings of the poor with empty words of spiritualist piety and a disempowering legalism , Mt.23:13 - 16 .

The contextual nature of our inculturation hermeneutics has to decode and reform our way of being Church . The credibility of Christianity and Scripture are strongly dependent on a considerable re-orientation of biblical hermeneutics from uniformity to pluriformity . Cultural originality and materialist critical readings of the Bible as crucial dimensions of inculturation hermeneutics are to ensure a glimpse of an apocalyptically proclaimed new heaven and a new earth . In this way inculturation hermeneutics stands as corrective to the Roman curia's claim of itself as avant-garde of the Kingdom .

Chapter 6. HERMENEUTICAL INDIVIDUATION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH .

6.0. Introduction .

In this final chapter I focus on the need for an epistemological break of the infantile bond or need for dependency of 'young missionised churches' to their Holy Mother Church of Rome . In this regard , inculturation hermeneutics thus becomes a rehabilitation sequestered site to the local church that has been traumatised by the cultural invasion which has taken place in our history as the Roman Catholic Church . The epistemological violence that has annihilated our traditional moral values , social identity and religious culture has to be openly denounced by the very process of our contextual re-appropriation of the biblical message . This also necessitates a new conception of theology which is not there to hauntingly legitimise Western theological values and totalitarian influence which have contributed to our anthropological poverty and dehumanisation .

The liberating nature of the Bible needs to be re-affirmed and God be acknowledged as truly identifying and liberating his people from their powerlessness and agony . Without this effort of Inculturation hermeneutics , the kind of biblical hermeneutics that dominates our doctrine , faith , morals , worship and religious symbolism will remain in support of the Western tradition , interest and ideology . It is thus out of necessity that our inculturation hermeneutics should reflect a radical break with the newly produced theology of the Roman Curia which is woven together with the world of capitalism and market system that is oppressive , fatal and mortal to the poor .

This radical epistemological break with the hermeneutical key (dualist tradition , abstract truth concepts and Western superiority complex) is crucial in order to serve as a counter-balance and give a positive affirmation of our inculturation \ contextual hermeneutical key which takes into account our religious , social and political traditions . Though our inculturation may be viewed as a newly discovered area and we find ourselves forging the very beginning of a biblical interpretation or ideological interest that is still in search of its tailor-made method of reading the Bible , it is critically significant to pursue it in order that our understanding of Scripture and our quest for a realised economical and political justice of God's Kingdom may renew our theological reflection and Christian social ethic as a local Church .

Unless this nascent hermeneutical effort is pursued , the abstract God-talk , the occult spiritual escapism and the gap between theory and practise of the Western theological discourse will always impose itself unchallenged over our contextual reading of the Bible . Our ecclesiology will also remain infantile and subordinated . On the basis of this , I strongly argue that our ecclesio-hermeneutical preferential option for the poor will not emerge from the paternalism of the Roman Curia's teaching , but from our hermeneutical individuation .

This hermeneutical individuation has to reflect our direct identification with the figures , events and processes communicated by our contextual reading and liberative experience of God through the Bible as the 'revelatory text' . I would even go further and contend that without rejecting the dichotomous hermeneutical principle of the West (body and soul , Gospel and culture etc.) our inculturation hermeneutics will fail to

rediscover our well-esteemed African traditions . As a result , it could also be incapable to bring about a profound communally owned spirituality , wholeness , integrity and liberty from the tradition-based ecclesiastical legalism .

6.1 The legacy of Eurocentricism and the evolution and revolution of Inculturation hermeneutics .

If we look at the documents of Vat. II , we may have a belief that this Council had already the process of inculturation in mind . When we read documents like Ad Gentes(# 8-11) , Gaudium et Spes(# 26,53-55,91) , Lumen Gentium(# 13,23) , Orientalium Ecclesiarum (# 2,5) , Sacrosanctum Concilium (# 37-40) and Unitatis Reintegratio (# 14,16-18) one gets a general picture of the conditions and criteria of what is understood by the local realisation of the Church . This general picture clearly demonstrates how the agenda of this Ecumenical Council was dominated by the Eurocentric ideology .

This general picture does not imply that the Council's deliberations on the issue of inculturation have not been a fruitful attempt , but my contention and serious concern lie in the fact that local churches of the various cultural contexts are merely to adapt a sociological and cultural form of Christianity that the Roman curia imposes on each one of them through a transcultural biblical hermeneutics . In this respect , each local Church or diocese merely becomes a concentric establishment of Roman Catholicism . The following extract sums this very well ;

A diocese is a portion of the People of God which has been entrusted to the pastoral care of a bishop within the co-operation of the presbyterate , so that , adhering to their pastor and gathered by him in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist , they might constitute a particular Church in which is truly present and active the one , holy , catholic and apostolic Church of Christ .¹⁹⁹

Inculturation hermeneutics does not conform itself to this kind of mere adaptation , but its ecclesio-hermeneutical copernican revolutionary approach aims at bringing about an originality that truly reflects the nature of the Church and its interpretive readings of the Bible as constantly evolving . In this way the Church becomes a concretely historical entity whose ecclesio-hermeneutical exchange affirms each local Church as an active and responsible subject and recipient of the Good News . This ecclesio-hermeneutical exchange as empowered by inculturation hermeneutics is also aimed at counter-balancing a centuries-long process of institutional and administrative centralisation and uniformity of the Roman Catholic Church life .

Eurocentricity of the Roman Curia has to descend in order for the inculturation process of Christianity and Scripture to emerge and ascend . Nowadays we do not need a catholicity and apostolicity of the universal Church whose perennial philosophy, theology , sociological and classicist cultural assumptions linger in a nostalgic affection for an idealised medieval Christendom , but a catholicity and apostolicity that imbues an ecclesio-hermeneutical self-realisation and cultural transformation of each local Church . The liberative potential

¹⁹⁹ Vat.II , 1965, L.G. 23 and C.D. 11 .

of this newly discovered inculturation hermeneutics (as in the early Church practise) has to reflect its dynamism and evolutionary organic existence in the way it fosters respect and dialogue among the particular different cultures .

In this way , inculturation hermeneutics has to capsulize and unfold the spirit of renewal in the Church as conceived by the aggiornamento of the Second Vatican Council . This unfolding has to be taken as further and beyond as abandoning the idea of Eurocentric classicist cultural assumptions and respond anew to the challenge of inculturating Christianity and Scripture according to the particularities of different world cultures . The 'dependency syndrome' that is fostered through patriarchal and institutional structures of the magisterium seems to legitimise its Carolingian superiority complex and feudatory command and also ensures a sense of inferiority complex and submissive dependency of the 'young missionised' Churches of the Third World . Such a dependency cannot be allowed to prevail as if it is an obligatory ideal or a pre-given ecclesio-hermeneutical model .

Inculturation hermeneutics has to engage various cultures into dialogue on their respective interpretive interests within which a biblical text and each local Church illumines and is illumined. On the basis of this , I strongly assert that the hermeneutical achievement of inculturation hermeneutics will be honoured when, for instance , the African interpretive interest or optic lens of reading the Bible comes to be acknowledged as an equal partner within the interpretive unity of the whole Church . It is only when African theology truly reflects an Africanised Christianity that it could - as one among others - authentically be at the service of a common biblical Tradition rather than yielding to

a universal applicability of certain cultural and moral norms that are categorically Western .

In practical terms this means that the accommodating presence and criticality of inculturation hermeneutics should not be subservient or resuscitate a Roman subculture that has been produced to preserve Roman Catholicism . Instead , Inculturation hermeneutics has to allow this subculture to collapse from its own weight of hermeneutical intransigence , ecclesiastical bureaucracy and biblical apologetic . When this subculture has subsided , it becomes more possible to create a platform on which intra-ecclesial intercultural dialogue may emerge.¹⁵⁰ This platform bears new architectural space for hermeneutical liberative insights rather than just conserving and spreading hierarchical truths .

This architectural space for hermeneutical liberative insights also serves as a finite panoramic view from which we carefully reshape our dogmatic teachings . The search for truth within this intermediate (already / not yet eschatology) historical existence as the Roman Catholic Church has to teach us that we can never claim to be in possession of the whole truth nor can we claim to possess the fullness of the means of salvation , Decree on Ecumenism # 3. Since the search for truth is a process that was never accomplished even by the incarnation of Jesus , we need to allow it continue to evolve as long as human beings inhabit the earth , Jn.16:7 , 12 -13 .

So if the divine revelation has not come to culmination and finality in the Word that became flesh (Jn.1:14) and the Spirit

¹⁵⁰ V. Elizondo , 1984 , p. 19 .

of God still leading us to the fullness experience of the God-truth , our dogmatic teachings have also to evolve through crises and discernment rather than holding us back .¹⁵¹ The teaching authority of the Roman curia has to reflect a hermeneutical reconnaissance in its reading of the Bible so that its engagement with the biblical world of the text would in turn facilitate a metanoia experience rather than continually subjugating and spiritually domesticating biblical texts .

As one denominational component part of the Post-Apostolic Church , we as the Roman Catholic Church , are to accept the reality of different cultural identities within the whole Christian family and the linear challenge of keeping a healthy balance between fidelity to our Christian biblical Tradition and its creative continuity . It is in this way that we could ensure newness and an enriched deeper meaning of this biblical God-story . In line with this , we could say that the Christian biblical God-story can not be seen as a well-defined deposit of revelation whose meaning is only decoded in accordance with the intention or the interpretive interest of the 'reliable witnesses' , Mk.4:34 .

The God-story evolves to reveal the divine salvation plan that constantly calls us to conversion . So the divine plan of God as reflected in the Christian biblical Tradition is not definitively inscribed or a crystallised memoirs and teachings that Jesus imparted but a contextual apostolic witness that forms part of a cumulative theological reflection and witness within this linear divine revelation . The crystallisation and Eurocentric tendency of the Roman curia has to come to terms with the cumulative and linear nature of the God-story and also develop a respect for other interpretive interests .

¹⁵¹ J.L. Segundo , 1992 , Chapter 6.

The Curia has to unmask its fear of letting-go of Scripture as a limitless linear witness and embrace other interpretive readings as collaborative partners in search for the truthful solutions to the burning problems of our epochal period . The poor and the marginalised have to ensure this through their struggle for recognition and as another way they express their resolution in opting for the Church . If the uniformal hermeneutics of the Roman curia remains uncontested , the symbiotic fusion of the text and our particular cultural world will not have far reaching effects . We need theologies at the service of one biblical Tradition rather than one universal dogmatic tradition which partly render our theology and spirituality somewhat backward , sterile and apologetic .

6.2. Different theologies at the service of one biblical Tradition .

The tendency of the Roman Curia of marginalising the cultures of the Third World is to be brought up in the open if at all a fresh vision of what it means to be a Christian and to be a Christian Church in our Post-Christian setting . We need a hermeneutic that does not resolve hermeneutical disputes by merely massaging them into docility or dissolve them into factionalism within which hermeneutical anomie becomes a perpetual existential reality , but a hermeneutics that qualifies Christian faith as embodying Good News and speaking truth in love (Eph.4:15) .¹⁵²

Inculturation hermeneutics has to serve as a critique of a Eurocentric religious truth claim that interprets Scripture in a way that affirms an individualistic legacy that masks and

¹⁵² V.J. Brownson , 1994 , p. 479 .

conceals the egoistic interpretive interest of the Holy Mother Church of Rome . Inculturation as a critical tool through which we address the problems and challenges of plurality in the arena of biblical interpretation , thus helps us to evaluate how we and others have mistakenly read the Bible and so try to find a new way of constructively reconciling our differences in interpretation and come to a healthy hermeneutical diversity as a universal Church .

The universal frame of reference or the interpretive unity is necessary within the universal Church of our post-modern age since our contrasting and conflicting interpretations as arising from different accents , perspective and social concerns face a serious possibility of some readers lapsing into religious fatalism and some would read the Bible in a way that justifies their emotional excrescent interests . Aware of these side effects of post-modern plurality , inculturation hermeneutics has also to guard against an emphasis on the contingent , the particularity and contextuality which may finally make it increasingly difficult for the local Churches to find a bases for intra-ecclesial intercultural exchange .

So even if our post-modern reading of the Bible may be pervasively polycentric and polycultural , we still need theologies that are self-critical and a constructive biblical hermeneutics that serves our Christian biblical Tradition . The diversity in interpretation and the dignity of theology in each local Church have to reflect a sincere search for communion within the universal Church . This implies a willingness of local Churches to identify the basic assumptions of their own hermeneutical models and how they should work in their respective social contexts . This is necessary in order for us to feel more assertive in the way we read and interpret the Bible .

This raises the basic question : how can we approach biblical interpretation so as to allow for a plurality of readings of the text, while at the same time allowing the text to exercise its controlling and shaping influence on each particular reading ? How can we acknowledge our particularity - and the limits that particularity entails - and yet seek to speak the truth , not just for ourselves but for the world as well ? Every interpretative reading is an attempt to project a symbolic world in which the world of the text and the world of the reader are brought together in such a way that each mutually informs the other . Where there is diversity of readers , there will always be plurality of interpretations ; each reader brings his or her own distinctive 'world' into a conversation with the text . But these 'worlds' in which text and context are brought are not totally dissimilar . Every interpretation must do justice way , to the same text . Moreover , every interpretation must connect, in some way , with our basic humanity Diversity in interpretation is healthy when it emerges from our human diversity , diversity in interpretation is deficient when it distorts our common text , or fails to connect with our common humanity . ¹⁵³

Our contextual and particular reading has to be centrifugal and co-exist with other diverse hermeneutical responses . I strongly believe that the teaching and sanctifying role of the Roman curia has to acknowledge this co-existence , since it bears more prospects than the suppression of diversity and particularity it seems to be presently embarking on .¹⁵⁴ The multi-cultural presence of God can never be exhausted by one culture no matter how

¹⁵³ Ibid ,pp. 482 - 483 .

¹⁵⁴ Ratzinger , 1985 , x :2.

triumphalistic and economically dynamic . But this divine presence of God through one common biblical Tradition is enriched and deepened by a creative intra-ecclesial interchange among diverse interlocutors or readers from different cultural and social settings .

It is from this diverse cultural communion that our doxological praise of God truly becomes a hymn of praise and a sincere response to a call to repentance . On the basis of this assertion , I think Inculturation hermeneutics would facilitate the emergence of true catholicity and apostolicity of each local Church and also contribute in bringing about a universal Church that is rich in cultural diversity rather than the obliteration of each culture under the banner of the Roman curia of 'conquering cultures for Christ' .

Inculturation hermeneutics as an avante-garde of distinctive cultural identity of each local Church has also to foster a kind of communion or 'hermeneutic of coherence' that makes it possible for each respectful voice to speak the truth in love ¹⁵⁵ rather than one voice claiming paramount authority over other voices and even silencing them before any reverberation .¹⁵⁶ Such orthodoxy can never be justified as the protection or be seen as symbolic of the preferential option for the poor while the poor themselves are hermeneutically silent and involuntarily silenced .

The biblical hermeneutics from which our Roman Catholic dogmatic teaching is produced has thus remained a propitious discipline within which some concessions have to be made , especially in

¹⁵⁵ Brownson , 1994 , p. 487.

¹⁵⁶ H.Cox , 1989 .

reference to issues pertaining to infallibility , inerrancy , inspiration and a kind of meteorite dogmatic truths that emerge from biblical allusions made in support of this approach . These concessions have to be made in order to give room to the reality of the Bible as an incomplete and transitory educational process and prophetic witness about the concern of God and the destiny of our existence .

The acknowledgment of this incomplete and transitory nature of the Bible also allows a reasonable degree of hermeneutical reformulation of meteorite dogmatic truths like grace , church , sin , judgement , heaven and hell .¹⁵⁷ If the Bible is a true portrayal through which God is leading humanity forward through trial and error as reflected throughout the work of the Bible writers , the same has to apply to the biblical theology of the Roman Curia .

If the Bible itself is a gradual narration of an evolving divine revelation which bears elements of continuity and discontinuity (especially the anachronism found in texts like 1 Cor. 7:29-31 , 1 Thes.4:15-17, and Mk.13:20) , our inculturation hermeneutics has thus to transcend such mere facts and search for a deeper truth that is being transmitted through such biblical texts . This search for truth through our socio-cultural reading cannot and should not be utterly subjected to the academic exigency and transcendental biblical hermeneutics of the Roman curia which seems to absolutise and dogmatise the evolving biblical Tradition.

¹⁵⁷ Segundo , 1992 , pp. 64 - 80 .

So , since our socio-cultural reading of the Bible often triggers critical confrontation and challenge between the Western philosophical and theological tradition that has no sympathy for particularity and our inculturation hermeneutics , the need for us to accept theological reflection as polycentric is unavoidable. But so critical is also a need for us to allow for multi-cultural co-existence of various biblical interpretive interests or contextual theologies and 'ecclesiogenesis'.¹⁵⁸ It is only when this co-existence of various contextual theologies has begun to germinate that we can appropriately speak of the dialogue between and among culturally different local Churches and the common option for the Reign of God that is founded in Jesus Christ who liberates and unites all humanity .

6.3. Conclusion .

As the profound meaning of the biblical message of each text transcends its own cultural milieu , so is Christianity to be seen as not the property of one imperialist culture . It is my expressed wish and conviction that once we have established this fact , then the Roman curia will enter into a process of multi-cultural reciprocity and recognise other polycentric cultural biblical reading of other continents . A hermeneutical acceptance of the Western culture and the Christian Biblical Tradition as two separate entities will hopefully create an opportunity for profound conversion of the whole Western Church and also allow more room for the Third World Churches to be truly a 'People of God' and their theologies in turn become a source of revelation. An honest acceptance of this challenge will in turn give birth to the spirit of fraternity between the Northern and Southern hemispheres . Finally , Christianity's theological reflection will offer concretely redemptive answers to the hopes and aspirations of women , men and children of our world .

¹⁵⁸ L. Boff, 1986 .

Appendix

INSTRUCTION ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE "THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION"

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of freedom and a force for liberation. In recent years this essential truth has become the object of reflection for theologians, with a new kind of attention which is itself full of promise.

Liberation is first and foremost liberation from the radical slavery of sin. Its end and its goal is the freedom of the children of God, which is the gift of grace. As a logical consequence, it calls for freedom from many different kinds of slavery in the cultural, economic, social and political spheres, all of which derive ultimately from sin and so often prevent people from living in a manner befitting their dignity. To discern clearly what is fundamental to this issue and what is a byproduct of it is an indispensable condition for any theological reflection on liberation.

Faced with the urgency of certain problems, some are tempted to emphasize, unilaterally, the liberation from servitude of an earthly and temporal kind. They do so in such a way that they seem to put liberation from sin in second place and so fail to give it the primary importance it is due. Thus, their very presentation of the problems is confused and ambiguous. Others, in an effort to learn more precisely what are the causes of the slavery which they want to end, make use of different concepts without sufficient critical caution. It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to purify these borrowed concepts of an ideological inspiration which is incompatible with Christian faith and the ethical requirements which flow from it.

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does not intend to deal here with the vast theme of Christian freedom and liberation in its own right. This it intends to do in a subsequent document which will detail in a positive fashion the great richness of this theme for the doctrine and life of the church.

The present instruction has a much more limited and precise purpose: to draw the attention of pastors, theologians and all the faithful to the deviations and risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought.

This warning should in no way be interpreted as a disavowal of all those who want to respond generously and with an authentic evangelical spirit to the "preferential option for the poor." It should not at all serve as an excuse for those who maintain an attitude of neutrality and indifference in the face of the tragic and pressing problems of human misery and injustice. It is, on the contrary, dictated by the certitude that the serious ideological deviations which it points out tend inevitably to betray the cause of the poor. More than ever, it is important that numerous

Christians, whose faith is clear and who are committed to live the Christian life in its fullness, become involved in the struggle for justice, freedom and human dignity because of their love for their disinherited, oppressed and persecuted brothers and sisters. More than ever, the church intends to condemn abuses, injustices and attacks against freedom, wherever they occur and whoever commits them. She intends to struggle, by her own means, for the defense and advancement of the rights of mankind, especially of the poor.

I. An Aspiration

1. The powerful and almost irresistible aspiration that people have for liberation constitutes one of the principal signs of the times which the church has to examine and interpret in the light of the Gospel.¹ This major phenomenon of our time is universally widespread, though it takes on different forms and exists in different degrees according to the particular people involved. It is, above all, among those people who bear the burdens of misery and in the heart of the disinherited classes that this aspiration expresses itself with the greatest force.

2. This yearning shows the authentic, if obscure, perception of the dignity of the human person, created "in the image and likeness of God" (Gn. 1:26-27), ridiculed and scorned in the midst of a variety of different oppressions: cultural, political, racial, social and economic, often in conjunction with one another.

3. In revealing to them their vocation as children of God, the Gospel has elicited in the hearts of mankind a demand and a positive will for a peaceful and just fraternal life in which everyone will find respect and the conditions for spiritual as well as material development. This requirement is no doubt at the very basis of the aspiration we are talking about here.

4. Consequently mankind will no longer passively submit to crushing poverty with its effects of death, disease and decline. He resents this misery as an intolerable violation of his native dignity. Many factors, and among them certainly the leaven of the Gospel, have contributed to an awakening of the consciousness of the oppressed.

5. It is widely known even in still illiterate sections of the world that, thanks to the amazing advances in science and technology, mankind, still growing in numbers, is capable of assuring each human being the minimum of goods required by his dignity as a person.

6. The scandal of the shocking inequality between the rich and the poor—whether between rich and poor countries, or between social classes in a single nation—is no longer tolerated. On one hand, people have attained an unheard-of abundance which is given to waste, while on the other hand so many live in such poverty, deprived of the basic necessities, that one is hardly able even to count the victims of malnutrition.

7. The lack of equity and of a sense of solidarity in international transactions works to the advantage of the industrialized nations so that the gulf between the

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rich and the poor is ever widening. Hence derives the feeling of frustration among Third World countries and the accusations of exploitation and economic colonialism brought against the industrialized nations.

8. The memory of crimes of a certain type of colonialism and of its effects often aggravates these injuries and wounds.

9. The Apostolic See, in accord with the Second Vatican Council and together with the episcopal conferences, has not ceased to denounce the scandal involved in the gigantic arms race which, in addition to the threat which it poses to peace, squanders amounts of money so large that even a fraction of it would be sufficient to respond to the needs of those people who want for the basic essentials of life.

II. Expressions of This Aspiration

1. The yearning for justice and for the effective recognition of the dignity of every human being needs, like every deep aspiration, to be clarified and guided.

2. In effect, a discernment process is necessary which takes into account both the theoretical and the practical manifestations of this aspiration. For there are many political and social movements which present themselves as authentic spokesmen for the aspiration of the poor and claim to be able, though by recourse to violent means, to bring about the radical changes which will put an end to the oppression and misery of people.

3. So the aspiration for justice often finds itself the captive of ideologies which hide or pervert its meaning and which propose to people struggling for their liberation goals which are contrary to the true purpose of human life. They propose ways of action which imply the systematic recourse to violence, contrary to any ethic which is respectful of persons.

4. The interpretation of the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel requires, then, that we examine the meaning of this deep yearning of people for justice, but also that we study with critical discernment the theoretical and practical expressions which this aspiration has taken on.

III. Liberation, A Christian Theme

1. Taken by itself, the desire for liberation finds a strong and fraternal echo in the heart and spirit of Christians.

2. Thus, in accord with this aspiration, the theological and pastoral movement known as "liberation theology" was born, first in the countries of Latin America, which are marked by the religious and cultural heritage of Christianity, and then in other countries of the Third World, as well as in certain circles in the industrialized countries.

3. The expression "theology of liberation" refers first of all to a special concern for the poor and the victims of oppression, which in turn begets a commitment to justice. Starting with this approach, we can distinguish several often contradictory

ways of understanding the Christian meaning of poverty and the type of commitment to justice which it requires. As with all movements of ideas, the "theologies of liberation" present diverse theological positions. Their doctrinal frontiers are badly defined.

4. The aspiration for liberation, as the term suggests, repeats a theme which is fundamental to the Old and New Testaments. In itself, the expression "theology of liberation" is a thoroughly valid term: It designates a theological reflection centered on the biblical theme of liberation and freedom, and on the urgency of its practical realization.

The meeting, then, of the aspiration for liberation and the theologies of liberation is not one of mere chance. The significance of this encounter between the two can be understood only in light of the specific message of revelation, authentically interpreted by the magisterium of the church.²

IV. Biblical Foundations

1. Thus a theology of liberation correctly understood constitutes an invitation to theologians to deepen certain essential biblical themes with a concern for the grave and urgent questions which the contemporary yearning for liberation and those movements which more or less faithfully echo it pose for the church. We dare not forget for a single instant the situations of acute distress which issue such a dramatic call to theologians.

2. The radical experience of Christian liberty³ is our first point of reference. Christ, our liberator, has freed us from sin and from slavery to the law and to the flesh, which is the mark of the condition of sinful mankind. Thus it is the new life of grace, fruit of justification, which makes us free. This means that the most radical form of slavery is slavery to sin. Other forms of slavery find their deepest root in slavery to sin. That is why freedom in the full Christian sense, characterized by the life in the Spirit, cannot be confused with a license to give in to the desires of the flesh. Freedom is a new life in love.

3. The "theologies of liberation" make wide use of readings from the Book of Exodus. The exodus, in fact, is the fundamental event in the formation of the chosen people. It represents freedom from foreign domination and from slavery. One will note that the specific significance of the event comes from its purpose, for this liberation is ordered to the foundation of the people of God and the covenant cult celebrated on Mt. Sinai.⁴ That is why the liberation of the exodus cannot be reduced to a liberation which is principally or exclusively political in nature. Moreover, it is significant that the term freedom is often replaced in scripture by the very closely related term *redemption*.

4. The foundational episode of the Exodus will never be effaced from the memory of Israel. Reference is made to it when, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon, the Jewish people lived in the hope of a new liberation and, beyond that, awaited a definitive liberation. In this experience God is recognized as

the liberator. He will enter into a new covenant with his people. It will be marked by the gift of his Spirit and the conversion of hearts.⁵

5. The anxieties and multiple sufferings sustained by those who are faithful to the God of the covenant provide the theme of several Psalms: laments, appeals for help and thanksgivings all make mention of religious salvation and liberation. In this context, suffering is not purely and simply equated with the social condition of poverty or with the condition of the one who is undergoing political oppression. It also includes the hostility of one's enemies, injustice, failure and death. The Psalms call us back to an essential religious experience: It is from God alone that one can expect salvation and healing. God, and not man, has the power to change the situations of suffering. Thus the "poor of the Lord" live in a total and confident reliance upon the loving providence of God.⁶ Moreover, throughout the whole crossing of the desert, the Lord did not fail to provide for the spiritual liberation and purification of his people.

6. In the Old Testament, the prophets after Amos keep affirming with particular vigor the requirements of justice and solidarity and the need to pronounce a very severe judgment on the rich who oppress the poor. They come to the defense of the widow and the orphan. They threaten the powerful: The accumulation of evils can only lead to terrible punishments.

Faithfulness to the covenant cannot be conceived of without the practice of justice. Justice as regards God and justice as regards mankind are inseparable. God is the defender and the liberator of the poor.

7. These requirements are found once again in the New Testament. They are even more radicalized as can be shown in the discourse on the Beatitudes. Conversion and renewal have to occur in the depths of the heart.

8. Already proclaimed in the Old Testament, the commandment of fraternal love extended to all mankind thus provides the supreme rule of social life.⁷ There are no discriminations or limitations which can counter the recognition of everyone as neighbor.⁸

9. Poverty for the sake of the kingdom is praised. And in the figure of the poor, we are led to recognize the mysterious presence of the Son of Man, who became poor himself for love of us.⁹ This is the foundation of the inexhaustible words of Jesus on the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. Our Lord is one with all in distress; every distress is marked by his presence.

10. At the same time, the requirements of justice and mercy, already proclaimed in the Old Testament, are deepened to assume a new significance in the New Testament. Those who suffer or who are persecuted are identified with Christ.¹⁰ The perfection that Jesus demands of his disciples (Mt. 5:18) consists in the obligation to be merciful "as your heavenly Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36).

11. It is in light of the Christian vocation to fraternal love and mercy that the rich are severely reminded of their duty.¹¹ St. Paul, faced with the disorders of the church of Corinth, forcefully emphasizes the bond which exists between participation in the sacrament of love and sharing with the brother in need.¹²

12. New Testament revelation teaches us that sin is the greatest evil, since it strikes man in the heart of his personality. The first liberation, to which all others must make reference, is that from sin.

13. Unquestionably, it is to stress the radical character of the deliverance brought by Christ and offered to all, be they politically free or slaves, that the New Testament does not require some change in the political or social condition as a prerequisite for entrance into this freedom. However, the Letter to Philemon shows that the new freedom procured by the grace of Christ should necessarily have effects on the social level.

14. Consequently, the full ambit of sin, whose first effect is to introduce disorder into the relationship between God and man, cannot be restricted to "social sin." The truth is that only a correct doctrine of sin will permit us to insist on the gravity of its social effects.

15. Nor can one localize evil principally or uniquely in bad social, political or economic "structures" as though all other evils came from them so that the creation of the "new man" would depend on the establishment of different economic and socio-political structures. To be sure, there are structures which are evil and which cause evil and which we must have the courage to change. Structures, whether they are good or bad, are the result of man's actions and so are consequences more than causes. The root of evil, then, lies in free and responsible persons who have to be converted by the grace of Jesus Christ in order to live and act as new creatures in the love of neighbor and in the effective search for justice, self-control and the exercise of virtue.¹³

To demand first of all a radical revolution in social relations and then to criticize the search for personal perfection is to set out on a road which leads to the denial of the meaning of the person and his transcendence, and to destroy ethics and its foundation, which is the absolute character of the distinction between good and evil. Moreover, since charity is the principle of authentic perfection, that perfection cannot be conceived without an openness to others and a spirit of service.

V. The Voice of The Magisterium

1. In order to answer the challenge leveled at our times by oppression and hunger, the church's magisterium has frequently expressed her desire to awaken Christian consciences to a sense of justice, social responsibility and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, and to highlight the present urgency of the doctrine and imperatives contained in Revelation.

2. We would like to mention some of these interventions here: the papal documents *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris*, *Populorum Progressio* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. We should likewise mention the letter to Cardinal Roy, *Octogesima Adveniens*.

3. The Second Vatican Council in turn confronted the questions of justice and liberty in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.

4. On a number of occasions the Holy Father has emphasized these themes, in particular in the encyclicals *Redemptor Hominis*, *Dives in Misericordia* and *Laborem Exercens*. These numerous addresses recall the doctrine of the rights of man and touch directly on the problems of the liberation of the human person in the face of the diverse kinds of oppression of which he is the victim. It is especially important to mention in this connection the address given before the 26th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, Oct. 2, 1979.¹⁴ On Jan. 28 of that same year, while opening the Third Conference of CELAM in Puebla, John Paul II affirmed that the complete truth about man is the basis for any real liberation.¹⁵ This text is a document which bears directly upon the theology of liberation.

5. Twice the Synod of Bishops treated subjects which are directly related to a Christian conception of liberation: in 1971, justice in the world, and in 1974, the relationship between freedom from oppression and full freedom, or the salvation of mankind. The work of the synods of 1971 and 1974 led Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to clarify the connection between evangelization and human liberation or advancement.¹⁶

6. The concern of the church for liberation and for human advancement was also expressed in the establishment of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace.

7. Numerous national episcopal conferences have joined the Holy See in recalling the urgency of authentic human liberation and the routes by which to achieve it. In this context, special mention should be made of the documents of the general conferences of the Latin American episcopate at Medellin in 1968 and at Puebla in 1979.

Paul VI was present at the Medellin conference and John Paul II was at Puebla. Both dealt with the themes of conversion and liberation.

8. Following Paul VI, who had insisted on the distinctive character of the gospel message,¹⁷ a character which is of divine origin, John Paul II, in his address at Puebla, recalled the three pillars upon which any authentic theology of liberation will rest: truth about Jesus Christ, truth about the church and truth about mankind.¹⁸

VI. A New Interpretation of Christianity

1. It is impossible to overlook the immense amount of selfless work done by Christians, pastors, priests, religious or laypersons, who, driven by a love for their brothers and sisters living in inhuman conditions, have endeavored to bring help and comfort to countless people in the distress brought about by poverty. Among these, some have tried to find the most effective means to put a quick end to the intolerable situation.

2. The zeal and the compassion which should dwell in the hearts of all pastors nevertheless run the risk of being led astray and diverted to works which are just as damaging to man and his dignity as is the poverty which is being fought, if one is not sufficiently attentive to certain temptations.

3. The feeling of anguish at the urgency of the problems cannot make us lose sight of what is essential nor forget the reply of Jesus to the Tempter. "It is not on bread alone that man lives, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4; cf. Dt. 8:3).

Faced with the urgency of sharing bread, some are tempted to put evangelization into parentheses, as it were, and postpone it until tomorrow: first the bread, then the word of the Lord. It is a fatal error to separate these two and even worse to oppose the one to the other. In fact, the Christian perspective naturally shows they have a great deal to do with one another.¹⁹

4. To some it even seems that the necessary struggle for human justice and freedom in the economic and political sense constitutes the whole essence of salvation. For them, the Gospel is reduced to a purely earthly gospel.

5. The different theologies of liberation are situated between the preferential option for the poor forcefully reaffirmed without ambiguity after Medellin at the conference of Puebla²⁰ on the one hand, and the temptation to reduce the Gospel to an earthly gospel on the other.

6. We should recall that the preferential option described at Puebla is twofold: for the poor and for the young.²¹ It is significant that the option for the young has in general been passed over in total silence.

7. We noted above (cf. 3) that an authentic theology of liberation will be one which is rooted in the word of God, correctly interpreted.

8. But from a descriptive standpoint, it helps to speak of theologies of liberation, since the expression embraces a number of theological positions or even sometimes ideological ones, which are not simply different but more often incompatible with one another.

9. In this present document, we will only be discussing developments of that current of thought which, under the name "theology of liberation," proposes a novel interpretation of both the content of faith and of Christian existence which seriously departs from the faith of the church and, in fact, actually constitutes a practical negation.

10. Concepts uncritically borrowed from Marxist ideology and recourse to theses of a biblical hermeneutic marked by rationalism are at the basis of the new interpretation which is corrupting whatever was authentic in the general initial commitment on behalf of the poor.

VII. Marxist Analysis

1. Impatience and a desire for results has led certain Christians, despairing of every other method, to turn to what they call "Marxist analysis."

2. Their reasoning is this: An intolerable and explosive situation requires effective action which cannot be put off. Effective action presupposes a scientific analysis of the structural causes of poverty. Marxism now provides us with the means to

make such an analysis, they say. Then one simply has to apply the analysis to the Third-World situation, especially in Latin America.

3. It is clear that scientific knowledge of the situation and of the possible strategies for the transformation of society is a presupposition for any plan capable of attaining the ends proposed. It is also a proof of the seriousness of the effort.

4. But the term *scientific* exerts an almost mythical fascination even though everything called "scientific" is not necessarily scientific at all. That is why the borrowing of a method of approach to reality should be preceded by a careful epistemological critique. This preliminary critical study is missing from more than one "theology of liberation."

5. In the human and social sciences it is well to be aware above all of the plurality of methods and viewpoints, each of which reveals only one aspect of reality, which is so complex that it defies simple and univocal explanation.

6. In the case of Marxism, in the particular sense given to it in this context, a preliminary critique is all the more necessary since the thought of Marx is such a global vision of reality that all data received from observation and analysis are brought together in a philosophical and ideological structure, which predetermines the significance and importance to be attached to them. The ideological principles come prior to the study of the social reality and are presupposed in it. Thus no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. If one tries to take only one part, say, the analysis, one ends up having to accept the entire ideology. That is why it is not uncommon for the ideological aspect to be predominant among the things which the "theologians of liberation" borrow from Marxist authors.

7. The warning of Paul VI remains fully valid today: Marxism as it is actually lived out poses many distinct aspects and questions for Christians to reflect upon and act on. However, it would be "illusory and dangerous to ignore the intimate bond which radically unites them, and to accept elements of the Marxist analysis without recognizing its connections with the ideology, or to enter into the practice of class struggle and of its Marxist interpretation while failing to see the kind of totalitarian society to which this process slowly leads."²²

8. It is true that Marxist thought ever since its origins, and even more so lately, has become divided and has given birth to various currents which diverge significantly from one another. To the extent that they remain fully Marxist, these currents continue to be based on certain fundamental tenets which are not compatible with the Christian conception of humanity and society. In this context certain formulas are not neutral, but keep the meaning they had in the original Marxist doctrine. This is the case with the "class struggle." This expression remains pregnant with the interpretation that Marx gave it, so it cannot be taken as the equivalent of "severe social conflict," in an empirical sense. Those who use similar formulas, while claiming to keep only certain elements of the Marxist analysis and yet to reject this analysis taken as a whole, maintain at the very least a serious confusion in the minds of their readers.

9. Let us recall the fact that atheism and the denial of the human person, his liberty and his rights, are at the core of Marxist theory. This theory, then, contains errors which directly threaten the truths of the faith regarding the eternal destiny of individual persons. Moreover, to attempt to integrate into theology an analysis whose criterion of interpretation depends on this atheistic conception is to involve oneself in terrible contradictions. What is more, this misunderstanding of the spiritual nature of the person leads to a total subordination of the person to the collectivity and thus to the denial of the principles of a social and political life which is in keeping with human dignity.

10. A critical examination of the analytical methods borrowed from other disciplines must be carried out in a special way by theologians. It is the light of faith which provides theology with its principles. That is why the use of philosophical positions or of human sciences by the theologian has a value which might be called instrumental, but yet must undergo a critical study from a theological perspective. In other words, the ultimate and decisive criterion for truth can only be a criterion which is itself theological. It is only in the light of faith and what faith teaches us about the truth of man and the ultimate meaning of his destiny, that one can judge the validity or degree of validity of what other disciplines propose, often rather conjecturally, as being the truth about man, his history and his destiny.

11. When modes of interpretation are applied to the economic, social and political reality of today, which are themselves borrowed from Marxist thought, they can give the initial impression of a certain plausibility to the degree that the present-day situation in certain countries is similar to what Marx described and interpreted in the middle of the last century. On the basis of these similarities, certain simplifications are made which, abstracting from specific essential factors, prevent any really rigorous examination of the causes of poverty and prolong the confusion.

12. In certain parts of Latin America the seizure of the vast majority of the wealth by an oligarchy of owners bereft of social consciousness, the practical absence or the shortcomings of a rule of law, military dictators making a mockery of elementary human rights, the corruption of certain powerful officials, the savage practices of some foreign capital interests constitute factors which nourish a passion for revolt among those who thus consider themselves the powerless victims of a new colonialism in the technological, financial, monetary or economic order. The recognition of injustice is accompanied by a pathos which borrows its language from Marxism, wrongly presented as though it were scientific language.

13. The first condition for any analysis is total openness to the reality to be described. That is why a critical consciousness has to accompany the use of any working hypotheses that are being adopted. One has to realize that these hypotheses correspond to a particular viewpoint which will inevitably highlight certain aspects of the reality while leaving others in the shade. This limitation, which derives from the nature of human science, is ignored by those who, under the guise

of hypotheses recognized as such, have recourse to such an all-embracing conception of reality as the thought of Karl Marx.

VIII. Subversion of The Meaning of Truth and Violence

1. This all-embracing conception thus imposes its logic and leads the "theologies of liberation" to accept a series of positions which are incompatible with the Christian vision of humanity. In fact, the ideological core borrowed from Marxism which we are referring to exercises the function of a determining principle. It has this role in virtue of its being described as "scientific," that is to say, true of necessity.

In this core we can distinguish several components.

2. According to the logic of Marxist thought, the "analysis" is inseparable from the praxis and from the conception of history to which this praxis is linked. The analysis is for the Marxist an instrument of criticism, and criticism is only one stage in the revolutionary struggle. This struggle is that of the proletarian class, invested with its mission in history.

3. Consequently, for the Marxist, only those who engage in the struggle can work out the analysis correctly.

4. The only true consciousness, then, is the partisan consciousness.

It is clear that the concept of truth itself is in question here, and it is totally subverted: There is no truth, they pretend, except in and through the partisan praxis.

5. For the Marxist, the praxis and the truth that comes from it are partisan praxis and truth because the fundamental structure of history is characterized by class struggle. There follows, then, the objective necessity to enter into the class struggle, which is the dialectical opposite of the relationship of exploitation, which is being condemned. For the Marxist, the truth is a truth of class: There is no truth but the truth in the struggle of the revolutionary class.

6. The fundamental law of history, which is the law of the class struggle, implies that society is founded on violence. To the violence which constitutes the relationship of the domination of the rich over the poor, there corresponds the counterviolence of the revolution, by means of which this domination will be reversed.

7. The class struggle is presented as an objective, necessary law. Upon entering this process on behalf of the oppressed, one "makes" truth, one acts "scientifically." Consequently, the conception of the truth goes hand in hand with the affirmation of necessary violence, and so, of a political amorality. Within this perspective, any reference to ethical requirements calling for courageous and radical institutional and structural reforms makes no sense.

8. The fundamental law of class struggle has a global and universal character. It is reflected in all the spheres of existence: religious, ethical, cultural and institutional. As far as this law is concerned, one of these spheres is autonomous. In each of them this law constitutes the determining element.

9. In particular, the very nature of ethics is radically called into question because of the borrowing of these theses from Marxism. In fact, it is the transcendent character of the distinction between good and evil, the principle of morality, which is implicitly denied in the perspective of the class struggle.

IX. The Theological Application of This Core

1. The positions here in question are often brought out explicitly in certain of the writings of "theologians of liberation." In others, they follow logically from their premises. In addition, they are presupposed in certain liturgical practices, as for example a "eucharist" transformed into a celebration of the people in struggle, even though the persons who participate in these practices may not be fully conscious of it. We are facing, therefore, a real system, even if some hesitate to follow the logic to its conclusion. As such, this system is a perversion of the Christian message as God entrusted it to his church. This message in its entirety finds itself then called into question by the "theologies of liberation."

2. It is not the fact of social stratification with all its inequity and injustice, but the theory of class struggle as the fundamental law of history which has been accepted by these "theologies of liberation" as a principle. The conclusion is drawn that the class struggle thus understood divides the church herself, and that in light of this struggle even ecclesial realities must be judged.

The claim is even made that it would maintain an illusion with bad faith to propose that love in its universality can conquer what is the primary structural law of capitalism.

3. According to this conception, the class struggle is the driving force of history. History thus becomes a central notion. It will be affirmed that God himself makes history. It will be added that there is only one history, one in which the distinction between the history of salvation and profane history is no longer necessary. To maintain the distinction would be to fall into "dualism." Affirmations such as these reflect historicist immanentism. Thus there is a tendency to identify the kingdom of God and its growth with the human liberation movement and to make history itself the subject of its own development, as a process of the self-redemption of man by means of the class struggle.

This identification is in opposition to the faith of the church as it has been reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council.²³

4. Along these lines, some go so far as to identify God himself with history and to define faith as "fidelity to history," which means adhering to a political policy which is suited to the growth of humanity, conceived of as a purely temporal messianism.

5. As a consequence, faith, hope and charity are given a new content: They become "fidelity to history," "confidence in the future" and "option for the poor." This is tantamount to saying they have been emptied of their theological reality.

6. A radical politicization of faith's affirmations and of theological judgments follows inevitably from this new conception. The question no longer has to do with simply drawing attention to the consequences and political implications of the truths of faith, which are respected beforehand for their transcendent value. In this new system every affirmation of faith or of theology is subordinated to a political criterion which in turn depends on the class struggle, the driving force of history.

7. As a result, participation in the class struggle is presented as a requirement of charity itself. The desire to love everyone here and now, despite his class, and to go out to meet him with the non-violent means of dialogue and persuasion, is denounced as counterproductive and opposed to love.

If one holds that a person should not be the object of hate, it is claimed nevertheless that if he belongs to the objective class of the rich he is primarily a class enemy to be fought. Thus the universality of love of neighbor and brotherhood become an eschatological principle, which will only have meaning for the "new man" who arises out of the victorious revolution.

8. As far as the church is concerned, this system would see her only as a reality interior to history, herself subject to those laws which are supposed to govern the development of history in its immanence. The church, the gift of God and mystery of faith, is emptied of any specific reality by this reductionism. At the same time it is disputed that the participation of Christians who belong to opposing classes at the same eucharistic table still makes any sense.

9. In its positive meaning the "church of the poor" signifies the preference given to the poor, without exclusion, whatever the form of their poverty, because they are preferred by God. The expression also refers to the church of our time, as communion and institution and on the part of her members, becoming more fully conscious of the requirement of evangelical poverty.

10. But the "theologies of liberation," which deserve credit for restoring to a place of honor the great texts of the prophets and of the Gospel in defense of the poor, go on to a disastrous confusion between the poor of the scripture and the proletariat of Marx. In this way they pervert the Christian meaning of the poor, and they transform the fight for the rights of the poor into a class fight within the ideological perspective of the class struggle. For them, the "church of the poor" signifies the church of the class which has become aware of the requirements of the revolutionary struggle as a step toward liberation and which celebrates this liberation in its liturgy.

11. A further remark regarding the expression "church of the people" will not be out of place here. From the pastoral point of view, this expression might mean the favored recipients of evangelization to whom, because of their condition, the church extends her pastoral love first of all. One might also refer to the church as people of God, that is, people of the new covenant established in Christ.²⁴

12. But the "theologies of liberation" of which we are speaking mean by church of the people a church of the class, a church of the oppressed people whom it is

necessary to "conscientize" in the light of the organized struggle for freedom. For some, the people, thus understood, even become the object of faith.

13. Building on such a conception of the church of the people, a critique of the very structures of the church is developed. It is not simply the case of fraternal correction of pastors of the church whose behavior does not reflect the evangelical spirit of service and is linked to old-fashioned signs of authority which scandalize the poor. It has to do with a challenge to the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the church, which was willed by the Lord himself. There is a denunciation of members of the hierarchy and the magisterium as objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed. Theologically, this position means that ministers take their origin from the people, who therefore designate ministers of their own choice in accord with the needs of their historic revolutionary mission.

X. A New Hermeneutic

1. The partisan conception of truth, which can be seen in the revolutionary praxis of the class, corroborates this position. Theologians who do not share the theses of the "theology of liberation," the hierarchy and especially the Roman magisterium are thus discredited in advance as belonging to the class of the oppressors. Their theology is a theology of class. Arguments and teachings thus do not have to be examined in themselves since they are only reflections of class interests. Thus the instruction of others is decreed to be, in principle, false.

2. Here is where the global and all-embracing character of the theology of liberation appears. As a result, it must be criticized not just on the basis of this or that affirmation, but on the basis of its classist viewpoint, which it has adopted *a priori* and which has come to function in it as a determining principle.

3. Because of this classist presupposition, it becomes very difficult, not to say impossible, to engage in a real dialogue with some "theologians of liberation" in such a way that the other participant is listened to and his arguments are discussed with objectivity and attention. For these theologians start out with the idea, more or less consciously, that the viewpoint of the oppressed and revolutionary class, which is their own, is the single true point of view. Theological criteria for truth are thus relativized and subordinated to the imperatives of the class struggle. In this perspective, orthodoxy, or the right rule of faith, is substituted by the notion of orthopraxy as the criterion of the truth. In this connection it is important not to confuse practical orientation, which is proper to traditional theology in the same way that speculative orientation is, with the recognized and privileged priority given to a certain type of praxis. For them, this praxis is the revolutionary praxis, which thus becomes the supreme criterion for theological truth. A healthy theological method no doubt will always take the praxis of the church into account and will find there one of its foundations, but that is because that praxis comes from the faith and is a lived expression of it.

APPENDIX

4. For the "theologies of liberation" however, the social doctrine of the church is rejected with disdain. It is said that it comes from the illusion of a possible compromise, typical of the middle class, which has no historic destiny.

5. The new hermeneutic inherent in the "theologies of liberation" leads to an essentially political rereading of the scriptures. Thus a major importance is given to the exodus event inasmuch as it is a liberation from political servitude. Likewise, a political reading of the Magnificat is proposed. The mistake here is not in bringing attention to a political dimension of the readings of scripture, but in making of this one dimension the principal or exclusive component. This leads to a reductionist reading of the Bible.

6. Likewise, one places oneself within the perspective of a temporal messianism, which is one of the most radical of the expressions of secularization of the kingdom of God and of its absorption into the immanence of human history.

7. In giving such priority to the political dimension, one is led to deny the radical newness of the New Testament and above all to misunderstand the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, and thus the specific character of the salvation he gave us, that is above all liberation from sin, which is the source of all evils.

8. Moreover in setting aside the authoritative interpretation of the church, denounced as classist, one is at the same time departing from tradition. In that way one is robbed of an essential theological criterion of interpretation and, in the vacuum thus created, one welcomes the most radical theses of rationalist exegesis. Without a critical eye, one returns to the opposition of the "Jesus of history" vs. the "Jesus of faith."

9. Of course the creeds of the faith are literally preserved, especially the Chalcedonian creed, but a new meaning is given to them which is a negation of the faith of the church. On one hand, the Christological doctrine of tradition is rejected in the name of class; on the other hand, one claims to meet again the "Jesus of history" coming from the revolutionary experience of the struggle of the poor for their liberation.

10. One claims to be reliving an experience similar to that of Jesus. The experience of the poor struggling for their liberation, which was Jesus' experience, would thus reveal, and it alone, the knowledge of the true God and of the kingdom.

11. Faith in the incarnate word, dead and risen for all men, and whom "God made Lord and Christ"²⁵ is denied. In its place is substituted a figure of Jesus who is a kind of symbol who sums up in himself the requirements of the struggle of the oppressed.

12. An exclusively political interpretation is thus given to the death of Christ. In this way its value for salvation and the whole economy of redemption is denied.

13. This new interpretation thus touches the whole of the Christian mystery.

14. In a general way this brings about what can be called an inversion of symbols. Thus instead of seeing, with St. Paul, a figure of baptism in the exodus,²⁶ some end up making of it a symbol of the political liberation of the people.

15. When the same hermeneutical criterion is applied to the life and to the hierarchical constitution of the church, the relationship between the hierarchy and the "base" becomes the relationship of obedient domination to the law of the struggle of the classes. Sacramentality, which is at the root of the ecclesial ministries and which makes of the church a spiritual reality which cannot be reduced to a purely sociological analysis, is quite simply ignored.

16. This inversion of symbols is likewise verified in the area of the sacraments. The eucharist is no longer to be understood as the real sacramental presence of the reconciling sacrifice and as the gift of the body and blood of Christ. It becomes a celebration of the people in their struggle. As a consequence, the unity of the church is radically denied. Unity, reconciliation and communion in love are no longer seen as a gift we receive from Christ.²⁷ It is the historical class of the poor who by means of their struggle will build unity. For them, the struggle of the classes is the way to unity. The eucharist thus becomes the eucharist of the class. At the same time they deny the triumphant force of the love of God which has been given to us.

XI. Orientations

1. The warning against the serious deviations of some "theologies of liberation" must not at all be taken as some kind of approval, even indirect, of those who keep the poor in misery, who profit from that misery, who notice it while doing nothing about it or who remain indifferent to it. The church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by the love for mankind, hears the cry for justice²⁸ and intends to respond to it with all her might.

2. Thus a great call goes out to all the church: With boldness and courage, with farsightedness and prudence, with zeal and strength of spirit, with a love for the poor which demands sacrifice, pastors will consider the response to this call a matter of the highest priority, as many already do.

3. All priests, religious and lay people who hear this call for justice and who want to work for evangelization and the advancement of mankind will do so in communion with their bishop and with the church, each in accord with his or her own specific ecclesial vocation.

4. Aware of the ecclesial character of their vocation, theologians will collaborate loyally and with a spirit of dialogue with the magisterium of the church. They will be able to recognize in the magisterium a gift of Christ to his church²⁹ and will welcome its word and its directives with filial respect.

5. It is only when one begins with the task of evangelization understood in its entirety that the authentic requirements of human progress and liberation are appreciated. This liberation has as its indispensable pillars: the truth about Jesus the savior, the truth about the church and the truth about man and his dignity.³⁰

It is in light of the Beatitudes, and especially the Beatitude of the poor of heart, that the church, which wants to be the church of the poor throughout the world, intends to come to the aid of the noble struggle for truth and justice. She addresses

each person, and for that reason, every person. She is the "universal church. The church of the incarnation. She is not the church of one class or another. And she speaks in the name of truth itself. This truth is realistic." It leads to a recognition "of every human reality, every injustice, every tension and every struggle."³¹

6. An effective defense of justice needs to be based on the truth of mankind, created in the image of God and called to the grace of divine sonship. The recognition of the true relationship of human beings to God constitutes the foundation of justice to the extent that it rules the relationships between people. That is why the fight for the rights of man, which the church does not cease to reaffirm, constitutes the authentic fight for justice.

7. The truth of mankind requires that this battle be fought in ways consistent with human dignity. That is why the systematic and deliberate recourse to blind violence, no matter from which side it comes, must be condemned.³² To put one's trust in violent means in the hope of restoring more justice is to become the victim of a fatal illusion: Violence begets violence and degrades man. It mocks the dignity of man in the person of the victims, and it debases that same dignity among those who practice it.

8. The acute need for radical reforms of the structures which conceal poverty and which are themselves forms of violence should not let us lose sight of the fact that the source of injustice is in the hearts of men. Therefore it is only by making an appeal to the moral potential of the person and to the constant need for interior conversion that social change will be brought about which will truly be in the service of man.³³ For it will only be in the measure that they collaborate freely in these necessary changes through their own initiative and in solidarity, that people, awakened to a sense of their responsibility, will grow in humanity.

The inversion of morality and structures is steeped in a materialist anthropology which is incompatible with the dignity of mankind.

9. It is therefore an equally fatal illusion to believe that these new structures will of themselves give birth to a "new man" in the sense of the truth of man. The Christian cannot forget that it is only the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us, who is the source of every true renewal and that God is the Lord of history.

10. By the same token, the overthrow by means of revolutionary violence of structures which generate violence is not *ipso facto* the beginning of a just regime. A major fact of our time ought to evoke the reflection of all those who would sincerely work for the true liberation of their brothers: Millions of our own contemporaries legitimately yearn to recover those basic freedoms of which they were deprived by totalitarian and atheistic regimes which came to power by violent and revolutionary means, precisely in the name of the liberation of the people. This shame of our time cannot be ignored: While claiming to bring them freedom, these regimes keep whole nations in conditions of servitude which are unworthy of mankind. Those who, perhaps inadvertently, make themselves accomplices of similar enslavements betray the very poor they mean to help.

11. The class struggle as a road toward a classless society is a myth which slows reform and aggravates poverty and injustice. Those who allow themselves to be caught up in fascination with this myth should reflect on the bitter examples history has to offer about where it leads. They would then understand that we are not talking here about abandoning an effective means of struggle on behalf of the poor for an ideal which has no practical effects. On the contrary, we are talking about freeing oneself from a delusion in order to base oneself squarely on the Gospel and its power of realization.

12. One of the conditions for necessary theological correction is giving proper value to the social teaching of the church. This teaching is by no means closed. It is, on the contrary, open to all the new questions which are so numerous today. In this perspective, the contribution of theologians and other thinkers in all parts of the world to the reflection of the church is indispensable today.

13. Likewise the experience of those who work directly for evangelization and for the advancement of the poor and the oppressed is necessary for the doctrinal and pastoral reflection of the church. In this sense it is necessary to affirm that one becomes more aware of certain aspects of truth by starting with praxis, if by that one means pastoral praxis and social work which keeps its evangelical inspiration.

14. The teaching of the church on social issues indicates the main lines of ethical orientation. But in order that it be able to guide action directly, the church needs competent people from a scientific and technological viewpoint, as well as in the human and political sciences. Pastors should be attentive to the formation of persons of such capability who live the Gospel deeply. Lay persons, whose proper mission is to build society, are involved here to the highest degree.

15. Theses of the "theologies of liberation" are widely popularized under a simplified form in formation sessions or in what are called "base groups" which lack the necessary catechetical and theological preparation as well as the capacity for discernment. Thus these theses are accepted by generous men and women without any critical judgment being made.

16. That is why pastors must look after the quality and the content of catechesis and formation, which should always present the whole message of salvation and the imperatives of true liberation within the framework of this whole message.

17. In this full presentation of Christianity, it is proper to emphasize those essential aspects which the "theologies of liberation" especially tend to misunderstand or to eliminate, namely: the transcendence and gratuity of liberation in Jesus Christ, true God and true man; the sovereignty of grace; and the true nature of the means of salvation, especially of the church and the sacraments. One should also keep in mind the true meaning of ethics, in which the distinction between good and evil is not relativized, the real meaning of sin, the necessity for conversion and the universality of the law of fraternal love.

One needs to be on guard against the politicization of existence, which, misunderstanding the entire meaning of the kingdom of God and the transcendence of the

person, begins to sacralize politics and betray the religion of the people in favor of the projects of the revolution.

18. The defenders of orthodoxy are sometimes accused of passivity, indulgence or culpable complicity regarding the intolerable situations of injustice and the political regimes which prolong them. Spiritual conversion, the intensity of the love of God and neighbor, zeal for justice and peace, the gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty, are required of everyone and especially of pastors and those in positions of responsibility. The concern for the purity of the faith demands giving the answer of effective witness in the service of one's neighbor, the poor and the oppressed in particular, in an integral theological fashion. By the witness of their dynamic and constructive power to love, Christians will thus lay the foundations of this "civilization of love" of which the conference of Puebla spoke, following Paul VI.³⁴ Moreover there are already many priests, religious and lay people who are consecrated in a truly evangelical way for the creation of a just society.

Conclusion

The words of Paul VI in his "Profession of Faith," express with full clarity the faith of the church, from which one cannot deviate without provoking, besides spiritual disaster, new miseries and new types of slavery.

"We profess our faith that the kingdom of God, begun here below in the church of Christ, is not of this world, whose form is passing away, and that its own growth cannot be confused with the progress of civilization, of science, of human technology, but that it consists in knowing ever more deeply the unfathomable riches of Christ, to hope ever more strongly in things eternal, to respond ever more ardently to the love of God, to spread ever more widely grace and holiness among men. But it is this very same love which makes the church constantly concerned for the true temporal good of mankind as well. Never ceasing to recall to her children that they have no lasting dwelling here on earth, she urges them also to contribute, each according to his own vocation and means, to the welfare of their earthly city, to promote justice, peace and brotherhood among men, to lavish their assistance on their brothers, especially on the poor and the most dispirited. The intense concern of the church, the bride of Christ, for the needs of mankind, their joys and their hopes, their pains and their struggles, is nothing other than the great desire to be present to them in order to enlighten them with the light of Christ and join them all to him, their only Savior. It can never mean that the church is conforming to the things of this world nor that she is lessening the earnestness with which she awaits her Lord and the eternal kingdom."³⁵

This instruction was adopted at an ordinary meeting of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and was approved at an audience granted to the undersigned cardinal prefect by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, who ordered its publication.

Given at Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Aug. 6, 1984, the feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
Prefect

Archbishop Alberto Bovone
Secretary

NOTES

1. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.
2. Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 10.
3. Cf. Gal. 5:1ff.
4. Cf. Ex. 24.
5. Cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ez. 38:26ff.
6. Cf. Zec. 3:12ff.
7. Cf. Dt. 10:18-19.
8. Cf. Lk. 10:25-37.
9. Cf. 2 Cor. 8:9.
10. Cf. Mt. 25:31-46; Acts 9:4-5; Col. 1:24.
11. Cf. Jas. 5ff.
12. Cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-34.
13. Cf. Jas. 2:14-26.
14. Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979) pp. 1144-1160.
15. Cf. AAS 71 (1979) p. 196.
16. Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 25-33, AAS 68 (1976) pp. 23-28.
17. Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 32, AAS 68 (1976) p. 27.
18. Cf. AAS 71 (1979) pp. 188-196.
19. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 39; Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931) p. 207.
20. Cf. nos. 1134-1165 and nos. 1166-1205.
21. Cf. Puebla Document, IV, 2.
22. Cf. Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 34, AAS 63 (1971) pp. 424-425.
23. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9-17.
24. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.
25. Cf. Acts 2:36.
26. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-2.
27. Cf. Eph. 2:11-22.
28. Cf. Puebla Document I, II, 3.3.
29. Cf. Lk. 10:16.
30. Cf. John Paul II, Address at the Opening of the Conference at Puebla, AAS 71 (1979) pp. 188-196; Puebla Document, II P, c.1.
31. Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Favela Vidigal at Rio de Janeiro, July 2, 1980, AAS 72 (1980) pp. 852-858.
32. Cf. Puebla Document, II, c. II, 5.4.
33. Cf. *ibid.*, IV, c.3. 3.1.
34. Cf. *ibid.*, IV, II, 2.3.
35. Cf. Paul VI, Profession of Faith of the People of God, June 30, 1968, AAS 60, (1968) pp. 443-444.

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