

THE USE OF THE BIBLE BY AFRICAN
COMMUTER-TRAIN WORSHIPPERS IN THE
JOHANNESBURG AREA

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the whole dissertation is, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, my original work.



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ABSTRACT

Although the Bible was brought to Africa by missionaries as part of the Western European colonial package deal, Africans have claimed the book as their own and have appropriated it from the perspective of their culture, world-view and life experience. It is as though Africans are asking, with the attendants in Jerusalem on Pentecost, "How is it that each of us hears [the wonders of God] in his own native language?" (Acts 2:8ff). In the midst of the stresses caused by poor working conditions, low wages and high cost of living, the African commuter-train worshipper has found the Bible to be an indispensable source of hope, and a source of life itself.

In the morning, on the way to work, and in the evening on the way back home, the African commuter can still afford a smile as the Bible promises him/her solutions to all problems. When the problems seem insurmountable, the commuter finds solace in the Biblical beatitude "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20b). The commuter hears blessings pronounced on the hungry and the weeping in the Bible, and he is convinced that these blessings are pronounced on him too. The Bible is an indispensable tool in the hands of the African commuter-train worshipper, who interprets it and appropriates its message in a liberating manner, which the western mind sometimes cannot make sense of. The Bible remains the one book that gives dignity to all the commuter-train worshippers who live in squatter camps and sprawling townships, as it banishes all social inequalities.

This study is about the way in which the African commuter-train worshippers read and interpret the Bible. The commuter's use of the Bible is placed within the context of the conventional African Biblical hermeneutical field. The commuter is recognized as an ordinary (untrained) reader whose contribution is highly valued by this author. This piece of work is a modest attempt at bringing to light the emerging phenomenon of commuter reading of the Bible, with the hope that Biblical scholars will take note of this rising phenomenon and give it the attention it deserves.

Buka ya BibeLe e ne e tle fatsheng la habo rona e le karolo ya sephuthelwana se kenyeditseng bo-koloniale sa ba bophirimela. Leha ho le jwalo, baholo ba rona ba maAfrika ba ile ba e amohela mme ba e etsa ya bona. MaAfrika a sheba BibeLe ho tswa moetlong wa bona, tsela eo ba lebang lefatshe ka yona, le maitemohelo a bophelo a bona. E se e ka MaAfrika a botsa potso e neng e botswa ke baeti Jerusalema ka mokete wa Pentakonta, "Ho tla jwang hore e mong le e mong wa rona a utlwe [dimakatso tsa Modimo] ka leleme la habo?" (Diketso 2:8ff). Hara ditsietsi le matshwenyeho a bakwang ke maemo a hlobaetsang a mosebetsi, meputso e tlase le ditjeho tse hodimo tsa bophelo, modumedi wa moAfrika ya sebedisang terene ho ya mosebetsing o fumana BibeLe e le yona mohlodi wa tshepo, le mohlodi wa bophelo.

Hoseng, ha a eya mosebetsing, le mantsiboya ha a kgutlela hae, mopalami wa moAfrika o sa kgona ho bososela ka ha BibeLe e mo tshepisa tharollo ya mathata a hae ohle. Ha maima a hlwa manolo hodimo, mopalami o iphumanela kgothatso mantsweng ana, "Ho lehlohonolo lona bafumanehi, hobane mmuso wa Modimo ke wa lona" (Luka 6:20b). Mopalami o utlwa ditshepiso tsa dihlohonolofatso ho ba lapileng le ba llang Bibeleng, mme o tiile hore le yena dihlohonolofatso tsena ke tsa hae. BibeLe ke sebetse se matla matsohong a mosebetsi wa moAfrika ya tsamayang ka terene. Mosebetsi enwa o bala le ho toloka BibeLe ka tsela e mo lokollang, eo kelello ya babophirima e sa e utlwisiseng. BibeLe ke yona buka e fang basebetsi ba tsamayang ka terene serithi. Basebetsi bana ba dula ditulong tsa baipehi tsa mekhukhu, le makweisheneng. Ho se leka-lekane hohle ho lahlelwa ka ntle ha ho balwa Bible.

Mosebetsi ona o mabapi le tsela eo moAfrika ya sebedisang terene ho ya motsebetsing a balang le ho toloka BibeLe kateng. Mokgwa ona wa ho sebedisa BibeLe o behilwe papisong le mokgwa o tlwaelehileng wa ho bala BibeLe ha maAfrika. Mopalami wa terene o behwa boemong bo phahameng ba mmadi ya sa rupellwang ho bala BibeLe. Nna, mongodi, ke hlompha haholo mmadi ya jwalo. Ana ke maiteko a ikokobeditseng a ho beha pepeneneng mokgwa wa ho bala BibeLe tereneng, ka tshepo ya hore babadi ba BibeLe ba rupelletseng ba tla ananela le hona ho hlompha mokgwa ona. Dikgomo!

INTRODUCTION

This study is influenced by a module I studied under Professor Gerald West, titled “Historical and Hermeneutical Trajectories of the Bible (and the Quran) in Africa.” The module opened my eyes to an African way of reading the Bible, and became more relevant in this era of African Renaissance. My own experience of detention in solitary confinement under the then Section 6 of the Terrorism Act from June 1981 to March 1982 in apartheid South Africa, motivated a thorough reading of the Bible as that was the only reading material I was permitted to read in terms of the detention laws. I could say that for nine months the Bible became my cell-mate. I have tried, albeit with moderate success, to conceal my emotions as I write about the Bible, for which my humble apology is due to the reader.

As one who commuted on the Johannesburg-Vereeniging trains from 1988 to 1998, I had the privilege of engaging with the Bible with fellow commuters in an inspired way. The focus on the commuters has become of particular interest to me because I believe the commuters have a method (or methods) of reading the Bible that should be recognized and incorporated in the field of African Biblical hermeneutics. I have heard and witnessed the interpretation of the Bible in the commuter-train carriages that find resonance with the recognized African interpretations. I have been struck by the similarities and dissimilarities between these interpretations. I have seen lives that have been transformed by the impact of Biblical interpretation on the trains. I wish to argue strongly that the commuter-train worship communities’ reading of the Bible does have a place in the field of African Biblical hermeneutics. I subscribe to the African Renaissance spirit and therefore I take seriously the reading of the Bible from the ordinary African’s point of view. I draw inspiration from the work done by the Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB) on reading the Bible with ordinary readers, and I am convinced the commuter reading will add value to the existing hermeneutics.

Thus while I have relied on interviews of commuters and Metrorail staff for this study, I have also drawn from my own experience with the Bible reading commuter-train worshippers and the sermons I heard being preached in these worship carriages. Since these worshippers can rightly be referred to as ordinary (untrained) readers, I found it appropriate to place their interpretation of the Bible within the context of African Biblical interpretation. Hence, in Chapter 1, I begin with the historical and hermeneutical trajectories of the Bible in Africa, drawing on the work of, among others, Vincent Wimbush and John Mbiti.

In Chapter 2 I follow up with developments in Biblical Interpretation in modern Africa. The three phases of these developments are explored, covering Liberation hermeneutics, the Bible and Black Theology, Inculturation hermeneutics, Contextual Bible Study and Feminist interpretations in Africa. The aim of including the above-named fields of study is to put the Biblical interpretation of the African commuter-train worshippers into perspective. It is also to elevate the status of the ordinary reader and his or her context, so as to understand this reader's interpretation of the Bible. Chapter 2, therefore, provides a context for dealing with the commuter-train worshipper's reading and interpretation of the Bible, as it includes the basic African cultural assumptions, methodological suppositions and procedural steps of the Inculturation process of interpretation.

Chapter 3 covers the beginnings of the African commuter-train worship services in the Johannesburg area, personal testimonies of commuters, the use of the Bible by commuter-train worshippers during the liberation struggle years as well as in the post-liberation era. Selected texts which help explain the Biblical interpretation method of the commuters, the ubuntu-botho concept as an interpretational frame work and the whole structure of worship in the carriages form the huge content of Chapter 3. Also in this chapter is the role of women commuters in the worship services as well as the way they interpret the Bible. The emphasis on prayer by women commuters has prompted me to include the mountain as a sacred place for the women commuters, based on several texts from the Bible. I then look at the impact these worship services have had on society.

In conclude by summarizing briefly a few major issues which I raised in my discussion, and then calling for due recognition of the Bible reading methods of interpretation of the African commuter-train worshippers.

Chapter 4 is intended to relate the Biblical interpretation discussed in Chapter 3 to the historical and hermeneutical trajectories of the Bible in Africa, discussed in Chapter 1, as well as the developments of Biblical interpretation in Modern Africa, discussed in Chapter 2.

There are a few motivating factors that led me to embark on this study. I believe this topic is important to society because it empowers the ordinary reader. It recognises and acknowledges ordinary readers as important partners in Biblical hermeneutics. It frees the African reader from the shackles of having to interpret the Bible from a western point of view. Most importantly, I suggest, this topic deals with an area that has not been explored so far. The worship services on the commuter trains have been a growing phenomenon and have moved from being haphazard to being formally organised. Moreover, these worshippers are mainly workers, family members and church members of various denominations. Their very ecumenical nature is an advantage from which we can be enriched as we interact with them in their use of the Bible. As a minister of the Word and Sacrament, this topic will widen my horizon in my discipline. It will help me to look further beyond my Methodist Tradition. It also gives me the opportunity to marry my western Biblical hermeneutical tools with the tools of the ordinary African readers. I see the value of this study as bringing the commuters into the limelight of Biblical interpretation. It is my view that, thus far, the commuters have been on the periphery and we have not heard what they have to say about the Bible.

As alluded to earlier, this research is not an attempt to start a new field of study. Much work has been done in the field of reading the Bible with ordinary (African) readers by the likes of Gerald West, Justin Ukpong, Musa Dube, Teresa Okure, to mention but a few. I therefore draw from their work and then use that framework to explore the use of the Bible

on the commuter trains. I am convinced that this will not amount to duplicating any other study. My hypothesis is that there is an emerging Biblical hermeneutic that lies untapped in the commuter trains. It is my conviction, that, brought into the fold, this hermeneutic has the potential to provide abundant wealth of the Biblical interpretative process.

The theological framework of this research, as provided by the above-named theologians, is one that stresses the importance of reading “with” rather than “for” the ordinary readers. West, for example, emphasizes the “need for more participatory research with ordinary readers” (WEST 1995:198). He cites the differences in the modes of reading of the ordinary reader and those of the trained reader. Whereas there may be interesting similarities, the ordinary reader reads the Bible “pre-critically” because he or she has not been trained in critical methods (ibid). This, I contend, applies to the commuter train reader. Ukpong, meanwhile, calls for a “re-reading the Bible with African eyes” (UKPONG 1995:3). Linking inculturation and hermeneutics, Ukpong delights at how African Christians are able to read the Bible in their languages and “with their own eyes”, within their own cultural context, world-view and life experience, and appropriate its message (ibid). The context of the commuter readers as workers and breadwinners will be placed within this framework. Since women form a sizable number of commuters and occupy some leadership positions in the formal structures of commuter worshippers, the work of Malika Sibeko and Beverley Haddad, Teresa Okure and Musa Dube has been used to provide a framework for the women commuters’ interpretation of the Bible. This will include, for example, “reading the Bible ‘with’ women in poor and marginalised communities in South Africa” (SIBEKO & HADDAD 1977:83).

The Oral history technique has been one of my main tools. Having placed the research project within the theological framework of the above-named theologians’ work, as well as those appearing in the bibliography, I have consulted the ISB and my supervisor, Professor West. Since commuter worshippers have now organized themselves into formal structures, I have consulted the leadership of a particular route, namely, the Vereeniging-Johannesburg route. There are some old founder members of this phenomenon whom I

have interviewed in order to know what lay behind this worship on the trains, how it has evolved to its present state and how the Bible has been, and is still being, interpreted in the commuter-trains. I have interviewed commuters, the Metrorail management - from ticket examiners to station management - to find out how the worshippers have impacted on crime in the trains and on the stations. I have particularly interviewed people who were converted by these worship services, for I know many self-confessed thugs who turned to a new life as a result of these worship services, with some now reading and interpreting the Bible both in the trains and at their respective denominations. The oral history techniques have focused mainly on the Biblical hermeneutics of the commuter-train readers - that is, how they use the Bible, open and closed, I have carefully drafted questions in a way that will enable me to realize this objective. Having observed the practice of Biblical interpretation on the trains, I have also recorded and analysed an example of commuter Bible reading.

Chapter 1

Historical and Hermeneutical Trajectories of the Bible in Africa

Early Contact

Africa's long association with the Bible stretches from the first century. Some key events recorded in the Bible took place in Africa; and the first translation of the Bible into the Greek language - the Septuagint - took place in Alexandria (MBITI 1994:27). In Acts 8:26ff we read about an Ethiopian eunuch, who had gone to Jerusalem to worship, reading the book of Isaiah while on his way home. There can be no doubting that back home in Ethiopia the eunuch shared the good news with his compatriots because, after Philip had told him the good news about Jesus and baptised him, the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (v39c). Mbiti notes that by 1990 the Bible was available in about 600 African languages either in full or in part, accounting for 30 % of the world-wide translations (ibid). He asserts further that translating the Bible into these African languages has meant ... "putting it right into the heart of African cultures" (ibid). Reading the Bible in African languages had meant, in effect reading it "with their own [African] eyes ... from the perspective of their own culture, world-view and life experience, and appropriate its message" (UKPONG 1995:3). Mbiti quotes a statement made by Professor Chain Rabin of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem at the Jerusalem Congress on Black Africa and the Bible in April 1972:

"There is no doubt that from the point of view of its structure and its ways of thinking, its directness, its imagery, the average African language is closer, a great deal closer, to Biblical Hebrew than the Biblical Hebrew is to any of the modern European languages." (op.cit:28)

Thus, the African languages and cultures, coupled with the oral traditions, came into dialogue with their Biblical counterparts namely, inter alia, the practices of circumcision, polygamy, ancestral veneration (the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and the oral tradition of the Old Testament ("Thus says the Lord" or "the word of the Lord") and Jesus'

parables (which were told and not written) connect with the African experience of folktales, legends and even oral instruction at initiation schools. To paraphrase Vincent Wimbush, the world of the African met with the world of the Bible text (WIMBUSH 1993:129), ensuring that the Bible was embraced by the Africans. The imposing presence of the Bible in Africa is tackled in the next section.

The Bible in Africa

The one hundred and eighty-first (181st) annual report of the Bible Society of South Africa (BSSA) states that Africa leads the world in Bible translations. The complete Bible, the report says, has been translated into 149 of Africa's 2000 languages, while portions of the Bible are found in the other languages (BSSA 2001:10). Robert Schreiter has made the point that Africa is the fastest growing Christian continent in the world and is "the third most populous Christian continent in the world after Latin America and Europe" in (MOGOBA 1994:3).

The Bible can be said to be the most read book in Africa. It has remained the single most unifying book among Africans. Mugambi notes that the Bible is read "at primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, in seminaries, during worship services, in fellowship meetings and in private devotions and meditations" (MUGAMBI 1995:142).

To this list Gerald West adds by identifying a range of African readers that includes semi-literate "readers" from the African Initiated / Independent Churches (AIC) in the townships and squatter camps, unionized workers and civic activists, rural black women and unemployed youth, to whom the Bible matters (WEST 1999:9-10). One can add that the Bible is also read by commuters in buses and trains, and it is on the commuter-train readers of the Bible that this study will focus later.

Whereas Black Consciousness formations such as the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) have lamented, rightly or wrongly, that when the White man came to South Africa he had the Bible and we had the land, and now he has the land and we have the

Bible, Desmond Tutu and other freedom-loving Blacks responded by stating, "And we got the better deal" (WEST 1999:9). Notwithstanding the challenge to Tutu's response, West draws attention to the reality of the Bible in South Africa (and on the African continent as a whole), namely that the Bible plays an important role in the lives of many people, particularly the poor and marginalized. The Bible, West asserts, "is a symbol of the presence of God of life with them and a resource in their struggle for survival, liberation and life" (ibid). It is instructive that even those who agree with AZAPO that we have been robbed of our land by Whites who brought the Bible to our country and continent have used and still use the same Bible to claim our land and fight for its return. Hence, theologians like Mugambi (1995:1), Villa-Vicencio (1992:1) and Karamaga (1991:1) are using the Bible (the Ezra - Nehemiah motif) in their theologies of reconstruction and renewal. However, the advent of Christianity and the Bible was not without its own complexities on the African continent. The next section will deal with the importance of the early encounters of the Bible with the African people.

The Importance of Early Encounters

The early encounters of the Bible and the Africans provide a helpful guide in determining how the African people came to relate to the Bible. While many missionaries were passionately intent on spreading the gospel using the Bible as their main tool, some of them tended to almost equate the Bible with God, either consciously or unconsciously. Thus when they brought the Bible to the Africans, it was almost as if they were bringing God to Africa. It seemed to have never occurred to these missionaries that God was active in Africa, and He was known and worshipped long before the missionaries set foot in Africa. Hence it was inevitable that there would be some resistance by Africans towards the Bible. Africans, who used such names as "Nkulunkulu" (meaning, the unimaginably big One) for God, could not comprehend a God who could be contained in a book. With time, and after persuasion by the missionaries, the Africans came to recognize and accept the Bible as a book that spoke and taught about the same God that they had always worshipped. Vincent Wimbush and John Mbiti provide valuable insight into the early encounters.

I have chosen to deal with the early encounters of the Bible and the Africans by reflecting briefly on the work of Vincent Wimbush, which looks at how African Americans came to appropriate the Bible, the contradictions of the same Bible being shared by both the slave and the slave masters, and how those contradictions were overcome. I do believe that Africans and African Americans share similar contexts in that they are both oppressed and exploited solely on the basis of the colour of their skin. Naturally they respond in similar ways to the Bible, which is also read by their oppressors. Later in this chapter I use John Mbiti's work to reflect on these encounters.

Wimbush's work is particularly helpful in that the African Americans he is writing about are, first and foremost Black Africans who were taken to America without their consent. They are no different from the Black Africans in South Africa, who found themselves at the receiving end of racial oppression and economic exploitation. In both the above instances, the African people were oppressed and discriminated against by White people who introduced the Bible to them and who professed to believe in the Bible. Naturally, both groups (African Americans and Black South Africans) were to find it odd that the practices of these Christians (slave-masters and oppressors) contradicted the teachings of the Bible. However, it is Wimbush's notion of the meeting of worlds - that strikes a chord with the way Africans came to relate to the Bible. It is also here that Wimbush converges with Mbiti. While Wimbush observes that African American readers identified with the oppressed and the underdogs in the Bible (1993:139), Mbiti observes similarities between the cultural world of the Bible and that of the African (1994:28). Therefore the two authors provide a valuable insight into how the African reader, through language and culture, came to interact with the Bible. It is natural that the manner in which our African ancestors read and interpreted the Bible, has had an effect on how we read the Bible today, and how the African commuter-train worshippers interpret the Bible.

Wimbush suggests, importantly, that in order to understand the early African American encounters with the Bible, we have to think of the Bible as a language, even a language world. Hence, in an article he aptly titles his work: "Reading texts through worlds, worlds

through texts.” Arguing that readings of texts – mythic, religious – are seldom cultivated by individuals, Wimbush asserts that the cultural worlds of readers often determine the texts to be read, as well as the meaning of “text” itself (WIMBUSH 1993:129). It is against this background that the early encounters of the African Americans with the Bible should be understood.

Historian, C Oosthuizen, states that the present is the result of the past and the origin of the future (OOSTHUIZEN 1981:8). It is thus through recourse to early encounters that we can interpret the present hermeneutical trajectories of the Bible in Africa, and then be able to inform future generations of African Bible readers. Wimbush notes that (African) cultures that were steeped in oral tradition found the concept of religion circumscribed by a book at first frightful and absurd and, then, awesome and fascinating. It was in the late 18th century that African Americans began to encounter the Bible on a large and popular scale. While they did so in large numbers and with enthusiasm, they observed that the white world they experienced used the Bible to explain its (the white world’s) power, authority and dominance (WIMBUSH 1993:131).

The Africans then embraced the Bible, transforming it from the white man’s book of religion into a source of inspiration for learning and affirmation, and into a language world of strong hopes and veiled, but stinging critique of the slave-holding Christian culture(ibid). Besides the dramatic Old Testament narratives, the stories of and about the persecuted but victorious Jesus captured the collective African imagination. This beginning of African American historical encounter with the Bible has functioned as phenomenological, socio-political and cultural foundation for the different historical readings of the Bible that have followed(ibid).

In the 19th and 20th centuries the “reading” that was most popular was more aggressive and overtly political rhetorics and visions of prophetic critique against slavery, and the blueprints for ‘racial’ uplift, social and political peace, equality and integration. Frederick Douglass (1818 – 1915) and Martin Luther King, Jr are among the most prominent

articulators of this reading. Wimbush adds, though, that the popular sources – the songs, conversion narratives, poetry, prayers, diaries, – most anonymous, are a truer, more powerful reflection of history. Together with Old Testament narratives, new Testament passages such as Galatians 3:26-28 and Acts 2; 10:34-36 were important because of their emphasis on the hope for the realization of the universality of salvation (WIMBUSH 1993:132).

Douglass, David Walker and Reverdy Ransom grappled with the following question: “How does a people enslaved by a people of a Book come to accept that Book as authoritative and legitimate?” Moreover, “How can a people come to interpret their experiences in the world through a book which (with its narratives and codes) has little to do with its origins and immediate historical experiences?” (WIMBUSH 1993:137) Wimbush asserts that the most defensible explanation lies in a meeting of ‘worlds’ – similar ways of viewing the self in the world – between African Americans and the (“worlds” of the) Bible(ibid). With its arresting stories of underdogs surviving and conquering and of a Saviour figure who is mistreated but who ultimately triumphs, it is hardly surprising that the Bible came to be embraced by African Americans. The African Americans identified with the protagonists of the biblical dramas. The oppressed of the New World heard and saw themselves being described in the stories and texts of the Bible. The Africans in the New World applied to themselves the inclusion of all humanity within the economy of God. Wimbush concludes that the contribution of African American religious traditions to hermeneutical theory is its modelling of a radical and consistent adherence to the primacy of interpretation (determination) of everything, including religious texts, through (a particular) “world” (WIMBUSH 1993:139).

One cannot but be impressed with the manner in which Wimbush relates and explains the (importance of) early encounters of the African Americans with the Bible. His assertion that mythic and religious texts are communal rather than individual terrain, fits in with the African “ubuntu” concept of “belonging” or “sense of community”, which will be dealt with in detail later. The early encounters inform our present reading of the Bible since

there is much that we can identify with in that history. Socio-political contexts and circumstances are seen here as defining religious texts, hence, the history of engagement of the Bible by African Americans. We share with the African American readers similar contexts of oppression and poverty. The commuter reader's material situation has not changed much: squalid living conditions and poor wages still reign supreme.

Since, however, cultures are not static, but dynamic, so should cultural readings be dynamic. For example, the way in which the Bible was read and used during colonial and apartheid era in Africa, will not necessarily be the same way as that used in post-colonial and post-apartheid Africa. Little wonder that the most widely read book before 1994 in South Africa was the Exodus, whereas after 1994 books such as Ezra - Nehemiah came to centre stage. Some scholars, like Mugambi (1995:1), Villa-Vicencio (1992:1) and Karamaga (1991:1) now espouse a theology of reconstruction. This is simply because the socio-political context is different from the pre-liberation era.

I do find helpful Wimbush's point that the solution to the African-Bible encounter problem lies in the meeting of the 'worlds', that is, our world and that of the Bible. The encounter should be two way; the Bible must continue to inform and impact upon lives of Africans, while the Africans must determine what the text is and what it means. Little wonder, as Mbiti asserts below, that the Africans pursued their engagement with the Bible in a bid to subvert what the White oppressors would have them believe about the Bible.

Mbiti points out correctly that one of the casualties of colonial occupation was the eclipse of African peoplehood. The colonialists' "presence, domination, ignorance and arrogance, plus a certain amount of cheap missionary teaching" projected an attitude towards Africans as if "they were no-people" (MBITI 2002:2). He notes that in contrast, the African people opened the scriptures in local languages and "saw people in the Bible as a mirror in which they viewed themselves" (op.cit:3). That was something which contradicted the image projected by colonial and missionary presence. Mbiti argues that the Bible had a greater authority than that of the colonial rulers and missionary preachers (ibid).

“They could find anthropological refuge and protection within the pages of the Bible and nowhere else. Furthermore, it was and is the word of God, the very God they knew through traditional religion before missionaries arrived. The Bible accepted and described the same God, which was something that had been denied them by foreign presence. In the pages of the Bible, the people saw themselves together with God the Creator of all things; about whom they knew something and to whom they addressed their prayers” (ibid).

Wimbush’s idea of the meeting of worlds in the reading of Biblical texts is well justified by the words of Cameroonian minister and theological teacher, the Reverend Meya: “We recognize our own history in the Pentateuch. We feel that we possibly stem from this history of the Hebrews, because our customs and those of the Hebrews are so similar” (MBITI op.cit:3). The Bible, adds Mbiti, gives the African readers the authority to feel and act that way, and they become freed from foreign domination in religious matters. “The once-in-the-eyes-of-colonial-and-missionary-rulers ‘no-people’, are now ‘the people of the Bible’” (ibid).

Thus when the African people learnt to read the Word of God as it was written in the Bible, they began to question the preaching and practices of the missionaries, and to recognize religious beliefs and the written Word of God in the Bible. “What African Christians discovered was a book about the wonderful works of the same Creator God in whom they had always believed” (op.cit:4). Two African Church officials are said to have written: “Although there was no written Bible in Africa in those days, the Word of God was known to our ancestors - at least partially. It was written in their hearts. King Moshoeshoe of Lesotho [1786 - 1870] once told the missionaries: ‘Your laws [the Ten Commandments] are exactly like ours except that yours are written on paper and ours are written in our hearts’” (ibid).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to trace the early contacts of the Bible with the African people, and to show how the Bible came to be owned by the African to the extent that it had greater authority than the colonisers and oppressors of the African people. What follows now is a brief review of the developments in Biblical Interpretation in Modern Africa.

Chapter 2

The Rise of African Biblical Scholarship

Some scholars contend that Africa can justifiably claim to be “the cradle of systematic biblical interpretation in Christianity” (UKPONG 1999:313). Notable theologians that worked in the city of Alexandria include Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Tertullian. In fact, Tertullian is credited with having coined the term “trinity” and thus making a valuable contribution to the doctrine of the tri-une God (DE GRUCHY & VILLAVICENCIO 1994:78). He also coined the phrase “three persons in one substance” to explain that the distinction of persons did not imply dividing the divine substance between them: “God was one in substance but three in the way in which that substance was shared” (ibid). These great scholars’ work in the north of Africa unfortunately did not envelop the rest of the continent. This can be attributed to the desert areas of the north, as well as the advent and growth of Islam in these areas. Hence, the Biblical interpretation under discussion will focus on Africa south of the Sahara, with strong emphasis, later, on South Africa. Ukpong notes that the foundation laid by the above-named theologians lasted in the western church until the era of the Enlightenment, and was replaced by the historical-critical method in the 17th century, followed by the literary forms in the 20th century (UKPONG 1999:13). The modern methods of western Biblical scholarships, Ukpong asserts, gave birth to Biblical studies in Africa today.

Notwithstanding this, though, Biblical scholars in Africa have succeeded in developing an African method whose particular characteristic is the concern to create an encounter between the Biblical text and the African context. This method differs from the western method in that “the main focus of interpretation is on the communities that receive the text, rather than on those that produced it over on the text itself” (op.cit:14). Ukpong divides the development of African biblical interpretation into three phases: 1930’s – 1970’s focuses on legitimising African religion and culture and is thus “reactive and apologetic”, dominated by the comparative method; 1970’s – 1990’s uses the African context as a

resource for Biblical interpretation and is thus “reactive-proactive” – it is dominated by Africa-in-the-Bible approach, inculturation-evaluative method and liberation hermeneutics; 1990’s recognizes the ordinary African reader and his or her context as the subject of Biblical interpretation and it is thus “proactive” – dominated by liberation and holistic inculturation methodologies (ibid). Ukpong cautions, though, that the above division is for convenience’s sake and is not suggesting compartmentalizing African Biblical interpretation, as these phases are complementary and interrelated.

Phase 1:1930’s – 1970’s

Ukpong points out that the roots of the modern Biblical studies in Africa lay in the African response to the wholesale condemnation of his or her religion and culture by the Christian missionaries of the 19th and 20th century. As Mogoba quotes Cyril Davey:

The nineteenth century missionary was a revolutionary whose call was to establish the rule of Jesus Christ amongst people who served other gods, and in doing so, to ensure that the new Christian rejected everything that linked him with his heathen past. ‘Everything heathen’ included caste marks, music, polygamy, dancing, partial nudity, native marriages, charms and amulets, ceremonies, and way of dress, especially among women and girls. If anyone had felt able to protest that these things were part of their national culture, some right and some wrong, the missionary would have dismissed the defence with the assured conviction that this culture was a primitive and debilitating paganism. Almost all colonial officers shared the missionary’s attitude to indigenous cultures, if not his or her Christian commitment to establish the Kingdom of God. They believed that the lifestyles of the people the [had] conquered were totally inferior to their own ‘Christian civilization’ (MOGOBA 1994:4).

It was in response to this that Africans and some westerners who were sympathetic to the African cause undertook research that sought to legitimize African religion and culture vis-à-vis Christianity, which research was done initially through Comparative Studies. The

latter studies strove to prove continuity between the religious culture of Africa and the Bible, which the missionaries were refuting. Whereas some exponents of Comparative Studies tried to focus on mere extrinsic resemblance of African religion and the Biblical Hebrews, for example the “correlation between the Hebrew language and the Ashanti language of Ghana” (UKPONG 1999:315), later scholars focussed on religious themes and practices, for example similar elements in both cultures such as the sense of community and the pervasive nature of religion. Ukpong points out that he did such a study looking at the sacrifices of the traditional religion of the Ibo of Nigerian and those of the book of Leviticus (ibid). He cites S Kibicho on the existence of a continuity between the African and the Biblical concepts of God, and John Mbiti on the New Testament and African understanding of eschatology.

Ukpong responds to criticism of this type of study by justifying it on the grounds that “only existential and not essential continuities are sought for” (ibid). He does concede, however, that this approach does not show concern for secular issues, which have become important today in theological discussions in Africa, and it does not involve drawing hermeneutic conclusions. To its credit, though, this study has led to African Traditional Religion being seen as a preparation for the gospel, as “Africa’s Old Testament”, and it has “helped to articulate the values of African culture and religion for the appropriation of Christianity” (ibid). All Biblical studies that link the Biblical text to the African context thus have Comparative Studies as their foundation.

Phase 2. 1970’s – 1990’s

Ukpong argues that this period was the most dynamic and rewarding in Biblical studies in Africa. It is proactive and it uses the African context as a resource in the hermeneutic encounter with the Bible, while covering a theological framework rather than the Religious Studies framework of phase 1. The main approaches that emerge are inculturation and liberation (op.cit:316). The inculturation movement derives from a desire “to make Christianity relevant to the African religio-cultural context” (ibid). The two models that express the inculturation approach are referred to by Ukpong as the *Africa-in-the-Bible*

studies and *evaluative* studies. With the growing influence of socialism in this period, theology could no longer ignore social matters, hence, the emergence of liberation theology whose aim was to fight all forms of oppression and exploitation, poverty and marginalisation.

Africa-in-the-Bible studies try to find the presence of Africa and its people in the Bible and the significance of such presence. Besides articulating "Africa's influence on the history of salvation", these studies sought to correct negative and destructive interpretations of some Biblical texts on Africa (UKPONG 1999:317), as well as the tendency in western scholarship to downplay or ignore Africa's presence and contribution in the Biblical story. One skewed reading was that of the so-called curse of Ham, that is found in Genesis 9:18-27. Even though in the story it is Canaan, Ham's son, who is cursed by Noah, later traditions on this narrative placed the curse directly on Ham. The implication of this distortion was simple: Africans are black, because they are cursed, and thus they should not be surprised by their suffering! In South Africa this was then preached from Christian pulpits for many years as black Christians were urged to endure their suffering without complaint, being promised a better life somewhere "up there in heaven". As Ukpong rightly points out, this type of (mis)interpretation is based on the ideology of dominance.

Coupled with this deliberate distortion was an attempt by western scholarship to de-emphasize the presence and contribution of Africa and African peoples in the Bible story. A glaring example is that in western Biblical studies Egypt was often considered to belong to the Ancient Near East rather than to Africa (UKPONG 1999:318). Consequently, African scholars embarked on researches that sought to confirm Africa's presence and influence in the Bible. While the *Africa-in-the-Bible* studies do not involve the search for the theological meaning of texts, they still play a key role in conscientizing Bible readers about the importance of Africa and its people in the Biblical story.

Evaluative Studies look at the encounter between African religion and culture and the Bible, as well as "the theological underpinnings" resulting from such an encounter

(op.cit:318). Ukpong points out that these studies aim to facilitate the Biblical message within the African context and develop “a new understanding of Christianity that would be both African and biblical” (ibid). Since, according to Wimbush, the cultural worlds of readers determine both the texts to be read and their meanings (WIMBUSH 1993:129), these studies seek to evaluate elements of African cultural practices in the light of Biblical witness to arrive at a Christian understanding of these elements and to accentuate their value for Christian witness” (UKPONG 1999:319). The studies also investigate the lessons that may be learnt from a Biblical text or theme for a particular context. “Biblical themes or texts are interpreted against the background of African cultures, religion and life experience,” offering some fresh insights into the meaning of these texts (ibid). Interestingly, Ukpong concedes that the western tools of interpretation still remain helpful in approaching these studies.

Also in these studies is an approach that erects what Ukpong calls “bridgeheads” to communicate the Biblical message (op.cit:320). This would entail the usage of concepts from the Bible or from African culture which show continuity between the latter and Christianity, and with which Africans can easily identify to communicate the Biblical message. For example, presenting Jesus as the ancestor par excellence, or as a healer, or a conqueror of evil spirits and death, makes it easier for Africans to identify with him since Africans venerate ancestors and fear evil spirits, disease and death. These concepts, Ukpong explains, serve as “bridgeheads” for communicating to Africans the role of Jesus Christ in the human family.

Another approach is one that studies the Bible to point to Biblical “insights that offer a theological foundation for a contemporary practice in church or society” (ibid). Using the tools of historical-critical research in analysing the Biblical text, some African scholars studied, for example, the relationship between the mother churches in Jerusalem and Antioch and the mission churches they founded in early Christianity, and have shown how the relationship was marked by the autonomy of the mission churches, instead of their dependence on the mother churches. This could offer a model for the development of the

autonomy of the young churches in Africa today. Ukpong refers to his work (1994) where he has analysed the Biblical foundations for the inculturation of Christianity. He also cites the work of Joseph Osei-Bonsu (1990) in which the latter points to “some New Testament antecedents of contextualisation of Christianity that form the basis for the contextualisation of Christianity in Africa today” (ibid).

The evaluative approach, Ukpong notes, is the most used in Biblical studies in Africa today. He asserts that the approach “is based on the classical understanding of exegesis as being the recovery of the meaning of a text intended by the author through historical-critical tools, and of hermeneutics as the application of the meaning so recovered to a particular contemporary context” (ibid). While conceding that this approach does not pay attention to social, economic and political issues, Ukpong points out that owing to this research, African religion and cultures are today seen not only as a preparation for the gospel – as in comparative studies – but rather as indispensable resources in the interpretation of the gospel message and in the development of African Christianity.

Liberation Hermeneutics. This type of hermeneutics generally uses the Bible as a resource to fight against oppression of any kind. It draws its strength from the Biblical witness that God is opposed to oppression and exploitation and God is on the side of the oppressed and liberates them. The exponents of liberation hermeneutics focussed on political and economic oppression and, later, gender oppression. In South Africa in particular, racial oppression (apartheid) came under the spotlight, as did oppression against women in Sub-Saharan Africa. This saw a rise in Black Theology and Feminist theology. The ground text for the hermeneutics of political liberation was the story of God’s political liberation of the Hebrews in the book of Exodus. The call of God on Israel to take care of the poor among them, and treat everyone in a just manner (Exodus 23:11; Amos 2:6f; 5:21ff), as well as Jesus’ sympathetic attitude towards the poor and his teaching in their favour (Luke 4:18f; 6:20f) provided the grounding for the hermeneutics of economic liberation. The Biblical message is not only that the poor should be loved and cared for, but rather that efforts should be made to work towards eradicating poverty and oppression. Ukpong observes

that Jean-Marc Ela (1994) calls on Christians to link their Biblically-grounded faith with the commitment to transform society, while C S Banana (1981 &1982) uses Marxist analysis of the Biblical text to demonstrate that the Bible not only condemns political oppression and economic exploitation, but it also gives a guide to political and economic transformation of society (op.cit: 321).

Black Theology and the Bible is liberation hermeneutics that confronted the apartheid policy in South Africa that prevailed until 1994 – declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations. Ukpong points out that its point of departure is the ideology of Black Consciousness, which enabled blacks to be critically aware of their situation of oppression and exploitation, which was based on their skin colour, and to analyze their situation and to struggle against it (ibid).

Black Theology also uses the Bible as a resource for this struggle. Although the term “black” covered all who were discriminated against in the apartheid system, including Africans, Indians and Coloureds, this theology was championed mainly by Africans in South Africa. Ukpong identifies two strands in Black Theology. One endeavours to interpret the Bible in the light of the apartheid experience, and to reflect on this experience in the light of the Biblical message. Since the Bible had been wrongly used as an instrument to entrench the apartheid system, it also remained central to Black Theology in its struggle for liberation. Its premise is that the Bible basically contains a message of liberation; “that apartheid is diametrically opposed to the central message of the Bible which is alive of neighbour, and that God is always on the side of the oppressed and therefore in support of the Black liberation struggle” (op.cit: 322). Themes of liberation are studied as a resource of empowerment for the liberation struggle. The other strand starts from the premise that the Bible cannot be accepted uncritically as a resource for the liberation struggle. This strand argues that “the Bible itself was written by the elite to serve their interest, is steeped in the ideology of the elite, is oppressive and in places mutes the voices of the oppressed” (ibid). That is why the apartheid regime in South Africa was able to use it to suppress the black people. If it is to serve the interests of the black struggle, it

must first be liberated from its elitist ideology. This position, Ukpong points out, is strongly articulated by, among others, Itumeleng Mosala, who proposes the use of the historical-materialist analysis of the Biblical text for this purpose (MOSALA 1996:45).

Mosala begins his work by tracing Black theology to the late 1960's and early 1970's as a cultural tool emanating from Black Consciousness (MOSALA 1989:13). It was a reaction to the Christian church's co-operation with the oppressive system and the White western outlook of the church's theology. One may add that according to the Rev Peter Storey, Black theology provided young Black activists with a terrain of 'struggle'. The cultural autonomy of Black people became a critical task of Black theology. This theology targeted theological seminaries as a starting point, and later the wider community of oppressed Blacks as the real ground in which Black theology would develop as an instrument of struggle for the liberation of the oppressed Black masses of South Africa. Mosala, however, importantly decries the stagnation of Black theology, which he attributes to it being the monopoly of educated Black Christians and its inability to impress White theologians against whose theology it was originally developed. He endeavours, in his work, to develop a distinctive Biblical hermeneutics of liberation for Black theology.

Mosala chooses the historical-materialist method as the focus of his analysis (ibid). He notes that this method may be used in historical, cultural and racial and gender variations. He contends that whatever perspective is used, must be tasked on the grid of Black history and culture in order for them to enable the development of a specifically Black Biblical hermeneutics of liberation. Like Justin Ukpong, Mosala recognizes that ideology is behind any Biblical text (UKPONG 1999:322, MOSALA 1989:14). Consequently, the notion of a Biblical text as an innocent, neutral, 'Word of God' is thrown out of the window. He argues that this reference above causes political paralysis in the oppressed masses who read the text. Mosala asserts that Biblical interpretations are always shaped by the social and cultural locations and commitments of those who do them. Thus, the relevant base for Black theology is in the historical, cultural and ideological struggles of Black people. This calls for probing the nature of the struggles behind and beneath the text. Like Takatso

Mofokeng, Mosala argues that there are texts in the Bible which disqualify themselves from Black readers, because of the oppressive, exploitative nature inherent in those texts (MOFOKENG 1988:37). To try and make those texts liberatory is both futile and tragic (ibid). Mosala calls on Black theologians to strive to identify oppression and oppressors, exploitation and exploiters in the Bible. This, adds Mosala, can only be achieved when Black theologians break theologically with traditional assumptions (read White, Western assumptions). This is where Mugambi, Mbiti and Ukpong would disagree: their view is that we need to employ the hermeneutical skills we learnt from the West, in order to advance the course of African/Black Christianity.

Having argued against the notion of the Bible as the revealed "Word of God", Mosala goes on to add another puzzle: he talks of many 'Gods' - white god, black god, god of the wealthy, god of the poor, god of the oppressor, god of the oppressed. All these gods, Mosala implies, are found in the Bible. (Similarly, there are even more than one Jesus in the New Testament.)

Maybe, at this point one needs to be careful not to take Mosala too literally. I hold that there is one Creator God, who manifests Godself in various ways and names: *Modimo, Nkulunkulu, Mvelingqangi, Xikwembu, Allah, Thixo, Qamata, Hlaa-hlaa-macholo, Ramasedi, Naledi-ntle-ya-Bochabela-Seokamela-dichaba*. Whether this one God resides in 'heaven', on 'earth' or in the hole-in-the-ground is a matter of culture and ideology. Mosala's idea of many gods, I believe, should not necessarily lend itself to abuse and manipulation of the deity. Otherwise, it would not help in fostering unity and nation-building in our quest to worship and serve the one God.

It is refreshing to hear Mosala assert that the social, cultural, political, and economic world of the Black working class and peasantry constitutes the only valid hermeneutical starting point of a Black theology of liberation. The virtue of this line of argument is that it 'frees' the Black readers to relate with certain texts which the western mind would not easily comprehend. For example, when Jesus meets with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28ff) on the mountain and discusses his mission with them, it is only the Black 'eyes' that can see, in this text, a man consulting his ancestors and God before embarking on his treacherous mission (WEST 1999:115). It therefore frees the Black reader from feeling guilty about honouring his or her ancestors while worshipping in church.

This does not mean that a text can mean anything. How, then, do we decide on the validity of an interpretation? Justin Ukpong offers a solution: we must question our own ideology vis-à-vis the ideology of the text, and then ensure that our interpretation is not exclusive or discriminatory, and that it promotes the values of the kingdom, namely, love, peace, justice, patience, kindness, humility.

The dilemma that I share with Mosala is that which he states as the contradictory insertion of Black theologians into social structures of the South African capitalist society and its cultural institutions, including the churches. He notes the conflict between a critique of oppression and a hunger to occupy and control the institutions of power that produce this oppression. Indeed, there are things that I state boldly in this piece of work, which I would not dare to say from the pulpit in my congregation. I think about the possible expulsion from the ministry and the impact that would have on my family. This, Mosala rightly points out, does affect Black theologians' choice of Biblical hermeneutics.

Whereas one is impressed with Mosala's argument, it becomes increasingly clear that subversion permeates his work (understandably so). This is summed up in his statement: "Nothing ... could be more subversive ... than enlisting the oppressors and exploiters as comrades in arms" (p33). His work is liberating; it just needs to be rid of the harsh language used in it. While it was difficult at first to deal with Takatso Mofokeng, one

gradually comes to terms with Mosala's assertion that not all of the Bible is on the side of the poor or human rights of the oppressed. Put another way, he contends that oppressive and exploitative texts cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberating texts. This is thought-provoking, and one has still to decide whether to embrace the whole of the Bible or only selected texts. However, it is important to note that Mosala and his colleagues write from a Black Consciousness point of view, with Black liberation as their ultimate goal. In the post-colonialist, post-apartheid Africa and South Africa, some of their arguments may give way to theologies of social reconstruction and transformation. I venture to suggest that Mosala's position will fail the test in the African Independent Churches, where the Bible is "everything". As Mbiti asserts, the Bible is very central in the formation and life of the African Independent Churches (MBITI 2002:1). "These Churches clearly take the Bible as one book, comprising the Jewish Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament. They cherish and defend its authority without compromising it" (ibid).

Ukpong hails the immense contribution that Black Theology has made in South Africa (UKPONG 1999:322). He cites the *Kairos Document* of 1985, which focussed on the ethical and theological evil of apartheid, as an epitomization of the contributions of Black Theology (ibid). Gerald West has pointed out, however, that many Black theologians did not support the *Kairos Document*.

In addition, Black Theology contributed an important dimension to theological reflection in Africa by focussing on the issue of socio-political and economic relations which some of the other theologies on the continent lacked (ibid). Ukpong suggests that a theology of liberation is still relevant in South Africa, despite the abolition of apartheid and the resultant spirit of reconciliation. On the one hand, it will take a very long time to eradicate the legacy of apartheid while on the other, the liberation struggle has to be seen as an ongoing exercise involving the poor and marginalized in society. Black theologians, though, will have to re-evaluate their approach and emphasis in the light of the changed situation. As Ukpong suggests, the direction should now be "total liberation for fullness of life, reconciliation and integration (ibid). This total liberation for fullness of life, of

course, cannot be achieved if we do not take on board the women folk, who should be allowed to read the Bible with women's eyes, hence the significance of feminist interpretations in Africa, which, as shall be seen later, have had an impact on the way African women commuters read the Bible.

Feminist Interpretations in Africa have been well explained by Teresa Okure, who concedes up-front, that she uses the term 'feminism' for lack of a better word. She is sensitive to the fact that feminism has been used to exclude and oppose men. Asserting that the aim of feminist interpretations is to give women a place in the Biblical story and thus provide a more balanced, complete, fully human understanding of the word of God, Okure suggests that a more appropriate expression of feminist hermeneutics is 'doing theology from women's perspective' (OKURE 1993:77). Okure notes importantly, that African women's - and men's - primary consciousness in doing theology is not methodology, but life and life concerns (ibid). Suffice it to say Okure sees feminist interpretations as inclusive: women and men, scholars and non-scholars, rich and poor. This is in contrast to what she calls the traditional male, individualistic, hierarchical and competitive approach (ibid).

Okure provides a fourfold reasoning for the inclusive nature of feminist hermeneutics. She points out that men need to struggle alongside women in the efforts to reread the Bible, in order to bring about "the new humanity redeemed by Christ" (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; 1 Cor 12:12f) (ibid). The Bible, she adds, is basically a community book whose message is addressed to men and women. It is therefore imperative that both women and men re-examine the Christian tradition and address those areas that justify the marginalisation of women. This will help attain humanity's divinely intended status (Gen1:26-28).

Secondly, Okure points out the problems of race and class as related to the gender problem. She notes that the problems of Africa are rooted not only in gender, but also in race and class. This necessitates the feminist hermeneutics' broad framework of survival of the African peoples. The abject poverty, the debilitating wars, the political economic

and religious exploitation, of which both men and women are victims, require that the African women's quest for a liberating theology be linked to the wider quest for the liberation of the African peoples. Hence, the need for men theologians to be partners in feminist interpretations of Scripture (op.cit:78).

Okure observes, thirdly, that in traditional African contexts, fully human undertakings are done jointly by men and women (ibid). She cites as an example the traditional priesthood which embraces both men and women, each in his or her right as a person. She draws parallels with men victims of Apartheid in South Africa, who through their common experience of blackness can feel the brutal discrimination against women.

Lastly, and most importantly, Okure argues that this approach to theology from women's perspective is inspired by the methodology of Jesus himself as recorded in the Gospels. Referring mainly to Luke's Gospel, she sees Jesus' interaction with his opponents, with the women, the poor, the sick, the marginalised as a method which theologians should adopt as a liberating theological methodology.

Okure concludes her good argument with a controversial assertion that "women are by nature creative, intuitive, and comprehensive in their perception of reality," (op.cit:80). While not disputing this assertion, one can only hope that Okure does not mean to imply that men are not creative, intuitive and comprehensive.

To her credit, though, she highlights the folly of women's exclusion of men by addressing only women's issues in their interpretation of the Bible. She cautions that the patriarchal nature of the Bible and doing theology must not be replaced with a matriarchal one (op.cit:81). She concludes by decrying the inferior, subdued position of women in the church. She argues that in many instances, the church and culture are engaged in a conspiracy to undermine women and Jesus' attitude towards them in the Gospels (op.cit:82).

The one aspect that I feel Okure has not addressed is the issue of God's gender. Yes, the Bible is a book in which we find the God that we believe in. It is my contention, however, that our view of God impacts decisively on our view of fellow humans. The traditional view of God as a 'father, provider, warrior, conqueror' has played a major role in the subjection of women. How does one account, for example, for the fact that one of the favourite Jewish men's prayers was to thank God "for not making me a woman"? I want to argue that for as long as we continue to see God as a male, men are likely to continue seeing themselves as little 'gods' in the homes, at workplaces, in churches and therefore in the theological sphere. The starting point, I suggest, is to look at what we believe are both male attributes and female attributes of God. The Bible is awash with examples of both. Then, if we truly believe - as Christians - that God is a Spirit (John 4:24) we should work from the basis that a spirit is 'sexless'. I do believe that this point of departure will go a long way in helping us men to accompany our sisters along the way to a truly liberating "feminist" theology. We have a responsibility to liberate the Bible from the clutches of male domination, realising that in freeing the women theologians, we will be freeing ourselves also.

This liberation hermeneutics focuses on the oppression of women. As Sibeko and Haddad have rightly pointed out, African women in South Africa have experienced "triple oppression" of race, class and gender (SIBEKO & HADDAD 1997:84). They argue that the subordination of women is even more evident in the church, even though they are in the majority, in most congregations. As Teresa Okure puts it, the church and culture are found "to form a coalition against women and Jesus' attitude to them in the Gospels" (OKURE 1993:82). Since in all of these instances the church (read male leadership of the church) uses the Bible to justify the subordination of women, feminist hermeneutics entails a feminist critique of the Bible and of the conventional mode of Biblical interpretation. Ukpong discerns at least five approaches to feminist hermeneutics by African theologians which, he cautions, are not mutually exclusive and have often been used in combination. He cites Mercy Oduyoye (1994:47) in one approach, challenging conventional hermeneutics, which interprets the Bible and the history of Christianity in androcentric

terms (op.cit:323). The presumption that God is male, for example, alluded to in a previous paragraph, and the fact that instances in the Bible where God is described with feminine attributes are conveniently ignored, are sharply criticised by feminist hermeneutics. Biblical translations, which tend to render God's name with the male pronoun, are regarded by feminist hermeneutics as "imprisonment of God in maleness" (ibid). This approach forms the basis for all feminist hermeneutics.

The second approach seeks to critique or re-interpret those Biblical texts that are oppressive to women or portray them as inferior to men. This is done through "a close re-reading" of such texts "in their literary and cultural contexts" (ibid). Ukpong refers to Okure's interpretation of the Adam and Eve story. According to this interpretation, the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, rather than denoting a situation of inferiority as has been often understood, "denotes their identity in nature, their destined marital status and their equality" (ibid). Also, some verses in Pauline letters which seem anti-women are made timeless truths by those who discriminate against women, often being taken out of context (1 Corinthians 11:3ff). One preacher points out, in response to this skewed interpretation, that Paul upholds the cultural custom of women being veiled to the Corinthian women, in a congregation which was abusing the idea of freedom to the extent that personal morality and congregational life were collapsing.

The third approach focuses on texts that show the positive role of women in the history of salvation or in the life of the church. Ukpong cites the works of Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, who analyses Jesus' teachings, parables and miracles showing Jesus' attitude to women to have been positive; Joyce Tzabedze, who has studied the positive role of women in the life of the early church as reflected in 1 Timothy and Ephesians; and Mbuy Beya, who has highlighted the role of women in the history of Israel, such as the unnamed widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8), as an inspiration for modern women in their struggle in a patriarchal world (ibid).

The fourth approach searches for a guide to interpreting both the negative and positive Biblical texts about women by enquiring into the basic biblical theological orientation. According to Ukpong, this is exemplified in Mercy Oduyoye's identifying "the theology of creation which affirms the basic equality of man and women created in the image of God, and the theology of community which calls for the exclusion of violence and discrimination in society", both of which theologies are fundamental to all Biblical teaching (ibid).

The fifth approach endeavours to interpret Biblical texts from the perspective of African women's experience. In this regard Nasimiyu-Wasike is credited with re-reading the stories of polygamy in the Old Testament from African women's experience of polygamy, and being able to show that contrary to the common assumption that the Old Testament extols polygamy, it contains a critique of this institution (UKPONG op.cit:323-324). The two main concerns of feminist hermeneutics are a critique of androcentrism, both of earlier Biblical interpreters and of the Bible itself, as well as a recovery of the forgotten and silenced voices, images and contributions of women in the Biblical text. This hermeneutics does not seek to invent new critical tools for reading the Bible; rather as Okure sums it, its aim "is to give women a place in the [Biblical] story and thus bring about a more complete and balanced, hence fully human and truly liberating, understanding of the word of God" (OKURE 1993:76). We now turn to the third phase as explained by Ukpong.

Phase 3:1990's

This is the phase in which Biblical studies in Africa became more assertive and proactive, intentionally making an original contribution to Biblical interpretation. Ukpong points out that the two main methodologies of inculturation and liberation, which blossomed in the second phase, are carried forward with two new orientations in the third phase (op.cit:324). The one orientation is that which acknowledges and recognizes the ordinary African reader as an important partner in academic Bible reading, seeking to integrate his or her perspective in the process of academic interpretation of the Bible. This orientation finds support in Mugambi's assertion that Africans have responded to the gospel in their

own way “and only God is justified to pass judgement on the appropriation of the gospel by Africans” (MUGAMBI 1995:xiii). Ukpong refers to Gerald West’s *Contextual Bible Study* method as an example of this orientation. The other orientation seeks both to recognize the role of the ordinary reader as well as to make the African context the subject of Biblical interpretation, and is exemplified by *Inculturation Hermeneutics*. In this phase, therefore, the African context is seen as both “providing the critical resources for Biblical interpretation and as being the subject of interpretation” (UKPONG 1999:324).

Contextual Bible Study as Gerald West puts it, “is not a fixed formula or a set method; it is a process” (WEST 1993:11). West shares his experience of having done contextual Bible study with others in the church and community, and he identifies four commitments of people who participate in contextual Bible Study groups: First is a commitment to read the Bible from the perspective of the South African context, particularly from the perspective of the poor and marginalized; the second is a commitment to read the Bible in community with others, particularly those whose contexts differ from our own; the third is a commitment to read the Bible critically; and the fourth is a commitment to individual and societal transformation through contextual Bible study (op.cit:12).

West points out that we all bring our contexts with us to our readings of the Bible, a fact that has not always been acknowledged. My context includes, for example, the fact that I am black, male, and grew up in a poor background in the Soweto township of Diepkloof. I, therefore, do need to recognize that these and other related factors shape my reading of the Bible. Contextual Bible study, West asserts, recognizes that we are all shaped by our contexts to some extent, and that our readings of the Bible are influenced by our contexts. The specific concrete human situation against which the Bible is read, in West’s case, is that of racial oppression and economic exploitation with its accompanying poverty. Thus the Bible is read, within the context of faith, with a commitment to personal and societal transformation. Ukpong notes that in this case, contextual Bible study shares the same goal as Black Theology, except that the starting point of the latter is black consciousness (UKPONG 1999:324).

The Bible bears testimony that "God speaks specifically to specific people in specific life situations" (WEST 1993:13). The many different realities in South Africa have resulted in many different readings of the Bible. For example, some people have read the Bible to support the heinous apartheid policy while others have read it to support the liberation struggle. Similarly, some people continue to read the Bible to maintain wealth and power, while others read it in their struggle for justice and democracy. This raises the need to be even more specific about what is meant by "reading the Bible from and for the South African context" (ibid). Hence, West points out that those who are committed to contextual Bible study have decided to read the Bible from a specific perspective within the South African context: the perspective of the poor and marginalized. West defines the poor and oppressed as those who are "socially, politically, economically, or culturally marginalized and exploited" (op.cit:14). This choice was made, West explains, because of the belief that God is particularly concerned with the plight of the poor and the oppressed. Readings of the Bible and concern for justice and righteousness do indicate clearly God's particular concern for the marginalized and the vulnerable. Reading the Bible, one finds a God who hears the cry of widows, orphans, women, strangers, the handicapped, the poor, and the oppressed. In Exodus 3:7 God sees the suffering and hears the cry of the slaves in Egypt, and the prophets consistently speak out and act against injustice to the poor (Isaiah 58:6ff; Amos 5:11f). The Gospels tell the story of a Jesus who was born among the poor and oppressed in Palestine, who chose to remain with the death of the poor and oppressed on a cross. For justice and righteousness to be achieved in South Africa, the needs of the poor and marginalized have to be addressed. Reading the Bible from the perspective of the poor and marginalized means choosing to hear the concerns and cries of the vulnerable and marginalized, and God's concern for them. West cautions that such a commitment requires not only an acknowledgment and recognition of the effect of the South African context on ourselves and our readings of the Bible, but also an analysis and understanding of the South African context (ibid). He argues that in order to hear the concerns of the poor and marginalized, and God's concern for them, we have to be prepared to analyze our context. This analysis should compel us to ask searching questions such as who the

poor and marginalized are and why they are poor and marginalized. We should be willing to probe and analyse the religious, political, economic, social and cultural aspects of our South African context. West reckons that when we are willing to analyse South African reality from the perspective of the poor and marginalized, we shall have begun to take part in the process of contextual Bible study, and we should be ready to take the second commitment of that process.

West points out the richness we experience through reading the Bible with others, as we learn by listening to others and by sharing our own contributions with others. Recognizing that theologically and Biblically trained scholars often find it difficult to hear and learn from ordinary readers of the Bible, West calls for “a conversion experience”, suggesting that there is a “need to be converted to a sense of community consciousness” (op.cit:15). West deliberately emphasises reading the Bible “*with*”, rather than “*for*” ordinary readers, citing two temptations that trained readers of the Bible face:

“biblical scholars either romanticize and idealize the contribution of the poor and marginalized or they minimize and rationalize that community’s contribution. Both an uncritical ‘listening to’, that romanticizes and idealizes the interpretations of the poor and marginalized, and an arrogant ‘speaking for’, that minimized and rationalizes the interpretations of the poor and marginalized, must be problematised” (WEST 1999:37).

Through the contextual Bible study process, West attempts to deal with the above temptations by reading the Bible *with* ordinary readers. This means that we as trained readers should acknowledge and recognize the privilege and power that our training give us over the group. We must strive to “empower ordinary readers in the group to discover and then to acknowledge and recognize their own identity and the value and significance of their own contributions and experiences” (WEST 1993:16). He notes, very importantly, that readers of the Bible from the poor communities have usually had their interpretations silenced and ignored by the dominant interpretations as their own. So when we read the Bible with ordinary readers we must work together to break the “culture of silence” and

to recover the identity and experiences of the poor and oppressed (ibid). When we talk to each other, recognizing the unequal power relations between us, we become able to construct transforming discourse. The process of *reading with* can only prevail if both trained and ordinary readers become active “subjects” in the reading process. West asserts that in the contextual Bible study process the trained readers need not feel guilty about their theological and Biblical training, while the ordinary readers must be able to speak with their own voice irrespective of how different this voice is from the dominant voices.

In a bid to highlight the enriching experience of reading the Bible with the poor and marginalized, West cites the Lord’s Prayer as an example. He asks, “what is the first request concerning their needs that the disciples are taught by Jesus to make of God when they pray?” and “Why does Jesus teach his disciples to make this their first request?” (op.cit:17) West contends that the answer one gives to these questions will indicate something of who one is and the context one comes from. He observes that scholarly commentaries do not even ask these questions. (After reading West’s work I personally asked my white ministerial colleagues the same questions and their answers were, predictably “hallowed be your name”, “your kingdom come” or “may your will be done”.) West points out that the above questions were asked by an African reader from a poor community, because he noticed that the first request Jesus teaches his disciples to ask of God when they pray in the request for daily bread: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Coming from a poor community, this reader understands how important basic food like bread is each day to someone who is poor; it is fundamental to his very existence. Jesus also understands this, hence, he teaches his disciples, who are poor like himself, to make this their first request. More penetrating and profound interpretations like this one do emerge when we read the Bible with ordinary readers from poor and marginalized communities.

West suggests that whereas “community consciousness” is crucial to the process of contextual Bible study, equally important is “critical consciousness” (WEST 1993:18). He

explains that a “critical consciousness” enables us to probe beneath the surface, to become suspicious of the status quo, and ask (especially) the question “Why?” This probing includes “systematic and structured analysis” (ibid). A famous statement by Don Helder Camara provides West with an example of critical consciousness “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint; when I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist” (op.cit:19). It is thus not good enough to accept that the poor have no food; rather, this reality must be probed. While many South Africans from poor and marginalized communities are critically conscious in socio-political matters, not many of the same people have a critical consciousness in the area of their faith. West points out that very few Christians in Africa ask questions about their theologies and their readings of the Bible. He concedes that we do not analyse systematically the way Christian tradition has affected our context, yet “the Christian faith has had both a profound oppressive and liberatory effect on our context” (ibid). Critical consciousness, therefore, is a commitment to the contextual Bible study process, that could be developed by beginning to read the Bible critically, thus helping to build a critical church and community that can play a vital role in analysing the past and present and shaping the future. This would be a small, but significant contribution towards constructing a more critical society.

West offers two reasons for the need for commitment to reading the Bible critically: the first being a concern that all readers recognize the ideological nature of the Bible and its interpretations; and the second being a concern that all readers develop critical skills and tools to empower themselves to do their own independent critical analysis of the Bible and its interpretations. Having accepted that Biblical interpretations are influenced and shaped by the interests and life-experiences of those who read it, West reckons that it is difficult to accept that the Bible itself is influenced and shaped by the interests and life-experiences of those who produced it (op.cit:20). Just as different Biblical interpretations represent different and sometimes contradictory perspectives, so do different Bible texts represent different and sometimes contradictory perspectives. This is exemplified by the four gospels, each of which presents a different perspective on Jesus, as well as Kings’ and Chronicles’ presentation of different perspectives on the period of David’s reign. The

different perspectives – or ideologies – of the Bible have to be investigated if we are committed to reading the Bible from the perspective of the poor and marginalized, and to reading it in community with others (ibid).

The need for this investigation is borne by the fact that throughout history the Bible and its interpretations have been used to oppress and exploit ordinary people. The apartheid theology in South Africa is an example of such abuse of the Bible. West laments the fact that some trained readers, on realizing that the Bible was being used to oppress African people, ended up rejecting or abandoning the Bible. He advocates that trained readers continue to read and appropriate the Bible since the Bible is a significant resource for ordinary people “in their struggle for survival, liberation and life,” and it is “a symbol of the presence of the God of life” (WEST 1999:9). He asserts that it is important “to stand in continuity with and to bear witness to the suppressed voices within the Bible and the neglected interpretations of the Bible” (WEST 1993:20-21). West warns that if we do not explore liberating and transformative ways of reading the Bible in our context we will be abandoning the Bible to those who use it to legitimate oppression, exploitation and domination. He adds that we need to honour the memory of our forebears in the Bible who have struggled for the values of the community of God. West contends that the faithfulness of our forebears to God’s calling provides us with a “dangerous memory” which reminds, challenges and empowers us to continue to find critical and creative methods of reading the Bible in and for our context (ibid).

The ideological nature of the Bible brings out an interestingly conflicting set of viewpoints from Gerald West and Takatso Mofokeng: West argues that it is dangerous to become selective in our reading by picking and choosing what fits our perspective and ignoring what does not; while Mofokeng argues that there are texts that have long disqualified themselves in the eyes of the oppressed people (MOFOKENG 1988:37). Mofokeng rejects the notion of the unity of the Bible, arguing that some texts lend themselves to only oppressive tendencies, because of “their inherent oppressive nature” (ibid). West counters by saying that selective reading is not a critical reading of the Bible. He contends that if we

read the Bible critically, "we can and should read any and every part of the Bible" (WEST 1993:21).

This, West points out, can be done through three different ways of reading the Bible, which he calls "modes " of reading the Bible critically. The first "mode of reading" is one in which the Bible is read in its historical and sociological context (ibid). This mode focuses on the historical and sociological context from which the Biblical text comes. For example, it investigates the historical and sociological situation that lies behind the gospels in order to understand Jesus and the gospels more fully. The second mode of reading the Bible critically is to read it carefully and closely in its literary context, and it focuses on the different types of literature or writings in the Bible and the various relationships within the text. For example, it focuses on what a gospel is and how and why Luke structures his gospel in the way that he does. The third method of reading the Bible critically is to read it in its thematic and symbolic context as a whole, that is, focussing on the major themes and symbols in the whole Bible. For example, it emphasizes the central themes that run like a thread throughout the Bible.

West notes that whereas the three modes of reading the Bible critically overlap and can be used together in the contextual Bible study process, it is still useful to differentiate between these critical forms of reading, because we then become aware of a variety of critical skills and concepts which are helpful both in reading the Bible and in "reading" our context (WEST 1993:22). Trained readers have acquired critical tools and concepts in their theological and Biblical training and should therefore share them with the ordinary readers who, though having critical resources, do not usually have a systematic understanding of the skills and concepts which constitute a critical reading of the Bible (ibid). West points out that the commitment of the contextual Bible study to a critical reading of the Bible is not in opposition to life of faith, but rather, on the contrary the relationship between our faith and our context.

West asserts that the commitment to personal and social transformation through contextual Bible study is usually an integral part of Bible study (op.cit:23). He notes that the Bible is

already a resource for transformation for many ordinary readers since they have shown a remarkable willingness and ability to appropriate and apply the Bible to reality. West, however, is quick to point out two areas of concern within this willingness to read the Bible for transformation: One is the tendency to appropriate and apply the Bible uncritically as has been the case in South Africa and elsewhere, which can be both “dishonest and dangerous” (ibid). He cites apartheid theology as an example of a process of Biblical appropriation and application which is both dishonest and dangerous. It is dangerous, because it has led to brutal oppression, callous exploitation, untold suffering and death; and it is dishonest in that it (ab)uses the Bible selectively for narrow, selfish interests. It is in this light that West cautions that while embracing the readiness of ordinary readers to appropriate and apply the Bible to the South African context, the process of contextual Bible study emphasizes the need for it to be done critically. “Reading the Bible critically is the first step in a critical appropriation and ‘reading’ our context critically is the second step” (ibid). We are able to appropriate the Bible more carefully only when we study the Bible systematically and analyse our context systematically, because then we can identify both the similarities and differences between the Bible and its context on the one hand, and ourselves and our context on the other. West reckons that appropriation is the most important part of the process of contextual Bible study (ibid). The other concern that West points out is that our willingness to read the Bible for transformation should include both the personal and the social. He refers to some contexts in South Africa, for example in white churches and communities, where Christians have concentrated on individual transformation, and in other contexts, for example in black trade union movement, where Christians have concentrated on socio-politico-economic transformation (op.cit:24). He is supported by Villa-Vicencio, who argues that “sin is not to be confined to people’s relationship with God or even relationships with their neighbours. It is seen also to be embedded in the structures of society itself” (DE GRUCHY & VILLA-VICENCIO[eds] 1994:190-191). Consequently, salvation includes liberation from oppressive and unjust social, economic and political structures, which are a manifestation of social or structural sin (ibid). Hence, the engagement of the church in socio-politico-economic matters “lies at the heart of its evangelical and salvific mission” (ibid). The process of contextual Bible

study, as West contends, is committed to both personal and social transformation that “includes the existential, the political, the economic, the cultural, and the religious spheres of life” (WEST 1993:24).

West points out that the key to the process of contextual Bible study is facilitation, since it cannot just happen on its own. He identifies the five most important marks of a good facilitator as suggested by participants in a workshop that he (West) held on contextual Bible study:

“the facilitator should use a method that encourages the whole group to participate; the facilitator should manage conflict and make the group a safe place for member contributions; the facilitator should train others to become facilitators; the facilitator should clarify what is not clear and should summarize the discussion; and the facilitator should enable the group to become aware of and involved in the needs of the community. A facilitator, then, is one who helps the progress and empowerment of others, who makes it easier for others to act, to contribute, and to acquire skills” (ibid).

West concludes by suggesting that anybody who is willing to learn and to be an enabler and not a dominator, can be a facilitator since community consciousness and critical consciousness cannot develop in dictatorial forms of Bible study. Mutual respect and trust, coupled with a deep sense of community, can only breed democratic processes where self-confidence, responsibility, and accountability grow naturally. This leads us to the closely related hermeneutics of Inculturation.

Inculturation Hermeneutics has become a very popular hermeneutic, and Mugambi points out that the term *inculturation* was coined recently by Catholic theologians “to explain the process by which the Catholic Church becomes rooted in every culture, without destroying Catholic ecclesiastical identity, tradition and history” (MUGAMBI 1995:8). He adds that the semantic inspiration of *inculturation* is incarnation (ibid). The latter, in theological terms, is the manifestation of the divine in human corporeality – God becoming manifest

in Jesus of Nazareth. Similarly, "inculturation is the manifestation of the Church in the various cultures where it has been introduced and established" (ibid). Tracing the history of inculturation to Jesuit theologians in the early 1960's, Mugambi quotes Aylward Shorter's definition of inculturation as "the on-going dialogue between faith or cultures" (op.cit:9). The inculturation hermeneutic, notes Ukpong, refers to Biblical interpretation which seeks to make the African context, and any socio-cultural context fort that matter, the subject of interpretation (UKPONG 1995:5). This hermeneutic is different from that which makes another context the subject of interpretation and then apply the result in the African context. It is also different from that which reads the context into the Biblical text. Ukpong points out that the central concern of the inculturation hermeneutic is to make Jesus and his message challenge contemporary society and the life of individuals. It seeks to find the meaning of Christian life in Jesus in the African socio-cultural context in the light of the gospel message. Ukpong sums up the many questions raised by this hermeneutic thus: "how to make the word of God alive and active in contemporary African societies and in the lives of individual Christians within their socio-cultural contexts" (op.cit:4). He cites the five components of the interpretation process: interpreter, context, text, conceptual framework and procedure, which he asserts, "are consciously informed by the world-view of, and the life experience within", a particular socio-cultural context that has been made the subject of interpretation (ibid).

Ukpong points out that the inculturation hermeneutic focuses on "the reader/interpreter and his/her context in relation to the text and its context" (op.cit:5). He cites Barton's classification of modern Biblical criticism into those that focus on the text, those that focus on the historical events narrated in the text, those that focus on the writer(s) of the text, and those that focus on the reader (ibid). Ukpong asserts that the inculturation hermeneutic falls under the last group, but he explains that "reader" should be understood as "reader-in-context", meaning the reader who consciously takes his or her socio-cultural context as a point of departure in the reading, and who is part of the Christian community whose world-view and life experience he or she shares. The reader, in the inculturation hermeneutic, is required to be part and parcel of the culture that is the subject of

interpretation. This reader would have to be someone who has acquired knowledge, experience, and the insight of that culture and should be capable of viewing it critically. Ukpong observes that apart from the conceptual framework used and the socio-cultural context that forms the point of departure for interpretation, in interpreting a text the interpreter may be further conditioned by factors which could be deemed personal and subjective. These factors may be social, like the reader's status in society, or biological, like the reader's gender. These factors give rise to biases in the interpreter's mind as he or she tackles the Biblical text. In inculturation hermeneutics the interpreter has to acknowledge such conditioning and be critically aware of it and use it positively. The interpreter should analyse such influences critically thereby exercising control over them, and use them "positively, critically and creatively" (op.cit:6). The participatory nature of the inculturation hermeneutic demands the involvement of the interpreter and his or her world in the world of the text.

Context refers generally to the background against which the text is to be interpreted. It refers, in particular, to an existing human community, which could include a nation, a local church, a race, which is designated as the subject of the interpretation "with the people's world-view, and historical, social, economic, political and religious life experiences" (UKPONG 1995:6). It is a dynamic reality with its norms and values, needs and aspirations. Religious issues, like the mode of Christian worship, and socio-politico-economic issues, like capitalist apartheid, provide materials for analysis within the context. Ukpong notes that the inculturation hermeneutic, like other (so-called) Third World hermeneutics, is a contextual hermeneutic, meaning that it is done consciously from the perspective of a particular context. The analysis of the context, in this case, is done from the perspective of the world-view of the culture concerned. The term "contextual" may also refer to the fact that every hermeneutic is informed by the perspective of a particular context "whether this is adverted to, acknowledged or not" (ibid). Biblical scholars and theologians have become more and more convinced that, ideology aside, "no exegesis can be a cultural, that is, no exegesis is done from a universal perspective" (ibid). Human

beings' perception of reality is from particular, rather than universal, perspectives. This quote from Ukpong encapsulates the above argument:

“Human perception is selective, limited, culture-bound and prone to be unaware that it is any or all of the above. The cognitive maps with which we select, sort and categorize complex data interpose themselves between events and our interpretation of them whether we like it or not. The only real question, therefore, may be whether to choose to raise this process to a conscious level and examine it or prefer to leave our biases alone” (ibid).

On the other hand, Ukpong asserts, the Biblical text itself is not acultural and universal, but is steeped in the culture and life experiences of those communities that produced them. Any reading of a text can therefore not be expected to be acultural, thus ruling out any possibility of an innocent interpretation, an innocent interpreter, or an innocent text, hence, the assertion that every hermeneutic or theology is contextual.

While this may refer to the Biblical text to be interpreted, it also refers to the theme of the text to be interpreted. Ukpong points out that the focus of interpretation is on “the theological meaning of the text within a contemporary context” (ibid). The interpretation involves interactive engagement between the Biblical text and a particular contemporary socio-cultural matter such that the gospel message serves to critique the cultures, and the culture perspective enlarges and enriches the understanding of the text. An integrated view of reality is maintained in the hermeneutical process in such a way that religious issues are not discussed separate from their secular dimension in implications, and vice-versa. Texts are interpreted holistically in inculturation hermeneutic, which interpretation may be said to rotate on the following axes: “the inner logic of the text; the immediate, mediate and larger literary context of the text; the historical context of the text; and the contemporary context of the interpreter” (UKPONG 1995:7). Inculturation hermeneutics puts emphasis on a careful analysis of the structure of the argument or narrative in the text in order to grasp the inner logic of the text. Studying the text within its literary context, which is the next axis, is based on the fact that a text is not seen as independent of the

larger whole to which it belongs, nor is the Bible seen as the sum total of its parts. Rather, Ukpong notes, a text is seen as “a living component in the interactive process of interpretation” (ibid), and must therefore be understood as an integral part of the whole. Possible lapses into overly subjective and skewed understanding of the text are avoided if we study a text in this way, thus giving a balanced theology. Another axis is the historical context of a text, where again the text is not seen as an isolated entity, but as belonging to a particular historical socio-cultural context. Hence, an important step in interpretation is analysis of the socio-cultural context of the text. This is vital for determining the particular orientation of the text, and giving a historical perspective to the text without which it is impossible to make a clear assessment of the Biblical “world” that made the text meaningful in the first place (ibid). A careful analysis of the historical socio-cultural context of the text is thus important for making the text resonate in the present context. Ukpong emphasizes that the strongest and most specific feature of the inculturation hermeneutics is critical analysis of the interpreter’s context, which has already been discussed above. He cautions, though, that this is not merely reading the interpreter’s context into the text or reflecting it in the interpretation. A critical analysis of the interpreter’s context enables him or her to be conscious of the influences that impact on his or her reading of the text and to utilize them positively and thus exercise control over them. It also helps him or her to understand the text in a contemporary setting. Ukpong argues 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” (UKPONG 1995:7). To interpret a text, therefore, means placing it into interaction with our world and with our personal being to address and question them.

Ukpong reckons that the exegetical conceptual framework, together with its procedure, is the most important component of the interpretation process (ibid). The framework is a “mental construct” within which the exegete is trained, into which he or she grows and with which he or she operates (ibid). Exegetical framework are geared towards certain areas of concern about the Biblical text and include the historical-critical method, literary criticism, and liberation hermeneutics. The inculturation hermeneutics emerged as an

attempt to respond to questions and issues emanating from the African Christian experience with the Bible which present exegetical frameworks are unable to handle adequately. Ukpong points out that all exegetical frameworks comprise theoretical assumptions “which frame the understanding of exegesis, its operation, and condition the exegete in his/her activity” (UKPONG 1995:8). He cites as an example the framework of the historical-critical method, within which the aim of exegesis is the recovery of history, that is, the historical context of a text, its historical meaning, and wherein the exegete applies historical tools to a text. In this instance, it is assumed that a text can only have one meaning, and that is the meaning, which was intended by the writer and could have been understood by the writer’s first audience. Within this framework, therefore, literary questions such as the structural relationship among characters in a text are regarded as irrelevant (ibid). Thus, the framework within which the exegete is working conditions him or her as to the type of questions he or she may put to the text and come up with a satisfactory answer. Ukpong deduces that ultimately, the exegetical framework is the product of certain cultural factors: “the assumptions of any framework are derived from the basic assumptions of a particular culture/cultures about reality and the collective and shared personal experiences in the culture/cultures at a particular time” (op.cit:8).

Basic cultural assumptions on which inculturation hermeneutic is based, for the purpose of this study, are observed in the African context. While conceding that there is a multiplicity of African cultures, Ukpong nevertheless argues that there are at least four identifiable aspects that are common to all African world-views and that belong to the root paradigm of African cultures. These aspects constitute the basic cultural assumptions on which the theory of inculturation hermeneutic is grounded, and they are: the unitive view of reality wherein reality is seen not as composed of matter and spirit, profane and sacred, secular and religious, but as a unity with visible and invisible aspects (UKPONG 1995:8; 1999:325). The world is seen as a unity having visible and invisible dimensions, and the human being is not seen as composed of body and soul, but rather as a single being with visible and invisible dimensions. The dead are regarded as human persons who currently exist in the invisible realm of the world, which means they inhabit the same world with

visible humans, but are invisible (ibid). The spirits, both good and bad, also inhabit the same world with visible human beings, but are unseen by humans. The spirits and the dead interact freely with human beings, but are unseen.

The second basic feature of African world-views is the divine origin of the universe and the interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos (UKPONG 1995:9). The whole universe is seen as participating in the one life of God, and there is supposed to exist a web of relationships between God, humanity and the cosmos wherein the human being is at the centre such that the conduct of human beings affects not only their relationship with one another, but also with God and nature (ibid).

The third basic feature is the African sense of community, which is explained more fully under the heading "Ubuntu and the Bible" in Chapter 3. The life of the individual human being and even of inanimate objects in the cosmos find meaning and worth in terms of the structure of relationships within the human community, and between the latter and nature. Humankind is regarded as the custodian of the earth, and "past, present and future generations form one community" (ibid). The individual is defined by the community to which he or she belongs – for example, the world's most loved statesman, Nelson Mandela, is popularly known by his clan name, Madiba. Hence, Ukpong observes, African writers replace the western dictum "I think therefore I am" with the African thought system "I belong therefore I am" (ibid). Problems and concerns are seen and treated not as a function of the deeds and dispositions of the individuals concerned, but basically as a function of the structure of the relationships within the community. For example, an individual's wealth or poverty is judged by the way he or she shares in the blessings or misfortune of the community. Death, sickness and natural disasters are seen not in terms of natural causes, but in terms of negative forces such as witchcraft in the community. The fourth feature of the African world-view is "the emphasis on the concrete rather than on the abstract, on the practical rather than on the theoretical" (ibid).

All the above cultural assumptions lie at the basis of the African's experience of the Bible, and they inform the understanding and methodology of the inculturation hermeneutics.

The African commuter-train worshipper naturally brings these cultural assumptions into the reading and interpretation of the Bible.

Methodological Presuppositions. There are certain presuppositions about the nature of the Bible and the goal of exegesis, with which the inculturation hermeneutic framework operates, which Ukpong explains. The Bible, in the framework of inculturation hermeneutic, is seen as “a sacred classic ... a book of devotion, the word of God containing norms for Christian living as well as an ancient literary document ‘worth attention beyond its time’” (UKPONG 1995:9). Interpretation focuses on the interface between these two categories and on the theological meaning of the text for today. The goal of exegesis is thus to actualize the theological meaning of the text in a contemporary context. Since the Bible is an ancient document, attention to the historical context of the text being interpreted is required of the exegete. The latter is required to employ the historical-critical tools. These tools should be used precisely as servant and not as master, because it is the theological meaning of the text which is sought and not its historical context. Since the Bible is a sacred religious book, the presence of the miraculous and the supernatural in it is taken for granted. The Biblical text is seen within the inculturation hermeneutic framework as “plurivalent” - capable of yielding many different, yet valid meanings depending on the point of departure of reading it (ibid). However, Ukpong warns of the possibility of correct and wrong readings of texts, because, firstly, any meaning derived from a text has to be judged in the light of the meaning of the whole Bible and, secondly, the theology of any text has to be judged “against the basic biblical affirmations and principles” such as the love of God and neighbour and the existence of God as creator and provider (UKPONG 1995:10). Ukpong further points out that the meaning of a text is not seen as concealed in the history of the text, but is seen as “a function of the interaction of the contemporary context with the text and its context” (ibid). The meaning is seen as emerging, within a contemporary context, from the nature of the interaction and relationships among the role players in the text in the light of its historical context. In other words, the meaning of the text is revealed by the way in which the interaction and the interrelationship among the different role players in the text seen against its context resonate in our context. This

means that both the context of the text and of the reader play a crucial role in the production of meaning. "Inculturation hermeneutic sees the bible as a document of faith and therefore demands entry into and sharing the faith of the Biblical community expressed in the text" (ibid).

Procedure in Inculturation Hermeneutics. Ukpong asserts that the components of the interpretation process comprise a preliminary condition and a series of five steps of analysis. The preliminary condition for engaging in the inculturation hermeneutics is "awareness of, and commitment to, the inculturation movement" which seeks strong interaction of the Christian faith with all aspects of African (or any) culture, life and thought (ibid). Supplementary to this is the interpreter's critical review of his or her conditioning and biases with the aim of utilizing them critically and creatively. The interpreter must be committed to the Christian faith and to the process of actualizing the Biblical message within the context.

The first step in the process of interpretation is to identify the specific context of the interpreter which corresponds or approximates dynamically to the historical context of the text, and then clarify the interpreter's perspective in relation to the text. In the same way as "dynamically equivalent" words are used to translate the Biblical text in the absence of exact equivalents, "dynamically equivalent" contexts are used to mediate the message of the text in the absence of exact equivalent contexts (ibid). Identifying the interpreter's specific context and perspective involves interaction between the total context of the interpreter and the historical context of the text. The reader has to ask what socio-cultural, political, economic or religious situation the text reflects, and what situation in the reader's context approximates to it. Using historical research, the reader finds out how and why the text would have been significant and meaningful in its historical context, and what concerns in the reader's context this reflects. Ukpong uses the parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1ff) where a historical research reveals widespread corruption and exploitation in Palestine at the time of Jesus' earthly life reflected in the parable. The interpretation process would next identify a comparable situation of exploitation in a

contemporary context. Another example is the story of the woman who suffered from bleeding (Luke 8:40ff).

The second step analyses the context of interpretation; and the interpreter's context forms the background against which the text is to be read. The context of the interpreter – identified in the first step – is analysed at five levels, which Ukpong points out, may not all be required in all instances. Using the basic assumptions of the inculturation framework in the analysis, the level of phenomenological analysis seeks to clarify the identity of, say, the shrewd manager, and this would involve a clarification of the particular issue of exploitation against which the text is to be interpreted. Ukpong cites the example of West Africa, where cases of middlemen produce traders who exploit peasant farmers through low pricing of farm produce and charging huge interest rates on agricultural loans (op.cit:11). In the case of the woman suffering from bleeding this would mean clarifying the identity of the woman and the inability to get a cure for a similar ailment in a contemporary Africa context, especially since cases like these are very real to African readers. The socio-anthropological analysis seeks to explain the issues in terms of the people's world-view (ibid). In the case of the parable of the shrewd manager this would mean an analysis of the people's world-view in respect of exploitation. Ukpong points out, for example, that the West African traditional world-view regards material possessions as God's gift to the community, and they detest exploitation (ibid). In the case of the woman suffering from bleeding, attention would focus on the consequences of such ailment in a contemporary African woman's social and religious life. Ukpong observes that the first thing to strike an African reader is that for the twelve years that the woman had this ailment she could not bear children. Therefore the misfortune of not bearing children and other ailments associated with this in the community could be "dynamically" associated with this situation (ibid). The historical analysis investigates the issues in relation to the people's life history. In the parable of the shrewd manager this would mean finding out how exploitation came into being in the society despite it being distasteful to the people's traditional world-view. Ukpong points out that the case of the bleeding woman does not warrant historical analysis. The social analysis probes into the

interconnectedness of the dynamics of the society in relation to the issue. The question is how the situation is connected to other aspects of society – political, economic or religious – and how it is being maintained in existence by the dynamics of the society. In the case of the parable of the shrewd manager this question is asked about exploitation, while in the case of the bleeding woman the question becomes that of the socio-cultural effect of the situation on the woman. The religious analysis seeks to show the religious dimension of the situation in the lives of the people. In the parable of the shrewd manager the religious implications of exploitation would be probed, while in the case of the bleeding woman the religious implications of the ailment would be probed.

The third step in the interpretation process is analysis of the historical context of the text. This step is important for gaining a proper focus for discussing the text. In the case of the parable of the shrewd manager, Ukpong notes, a proper analysis of the socio-economic conditions in Palestine at the time of Jesus' earthly life gives a lot of insight into this story. Such analysis, for example, reveals that the manager was not necessarily defrauding the business by "altering the debit notes" of his clients, but rather he was exercising his authority to give discount to customers (UKPONG 1995:12). In the case of the bleeding woman, an investigation into the historical context of her situation reveals that, according to Leviticus 15:19ff, she was unclean and so was everything and everybody she touched. She could also not take part in divine worship. All the above insights help in sharpening the focus of the text in relation to a contemporary context.

The fourth step analyses the text in the light of the contemporary context that has already been analysed. This step could begin with a critical review of current interpretations, and follow with a textual analysis employing different tools depending on the nature and motif of the text. Ukpong reckons that it is most important to place the text in its larger contexts "within the canon for the purpose of further clarifying the focus of interpretation" (ibid). In the case of the parable of the shrewd manager and the story of the bleeding woman, the immediate and mediate contexts of the text are identified after a review of literature, and each text is located within the general framework of Luke's theology and style. At times

it may be more appropriate to locate the text “within an entire corpus (e.g. gospels, Pauline literature, etc.) or testament” (ibid). After this, follows interpretation whose goal is to arrive at the meaning of the text dynamically in a contemporary context. The text is interrogated with questions that arise from insights gained from the analysis of the context of interpretation with a view to gaining an insight into the nature of the functioning of the text in relation to the shrewd manager, such interrogation will reveal that the parable is a critique of the rich man, who had made his fortune through exploiting the peasant farmers in the community. “and, hence, a critique of the middlemen traders in our contemporary African context who exploit peasant farmers in their communities” (UKPONG 1995:12). It also reveals the later role of the manager as one who eased the economic burden of the farmers through giving discounts to them. One could talk of the manager playing a small but significant part in the redistribution of wealth. This challenges contemporary Christians to fight exploitation in whatever form they meet it and with any means they have at their disposal. In the case of the bleeding woman, such interrogation reveals the need to rise above a situation of desperation and hopelessness through a faith in Jesus expressed in practical action of commitment to him. Musa Wenkosi Dube provides a more sobering analysis of the story of this woman using this fourth step. She argues that the bleeding woman represents the powerless and the exploited women who have decided “to touch the garments of power [in order] to change the direction of power, and thereby enable power to flow from the powerful to the disempowered. This touch is a transformative act: it seeks to shake the halls of power and lead the powerful to ask: ‘who touched me?’” (NJOROGE & DUBE[eds] 2001:6).

The fifth step involves gathering together the fruits of the discussion and a commitment to actualizing the message of the text in a concrete life situation. Ukpong cautions that the above steps need not be followed slavishly in the order in which they appear above, nor is it necessary to try to use all of them in actual exegesis since two steps could be telescoped into one. The interpreter will be guided by the nature of the text as to which order to follow. He emphasises, however, that it is important that “analysis of the context of interpretation is given at the beginning as it is what should condition the evaluation of

the discussion in the other steps" (UKPONG 1995:13).

One criticism that Ukpong picks up from critics the inculturation models discussed earlier is "the lack of attention to social issues like poverty, political oppression" and economic exploitation, while in the liberation models he cites the "lack of attention to specifically African religio-cultural issues such as belief in ancestors, the spirits, spirit possession, witchcraft" (UKPONG 1999:325). What the latter part of the discussion on the inculturation hermeneutics has attempted to do was to redress the above mentioned criticism by adopting a holistic approach to culture whereby both the secular and religious aspects of culture are seen to be interconnected and as having implications for one another, and the Bible is read within the religious as well as the socio-economic and political context of Africa. This approach also operates at the interface of academic and ordinary readings of the Bible, the latter groups' main characteristics being that they are strongly influenced by the world-view provided by their traditional culture as opposed to the world-view of the western technological culture, and that they are poor, oppressed and exploited, and marginalized. The third feature of this approach is that the African context forms the subject of Biblical interpretation. The goal of integration is to actualize the Biblical message in today's context "so as to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation" (UKPONG 1999:325).

Conclusion Ukpong concurs with West that modern Biblical interpretation can conveniently be classified in three main approaches (UKPONG 1999:326; West 1995:131). One is the historical-critical approach which focuses on the historical background of the text, its writer and the original audience. This approach identifies the meaning of the text with the meaning originally intended by the authors. The second is the literary approach which focuses on the text and its underlying structure, and it looks at attaining the meaning of the text by decoding the text. It also focuses on the reader in interaction with the text, and perceives the meaning of the text as deriving from the encounter between the reader and the text. The third approach is the contextual approach, which focuses on the context of the reader in relating it to the text. The context of the reader is used in various

ways as a vital factor in making meaning of the text. Ukpong asserts that all the approaches to Biblical interpretation in Africa - as well as all so-called Third World approaches to Biblical interpretation - fall under the third category, their point of departure being the context of the reader, and their concern being the linking of the Biblical text to the reader's context (UKPONG 1999:326). As developments so far point to the models of liberation and acculturation gaining from each other's method, Ukpong points out significantly that the importance of the ordinary reader gradually comes to the fore. "Academic reading of the Bible in Africa will no longer afford to ignore the concerns and perspectives of the ordinary reader" (op.cit:327). Since the overwhelming majority of the African commuter-train worshippers could safely be classified as ordinary readers, it becomes logical to now turn to the Bible in the hands of the ordinary African reader.

Chapter 3

The Commuter - Train Worship Services

In this chapter I outline a brief history of the African commuter-train worshipping community, focussing on the Johannesburg area. I will explain how I conducted the interviews with the commuters. From these interviews I have been able to trace the roots of commuter worship. I will then look at how people become members of this community, citing some personal testimonies by commuters. I will follow up with a description of commuter worship, that is the liturgical aspect of the worship service, the healing service and then the Bible study.

The reason for discussing the above is that the Bible plays a central role in all these services. Regarding worship, Africans are by nature a religious people, as explained earlier. They worship God in everything they do: one just needs to go to a shebeen to see how Africans worship even when they are intoxicated. The difference here in the trains is that the Bible is prominent in the worship life. As for the healing service, Africans have long been suspicious or apprehensive of sickness. The memoirs of the early missionaries such as John Campbell show that one of the chief reasons for the acceptance of missionaries by the African people was that the missionaries were seen as “doctors”. It is thus not surprising that the healing service occupies such an important part in the worship life of the commuters. And here again, the Bible is used maximally for the healing processes. Selected Biblical texts are then looked at, from personal testimonies to group exposition of the texts by the commuters. I follow up with contextual Bible study, looking at how the Bible was used in the trains during the liberation struggle and during the train violence of the early 1990's. I then discuss the themes of Ubuntu and Life and death vis' a' vis the reading of the Bible. The African commuters bring the element of ubuntu in their reading of the Bible and this is evidenced by the way they apply the Biblical teachings to their practical lives as they strive to “walk their talk”.

I then intentionally include a large section on the women commuters, the role they play in these worship services, the way they read and interpret the Bible in a manner that frees them from the male-dominated interpretations. To this I have added the mountain as a significant (sacred) place for the women commuters. In Africa, in times of disaster, the nation looks up to women to pray. The commuter-train worshipping community is no exception. When the need arises for earnest prayer, the women commuters set aside a day to go to the mountain to pray. What I attempt to do here is to see the Biblical connections of praying at the mountain as expressed by women commuters themselves.

I conclude this chapter by looking at the impact of the Bible-reading commuter-train services on the lives of the communities, including the students who commute on the trains, and how this in turn impacts on the schools.

Motivation

I wish to argue that the form of Bible reading found in the African commuter-trains is a reality in South Africa which cannot and should not be ignored. As was discussed in the inculturation hermeneutics and contextual Bible study, the context of the reader (in this instance the African commuter) constitutes an important cog in Biblical interpretation. The African commuter is Black, and therefore Black Theology of Liberation and its method of reading the Bible has an influence on the commuter's way of reading the Bible. The context of the commuter reader is that from whose perspective West argues the Bible has to be read: the reader is poor and marginalized. Yet this reader reads the Bible with a view to individual and societal transformation. The African commuter-train worshippers read the Bible with their own eyes - the fact of not having studied theology helps these readers from being influenced by foreign contexts in their reading of the Bible. The personal testimonies of the commuters are important in that they give "a voice to those previously denied the chance to contribute to the recording of history" (WORTHINGTON & DENIS 2001:1). Interviews with commuters give them a sense of worth as they realize their importance and ability to retell their history.

The worship services are vital in that for the majority of the commuter worshippers, these services provide the only platform from which to do Bible study and Biblical interpretation. Most of them only listen passively to preachers at their respective denominations. The less formal nature of commuter worship services gives commuters the opportunity to interpret the Bible freely.

The healing services, wherein prayer and the laying on of hands are used in conjunction with Biblical texts, have become a crucial part in the life of commuter-train worship life. The reason is simply that at these services even those who are not members of this worshipping community come and bring their prayer needs. Job seekers who seldom commute on the trains come with the hope of attaining their employment needs through prayer. People who are sick, or have some family members at home sick, come for the prayers of intercession. The sicknesses may be spiritual and emotional, as some people believe they or their family have been bewitched. The most attracting factor in these healing services is that people often see others healed of their ailments, while yet others do find employment after being prayed for.

Important themes in the lives of the African people, such as the ubuntu concept as well as life-after-death and ancestor veneration, have to be dealt with since African Christians (and therefore commuter-train worshippers) have inherited a book (the Bible) which was (ab)used to condemn indigenous and traditional African belief systems and practices. It is therefore interesting to see how the commuters look at the African practices through Biblical texts, or look at the latter through the former.

Women commuters, arguably the backbone of the commuter-train worshipping commuters, play a vital role in the reading of the Bible, and they offer a refreshing interpretation of the Bible through their preaching and teaching. In addition, they are the custodians of the prayer life of the commuter worshipping community. When times are tough, everybody looks to the women for prayers. There is a strong belief among Africans that God hears and answers the sincere prayers of women. Hence, I have included a

portion on the significance of the mountain as a place of prayer for women commuters, with some Biblical texts which women use to explain their belief in the mountain as a sacred place.

The students also form a sizeable part of the commuter-train worshipping community. They take part, especially in the Tuesday services, which are led mainly by young people. It is instructive to note the impact that the Bible has had on the conduct of the student commuters, and how they have helped transform their schools by re-instilling discipline as taught by the Bible. The once defunct Students' Christian Movements (SCM's) have been revived by student commuters in their secondary schools. Naturally, with greater discipline at schools comes an improvement in the examination results.

This chapter therefore contains the heart of my research project, and through it I intend to portray a reality in South Africa which is on the rise in African Biblical interpretation. I will start with a background to the phenomenon of commuter-train worship.

The Beginnings

Metrorail is one division of Transnet that provided rail services to meet the country's need for affordable public transport. Founded in 1990, Metrorail transports 1,5 million people per day and, according to the manager for marketing and communications, 576 000 of those people are from the Witwatersrand region only. It has 352 trains and 4635 carriages and motor coaches. Its 470 stations are found in six metropolitan areas, Witwatersrand, Pretoria, Durban, Cape Town, East London and Port Elizabeth. The Johannesburg area falls within the Witwatersrand region.

It is no exaggeration to say that in almost all the commuter trains, there is at least one carriage that is used by African worshippers and readers of the Bible. Mandla Mkhonza, who is the chairperson of the worshipping community on train number 9019 (Vereeniging to Johannesburg), points out that in the Vaal area there are two thousand registered commuter train worshippers. This number does not include those commuters who

sometimes join in to share the services on an irregular basis. Also not included is the number of charismatic preachers who read the Bible and preach in any carriage, irrespective of whether people are listening or not. For the purpose of this project focus is set on the organised, formal worshipping commuter groups on the trains, who have identified the fifth carriage from the front as their meeting place. This means that anyone who goes into that carriage, knows that he or she is going into a worship place. Given these numbers and the amount of organisation that goes into these Bible-reading communities, I wish to argue that the commuter-train worshippers provide a potent contribution to the African Bible interpretational sphere. Since most of these worshippers do belong to various denominations, I contend that they bring an enriched hermeneutical tool from a vast pool of Biblical interpretations.

Profile of the commuters

The train commuters in the Johannesburg-Vereeniging area are predominantly African, with a few Coloureds and Indians who come mainly from Ennerdale and Lenasia respectively. These people are generally low wage earners as the majority work in factories, shops and as domestic workers. Most choose the train not because of its comfort, but simply because the train remains the cheapest mode of public transport in South Africa. To indicate the low income status of the commuters, they board in third class coaches, which are much cheaper than the first class ones. In fact, there is normally one first class coach and eleven to thirteen third class coaches in any commuter train. Many of these commuters are township residents, who stay in four-roomed houses, two-roomed (RDP) houses and shacks in squatter camps. The commuter train itself reflects township life: in the first class coach are white collar workers who hardly converse as they read their own newspapers, in the third class area some coaches are occupied by beer drinkers and gamblers who consume their stuff and play dice and cards on their way to and from work, in some coaches people converse freely, punctuating their conversation with laughter, and then there are coaches where worship takes place.

The commuter-worshippers are normally people who attend church but who do not usually get the opportunity to play a leading role in their denominations. One could safely say they do not have a high level of education. Others are simply drawn to the worship carriage by the inspired singing of the worshippers, and they later register as members. These commuters are fairly disciplined, as is shown by their dress code and compliance with the regulations of the worship carriage. The ages range from school-going age to above fifty - the latter being mainly domestic workers. Women are in the majority, perhaps in the ratio of 65% - 35% to men. I will now explain how I managed to obtain the information I needed.

Method of Interviewing

The method I used to obtain information on the history, nature and Biblical interpretation of the commuter-train worshipping community was a combination of the oral history methodology and my personal presence in and observation of the proceedings in the train. Having obtained permission from Lillian Mofokeng, marketing and communications manager of Metrorail, to conduct interviews, take photographs and record the proceedings in the worship carriages, I set aside time to commute on the trains with this community. While I did manage to interview some commuters in the trains, it was difficult to get full and uninterrupted dialogue going since some commuters were frequently looking outside to see how far they were from alighting at their destinations. Sometimes, in the middle of the interview, a commuter would unceremoniously leave me on realizing that the train had stopped at the station where he or she had to alight. To counter this situation, I decided to take down work or home telephone numbers and addresses of the commuters. To set up appointments for interviews which would be held in a conducive, relaxed atmosphere. I found this way more fruitful and rewarding, as the interviewees were able to tell their stories without the pressures of time constraints. I did the same with the Metrorail management whom I visited at their offices.

Insofar as the reading and interpretation of the Bible is concerned, I relied on listening and recording the worship services in the trains. Here many commuters, whose names do not

appear in the list of interviewees, provided some insight into the way they interpret the Bible as they read texts and preached on these texts. Where I needed some clarity from a commuter on something, he or she said in the train, I would simply ask for his or her contact number in order to enquire telephonically later the aspect of interpretation on which I sought to be clarified. I should add that my own experience as a commuter-train worshipper stood me in good stead in researching their way of interpreting the Bible. The fact that most of the community knew me made it easy for them to accept me and to cooperate without any suspicion. I will now trace briefly the history of the African commuter-train worshipping communities in the Vereeniging-Johannesburg route, starting with a brief description of the route.

The Commuter-train Worship Services in the Vereeniging-Johannesburg Route

The Vereeniging-Johannesburg route is two-way. There is the route that goes via Meyerton and Germiston stations, as well as that which goes via Lenasia and Langlaagte stations. It is the latter route that is under discussion. There are twenty-eight stations on this route, including Vereeniging and Johannesburg. Besides the stations in the town areas of Vereeniging and Johannesburg, the trains stop at the Vaal Triangle township stations of Sebokeng and Orange Farms. As well as the Soweto stations of Chiawelo, Kliptown, Pimville, and Orlando. At New Canada station, some commuters who alight from Naledi (Soweto) - Johannesburg bound train board the Vereeniging-Johannesburg bound train, and vice-versa. The stations that have a large number of commuters are Vereeniging (mainly Sharpeville residents), Residensia in Sebokeng, Stretford in Orange Farms, Lenz in Lenasia, Medway in Chiawelo, New Canada, Langlaagte and Johannesburg. It is worth noting that the train stops only for forty five to sixty seconds at a station, irrespective of how many commuters are on the platform. This, inevitably, leads to pushing and shoving by commuters who want to gain entry before the train doors close electronically. Needless to say this has sometimes led to injury and death as a result of stampede. However, since most commuters have no alternative to this cheaper mode of public transport, they still come in their hundreds to the trains.

The surviving founder members of these worshipping communities recall with nostalgia the early days when commuter trains were operating under the South African Railways (SAR), before the advent of Metrorail. They remember fondly some founder members who have since died. Rose Magoda relates how, as a student who lived in Meyerton, she commuted on the train to Johannesburg where she was studying typing. In 1970, she says, she and a group of other young commuters decided to sing hymns and choruses in the carriage just to while away time and so as not to feel the length of the trip from Vereeniging to Johannesburg and back. As more youngsters joined them, they decided to form a choir. More people, including adults, joined in the singing. The adult commuters encouraged the youths to read the Bible and learn to preach its message. The commuters chose the fifth carriage from the front as their worship place. When the Bible occupied centre stage in these worship services, the elderly decided on a name to identify themselves. They called themselves "SARAFIM", an acronym for South African Railway Fishers of Men. This name explained the new purpose of the group, which was to "fish" for men and women on the trains using the Bible and to combat the rampant crime - muggings, assaults and robberies - that prevailed on the trains. Magoda is quick to point out that the name SARAFIM was also almost identical to the Bible name 'Seraphim' which referred to heavenly beings.

When the train stopped at New Canada station, Soweto commuters would join in with the Vaal commuters and read and preach from the Bible. The Vereeniging-Johannesburg train was number 0035 at the time. Soon there was a register and all who joined Sarafim were required to bind themselves to contributing towards death and bereavement of fellow commuters, in obedience to the Biblical teaching of rejoicing with those who rejoice, and mourning with those who mourn (Romans 12:15).

In 1974, the Vaal commuters launched their own branch, which they named after a popular Sesotho hymn "Lona ba ratang ho phela"; loosely translated, meaning "those who seek life". This was launched on trains 0757 and 9074, and later 9029 under the leadership of Tshediso Selatela, Tshidi Mosikidi, Makgato, Mollo, Rose Magoda and some who have

died. The legacy left by these unsung heroes and heroines has provided us with a foundation on which to develop a sound Biblical hermeneutics hitherto untapped. With regard to joining the commuter worship, there are not many inhibiting conditions, as Rebecca Tsolo's story testifies.

Testimony of Rebecca Tsolo

Tsolo says she had never thought that being a passenger in a train could transform her life so profoundly. She recalls how she was recruited by Selatela to the commuter-train worshipping community in the fifth carriage from the front of train number 0757 from Vereeniging to Johannesburg in 1990. Initially attracted by the inspired singing and dancing in the coach, she later became interested in reading and interpreting the Bible. She would often also try to preach on the text read for the day. However, it is Psalm 1 that really marked a turning point in Tsolo's life. She says this text taught her about the value of obeying God's word and refusing to listen to those who discredit or ridicule God. Verses 1-3, in Tsolo's words, "describes me, as I am like that man spoken of (not that I do not make mistakes). But I have looked back at every step I took, and realize that God is involved. I have learned to trust in God, and everything I have touched has turned gold."

Tsolo says this text taught her to become wary of the subtlety of the influence of friends and associates. She decided to shun friendships with those who mock what God holds sacred, lest she sin by becoming indifferent to God's will. She rather chose friends who would help build up her faith and draw her closer to God. Meditating on God's word meant to Tsolo spending time reading and thinking about the Bible, asking herself how she should change so she is living as God wants. Tsolo's interpretation of verses 2 and 3 is that the more we delight in God's presence, the more fruitful we are, whereas the more we allow drunkards, adulterers and muggers to influence our thoughts and attitudes, the more we separate ourselves from God, the source of life and nourishment.

Tsolo concedes that contact with unbelievers is inevitable if we are to witness to them, but we should not join in or imitate their wayward behaviour. Spending time with mocking

sinner is a recipe for despair, while making friends with those who love God and his word - such as the commuter-train worshippers - can only lead to a happy life. She says the fact that she prospers (she lives in a posh house in the town of Vereeniging, has children in the former model C school with a taxi owner husband) can be attributed to her following Psalm 1:1-3 to the letter.

Whereas one finds it difficult to agree fully with the above interpretation that suggests that good people prosper and evil people perish - a kind of Deuteronomistic theology - one has to appreciate the fact that this is a common manner of reading and interpreting the Bible in the trains. Hence Tsolo was elected chairperson of the youth section of train number 0757, and would thus arrange and organize their Tuesday services on the train, as well as their outreach programmes including aid to charities. The liturgical aspect of the commuter worship will now follow, beginning with the nature of the worship service itself, followed by the healing service.

The Worship Service

There is something decidedly African about the way the commuter-train worshippers conduct their services, and use the Bible. In African culture, when a host has prepared food and drinks for the guests, the host must be the first to drink from the calabash. Only then can he or she pass it on to the guests who, seated in a circle, will each drink from the same calabash. The elderly have explained that this practice is meant to assure the guests that the food and drinks are safe (that is, not poisoned) and are ready for consumption. In the train, the person who has been appointed to "feed fellow commuters with spiritual food" reads a passage of Scripture, preaches on it for about ten minutes, and then allows the other worshippers to share their thoughts on the same text. As other commuters board on the various train stations on a particular route, they are told about the text that is being preached on, and invited to preach on it too. Just as the calabash is snatched from someone who seems to hold on to it rather too long, when a commuter worshipper preaches a lengthy sermon, some other worshipper may interrupt with a song, signalling his or her intention to preach. There is usually no ill-feelings when this happens, as the

people understand that the proclamation of the Biblical message has to be shared among as many worshippers as possible. When the train approaches the last station (say, either Johannesburg or Vereeniging), those commuters that are left in the worship carriage (that is, those who have not alighted on the previous stations) all say prayers of thanksgiving for a safe journey. The prayers are said communally, simultaneously.

The worship seems to be a combination of African rhythms and the Biblical injunction to “sing to the Lord... make music to the Lord with the harp... with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn” (Psalm 98:1ff). The commuters clap their hands as they sing, some ring the bells to the rhythm of the hand-clapping, some beat with their hands the spaces between the windows that are made of hard board (this takes the place of the drum), others use self-made percussion in the form of polish tins filled with stony sand; and the songs are punctuated with whistling and ululation. This spontaneous celebration ensures that the commuters’ worship of God involves the whole person, and is joyous. It is colourful and it involves a lot of movement and rhythm. The worship service is simply vibrant. One can almost visualize the Psalmist’s invocation: “Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord” (Psalm 98:7ff).

On Mondays and Fridays, the service is led by the men, that is, a man reads the Bible, preaches and then invites anybody to preach on the text of the day. On Tuesdays it is the youth who lead the service. On Wednesdays it is the healing service, while on Thursdays it is the women who lead the service, in recognition of Thursday as a day set apart for prayer meetings of various church women’s organizations. One can thus call the commuter-train worship services family services.

The Healing Service

The most used texts in the healing service are John 5:1ff and James 5:13ff. In the latter text the emphasis is on the elders of the church praying for and anointing the sick with oil in

the name of the Lord (v14), while in the former text the emphasis is on the stirring up of the waters by an angel of the Lord, giving the waters healing powers (v4).

This service is held on Wednesdays in the mornings when the commuters go to work, and in the afternoons when they return home. This service starts whilst the train is still stationary, that is, at Vereeniging Station in the morning and at Johannesburg's Park Station in the afternoon. A hymn is sung, followed by the singing of the Lord's Prayer in Xhosa or English. After the notices and announcements have been made, those worshippers who are recognized intercessors in their various denominations gather in the middle of the carriage. They make a small circle as they join hands. That circle is treated as the pool, which must be stirred through prayers by these leaders as the rest of the worshippers sing hymns and choruses whose lyrics have to do with the pool. A favourite hymn for this service is the Sotho hymn "*Se teng sediba sa madi aletareng ya tefelo, diba seo leng sehlare matla a sona ke bophelo*"; loosely translated it means: "*there is a pool of blood on the altar of sacrifice, which provides healing and yields life.*" When the intercessors have finished praying (stirring the waters), they invite those people with prayer needs ranging from physical and emotional illnesses to the need for employment and peace at home. These "patients" come inside the circle, state their prayer requests, and are then prayed for by the intercessors. They believe that they have entered the stirred waters, and that the elders' prayers to God will be answered, and healing will follow. Since many of the intercessors are members of the AIC's "the touchstone of whose spirituality is healing and driving out demons from people" (Ukpong 1995:3), the intercessory prayers include the exorcism of evil spirits. Some of the people suffer from "*diphaiphai*" (pronounced "dee-pie-pie"), which is some form of a trance in which one is possessed by the Spirit. The singing intensifies as the intercessors physically beat the person who has "*diphaiphai*", and after a while the person calms down. Meanwhile, the "prophets" (that is, the fortune-tellers in this context) busy themselves with diagnosing other people who may be wanting to know what bothers them. The prophets use the Bible to "diagnose" their "patients". The patient is given the Bible by the prophet, and is asked to open it randomly and hand it back to the prophet. Then, whichever page or pages are opened by the patient, will be read (quietly)

by the prophet, who will then begin to tell the patient the nature, source and cause of his or her problem. Often the patient is given the opportunity to confirm or deny the diagnosis, almost in the same manner that prevails when a sangoma throws the bones to diagnose a patient. The difference here is that the Bible replaces the bones as a means of diagnosis. It is incredible how the prophets almost always get it right with their diagnosis. Using the Bible, they are able to diagnose not only the patient presently before them, but also the patient's family members and relatives. Some of the prescriptions offered by the prophets to their patients include being given certain Scriptural texts to read at particular times. In case of nightmares or sleepless nights, the patient may be instructed to put the Bible underneath the pillow at night when going to sleep. Many patients have come back to the commuter-train worship carriages to express their gratitude for their healing, for finding a job after a long time, or for the return of peace and stability in the home environment and restoration of crumbling marriages. The Bible, therefore, provides the basis for the healing services in the trains, especially the above mentioned texts. The Bible, open and closed, is a source of healing in the commuter-train worshipping community.

I now turn to some Bible study, beginning with the personal story of Tshidi Mosikidi, an ordained minister in her church.

Tshidi Mosikidi's Testimony

Mosikidi recalls how Genesis 37:12ff so tore her heart that she sensed a call to the ministry. The text was read and preached on in the train while on the way to work. She says she was touched by Joseph's story and that same weekend she consulted her minister at St Elizabeth Apostolic Church in Sebokeng and related her sense of call to the ordained ministry. On the day of her ordination in 1995, Mosikidi invited the commuter train worshippers and they came in large numbers.

It was very interesting how the Bible was used at the ordination service. The service began at her home in the evening. The book of Leviticus 17:1ff was read by the presiding minister; then a beast was slaughtered and disembowelled, and its entrails were burnt on

an open fire outside the house. As they were burning, the congregation filed around the fire as they sang hymns. Later when the entrails had been burnt completely, the congregation proceeded to the church for the ordination of Mosikidi. When I enquired about the significance of burning the entrails on an open fire, Mosikidi explained that they were invoking the presence of the ancestors, as well as obeying the Biblical law to “burn the fat as an aroma pleasing to the Lord” (Leviticus 17:6b). Here was a very interesting way of applying the Biblical message. It suffices to say many more leaders of the commuter-train worshipping communities ended up in the ordained ministry of their denominations, while others formed their own churches.

A brief look at Contextual Bible study as practised in the commuter-trains follows, touching on the use of the Bible by commuters during the liberation struggle.

The use of the Bible in the Train during the Liberation Struggle

The old members of the commuter-train worshipping community relate with mixed feelings the difficult years of apartheid brutality and the callous repression of the Africans' resistance by the oppressive white minority regimes of South Africa. In 1985 the then president of South Africa, P W Botha declared a national state of emergency, in terms of which Africans' political activity was curbed and political meetings banned. During this period, the African commuter-trains worshippers read the Bible for liberation and against the status quo. Gerald West has spoken of the “hidden transcript” and the “public transcript” (WEST 1999:45). The former, he explains, “represents the safe articulation and acting out of forms of resistance and defiance that is usually thwarted in contexts where the exercise of power is nearly constant” while the latter is an “open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate [and], where it is not positively misleading, [it] is unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations, because it is frequently in the interest of both parties to conspire tacitly in misrepresentation” (ibid). Since train carriages where unionized workers chanted political slogans were constantly raided by security police and members arrested and assaulted, the worship carriages became the safest from police harassment. These worship carriages thus became a terrain of struggle. Therein the

hidden transcript was espoused, and the police would approve of the worship carriage as carrying peaceful, law-abiding church-goers.

Takatso Mofokeng points out that Africans have asserted their right to appropriate and interpret the Bible according to their socio-politico-economic, cultural and religious needs (MOFOKENG 1988:40). He observes that, guided by these needs, they have sought to appropriate the Bible “selectively and critically” (ibid). Only parts, texts and stories in the Bible which were seen, in the light of these needs and concerns, to be supportive of the main goals of the majority of the religious community were appropriated. “Those portions, text and stories of the Bible which were seen to be clearly opposed to their communal concern for individual and communal survival were ignored or rejected outrightly” (ibid). The above is true of the African commuter-train worshippers in the apartheid era. Texts such as Romans 13:1ff which urged everyone to “submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established”, were either ignored or rejected since Africans felt neither legally nor morally bound to submit to an evil government which they did not elect. The same applied to texts such as Ephesians 6:5ff which urged slaves to obey their earthly masters “with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as [they] would obey Christ”. Africans would rather have texts that encouraged slaves to fight for their emancipation, or that encouraged slave-masters to set their slaves free. Popular texts were those that referred to freedom and condemned oppression and exploitation. For example, Luke 4:18f, which constitutes Jesus’ mission statement, appealed to African commuter readers with its emphasis on the preaching of the good news to the poor, the proclamation of freedom for the prisoners and the release of the oppressed. The reason for this is simple. It was the Africans who constituted the poor, who were oppressed, and who were imprisoned for daring to oppose the unjust draconian laws of the racist minority regime. It was therefore heartwarming to hear Jesus declaring that his mission was to identify with and improve the plight of the poor, oppressed and imprisoned (Africans). Jesus was seen as one whose primary purpose on earth was to liberate the oppressed and exploited masses of the African (and other) people.

Predictably, the Exodus narrative in the Old Testament took hold of the African commuter-train worshipper's imagination in the apartheid era. As Mugambi observes, "this narrative greatly appeals to peoples who have suffered colonial and other forms of domination. As victims of oppression, they identify themselves with the Israelites" (MUGAMBI 1995:2). African (commuter) readers, when reading Exodus 3:1ff, saw their political leaders as Moses, the apartheid regime as Pharaoh, and racist South Africa as Egypt. Thus when the Lord declares, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out... and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them" (v7-8a), African commuters became convinced that God had come down to rescue them, to free them from the yoke of oppression. The land of milk and honey, Canaan, was for the African a truly liberated, non-racial, non-sexist prosperous South Africa. The stubbornness of P W Botha's regime and its violent suppression of popular resistance, seemed to be explained by the fact that God had hardened the heart of Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21b; 7:3; 10:1). The death of many Israelites in the wilderness helped explain the death of many political activists at the hands of the apartheid security police, and the many deaths in detention. However, the fact of Israel's total emancipation gave hope and courage to the African readers of the Bible that, notwithstanding the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in the way of freedom, their day of freedom would dawn, since God almost always appears to be on the side of the oppressed. The Bible - with its selected texts - remained the single most potent weapon in the struggle for liberation as it gave people that important characteristic: hope. It is this hope that enables the oppressed masses to "hang in there" even when the temptation to quit or surrender became very real. We now look at the role of the Bible during the political violence in the trains in the 1990's.

The Bible during Train Violence of the 1990's

The political violence that engulfed South African townships in the early 1990's claimed many lives in the commuter trains. The Vaal trains to Johannesburg had as one of their stop stations Nancefield station, which was next to Nancefield hostel, an Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) stronghold. This is the station where armed IFP warlords would board the train and start shooting, stabbing and hacking commuters indiscriminately, with a

callousness that is beyond description. Rose Magoda still carries an injury from one such attack. She fell and broke her leg as she was fleeing the attacking gangs. It was during this painful period in our history that the commuter-train worshippers used the Bible to give hope to fellow commuters. They closed ranks, prayed earnestly, read and expounded the Scriptures. As the worshippers struggled to make sense of the situation and find answers in the Bible, they read texts such as Matthew 24:6ff and Luke 21:10ff. They preached and tried to console themselves by convincing one another that those incidents of violence were foretold by the Bible: "For this is the time of punishment in fulfilment of all that has been written" (Luke 21:22). They comforted one another by saying: "By standing firm you will save yourselves" (Luke 21:19).

The Soweto commuters were experiencing the same problem with hostel dwellers who boarded at Merafe and Mzimhlophe stations, and attacked commuters. This common problem led to Soweto and Vaal commuters coming together, organising prayer services for an end to the train violence. The venues used to alternate between Soweto and the Vaal triangle. A popular text that was read at these services was 2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land". It was emphasized that God's people needed to do as instructed in this text so that the violence may stop. This co-operation between Soweto and Vaal commuter-train worshippers led to the formation of one body called "Siyathandaza" which was formally launched in 1997. The name means "we are praying", and it had Boisy Maile and Papi Lekitlane as chairperson and vice-chairperson respectively. The leadership comprises chairpersons of each commuter worshipping carriage. The Bible still remains the rallying point of Siyathandaza. Towards the Christmas holidays, a big closing and thanksgiving service is held by the commuter-train worshippers at a venue agreed upon. A similar service is held at the beginning of the year. A well-loved verse that is usually read at these services is 1 Samuel 7:12b "Thus far has the Lord helped us". At these thanksgiving services, not much is said about the above text (1 Sam 7:12b), as almost every commuter takes the opportunity to give thanks to God and to fellow commuters for

the many blessings that include, among others, being in employment, safe commuting to and from work, and the general well-being of family and friends. In the end, though, all the commuters thankfully echo the words of Samuel: "Thus far has the Lord helped us." What follows now is a brief discussion of some themes that run through the Biblical interpretation in the commuter-trains, starting with the much vaunted African concept of ubuntu, and the life before and after death, vis á vis some selected Bible texts.

Ubuntu and the Bible

It becomes clear that the commuter-train worshippers, as Africans, are subverting the way of reading the Bible that was taught by or inherited by the Western mission churches. While for many years embracing Jesus Christ and the Bible meant rejection of African cultural norms and values, the commuters find a way of marrying the two. They have found that African values are often closer to the Semitic values that pervade the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. One such value is the African sense of community. It is found in the noble concept of "ubuntu", that basically declares that a person discovers full personhood or personality only in group or community relationships. It teaches that the family and the extended family nurture human growth and happiness, and that "the community is a unit to which people can belong and in which the individual's freedom and responsibility are carefully adjusted and co-ordinated" (MOGOBA 1994:7). African society is very strong on relationships: between persons, between humans and divine beings, between the living and the dead. Hence, if I were to introduce myself to fellow Africans I would not just say I am Phidian. That would be insufficient. I should say that I am Phidian, son of Dorrington and Mamikie Matsepe, husband of Hloni, father of Karabo, Obakeng and Ofentse, belonging to the Bahlakwane clan of the Basotho tribe. Only then will I be properly known and identifiable. This norm is found in the Old and New Testaments, as will be seen later in this section.

The first story of creation (Genesis 1 - 2:4a) talks of the creation of a community - "male and female" (1:27) - and of living creatures in community. This is in agreement with the two known African creation traditions. The "Umhlanga" (bed of reeds) myth, found

among the Nguni people, tells of people, at the time of creation, coming together in community with each other and their animals out of a bed of reeds (TEEC 1999:16). Some groups still celebrate this creation story - the Swazi people celebrate it annually. The "hole-in-the-ground" story, found among Batswana and Basotho, tells that "Modimo (divinity) has its (no gender) abode in a hole under the ground where the setting is idyllic: green fields, plenty of people, water, cattle, goats and other animals. It is from here that the people who inhabit the earth emerged" (ibid:17). These creation stories, which are still related by the elderly in African society, are very important because they impact on the way the African and commuter-reader of the Bible interprets Genesis 1:28. "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Africans, as a rule, are friendly with the environment and the animals. They look after the land, they tend the animals, and the animals in turn feed humanity. That is why, among the Basotho, for example, the various clans each have a particular animal or plant that they identify with, and it becomes their unifying and rallying symbol. There are, among others, BaTAUng (Tau is a lion), BaTLOUng (elephant), BaTHLAPIng (fish) and BaTSHWENEng (monkey). This is in sharp contrast to the distorted reading of Genesis 1:28, "the so-called cultural mandate" on the basis of which generations of Christian readers have portrayed human beings as having the right to dominate the rest of creation which, it has been argued, was made for us and only has significance in relation to us. Human beings can therefore treat nature as they please. De Gruchy and Field point out that the Genesis narrative portrays the created order as "having its own dignity and value even before the creation of human beings" (VILLA-VICENCIO & DE GRUCHY [eds] 1994:205). This creation declares "the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1) and therefore has the capacity to reveal God to humanity. Moreover, Genesis 9:4-6 affirms the value not only of human life, but also of animal life. Psalm 8 locates human beings within this created order as integral part of it, while recognizing an important distinction. De Gruchy and Field argue that human beings are embedded within a complex network of relationships with the rest of creation, "but have the special responsibility to be the stewards of creation" (op.cit:205). The commuter-train worshipper, therefore, being an African reader of the Bible, understands the creation stories in a

different way from a westernized reader. In fact, the commuter seems unaware that there are two creation stories (Genesis 1 - 2:4a; 2:4bff). The two stories are always read as one, and the understanding is that God created Adam and Eve in God's image.

On relationships between persons, the commuter-worshipper finds resonance in the way the books of the prophets introduce their authors, for example, Isaiah, son of Amoz (1:1), Jeremiah, son of Hilkiyah(1:1), and Ezekiel, son of Buzi(1:3). The genealogies of Jesus Christ recorded by Matthew (1:1ff) and Luke (3:23ff) place Jesus in a relationship with his living parents and his living ancestors, and it fascinates the African commuter reader who, to an extent, regards Jesus as the ancestor par excellence. The fact that Jesus, in his ministry, formed a community of twelve disciples, and within that community there was a smaller community of three, strengthens the commuter's belief in community. In all the African languages in South Africa, there is an idiomatic expression that stresses the importance of living in community. In isiZulu it is "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu*" which, loosely translated, means a person can only attain full personhood in relationship with other people. That is why the commuters can relate to the early church in Acts 4:32ff. Besides caring for one another, the commuters have taken it upon themselves to donate money, food and clothing to needy organizations such as the Takalani School for the Mentally Handicapped, Thabo-vuyo School for the Disabled, as well as street children. This, the commuter-worshipper asserts, is both African and Biblical. The commuter-worshipper reads the Bible and discovers himself or herself, and then applies its teachings in his or her daily life.

This attitude has helped the African commuter to deal with the mystery of the Trinity. In all their prayers, the commuters mention the Trinity at the beginning, throughout, and at end of their prayers. It is instructive that even though the commuters read the Bible pre-critically, their view and interpretation of the Trinity strikes a chord with those of Brian Gaybba on "The Trinity as a Divine -Human Reality" (DE GRUCHY & VILLAVICENCIO[EDS]1994:83). Gaybba asserts that "there is no such thing as Trinity apart from humanity ... the only Trinity Christians know of is one in which a human being -Jesus - is one of its members"(ibid). This, Gaybba stresses, affects the way in which we view

salvation. Instead of salvation being viewed individualistically, salvation implies being inserted into the life of a community since God is a community of Father, Son and Spirit. Salvation means not simply having one's personal sins forgiven or getting into heaven, but rather to share in the life of a community. To be saved, therefore, is to be made part of a family that includes not only Father, Son and Spirit, but also neighbour. Thus, Gaybba concludes, reaching out to the poor, the lonely, the oppressed, and treating them for what they are, namely our brothers and sisters, is to enable them to experience not only human love and caring, but also "what it means to share in God's own community life" (op.cit:85). This enables the needy to experience an important dimension of salvation. It is exciting that even without articulating Gaybba's views on the Trinitarian Experience and Doctrine, the commuters bring into reading of the Trinity their own experience based on Ubuntu and then live out the sentiments spelled out by Gaybba. As Mogoba aptly sums it up, "the Christian theology of the common parenthood of God or of all being sons and daughters of the Father, or that we are all brothers and sisters together, or the three Persons of the Trinity, all lends itself to the African way of life and is very meaningful" (MOGOBA 1994:7). In many other interpretations of Biblical texts we find this strong ubuntu element in the African commuter-train worshippers. I turn now to some Biblical texts that are read to find resonance with the African belief in life beyond the grave.

Life Before and After Death

It was refreshing to hear African readers of the Bible identifying with the events and people in the Bible. On reflecting on the significance of the bones of the departed (Exodus 13:17ff), and the constant visits to their graves, one came face to face with the African belief in life after death vis-avis the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus and his continued life among us. Jesus taught that he had come that we may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10). One commuter points out that when a Mosotho was buried, the deceased was given seeds of corn, wheat and maize in his hands. The deceased was also given some reeds. The idea was that the deceased should plant the seeds when he arrives in "the next world" and he should use the reeds to build himself a dwelling. Periodically, the grave would be visited as the survivors requested the dead to intercede for them in times of

drought, famine or any natural disaster. Jesus also said to Martha: "He who believes in me will live, even though he died; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25f). The commuter-train worshippers' interpretation of the Bible seems to agree with Dr Stanley Mogoba's assertion that Africans believe in "life before and after death" (MOGOBA 1994:5). Mogoba argues that Africans, as a rule, believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his continued presence among us. He adds that the Easter event is not a matter for rationalizing about the plausibility of the resurrection; rather, it is a celebration of Christ's victory over death (ibid). He points out that before the advent of Christianity, Africans believed, like the Israelites, "that the community of the living and of the living-dead were one continuous community" (ibid). Parents and grandparents, Mogoba asserts, have a physical link with their children and grandchildren, looking like them and having their attributes of character. In this communal setup, the elderly pass on cultural and community lifestyles and norms and values of life. He quotes Robert J Schreiter:

"The Bantu ancestors are not dead but alive. This, with perhaps a bit of exaggeration, is the whole difference between the European ancestor and the Bantu. The former is a memory, the latter is a presence. One remembers the former, merely in recounting family history, in remarking that this or that family member has traits similar to those one recalls in such and such an ancestor or what is told about that ancestor. But, the Bantu ancestors are invoked on every important occasion. One converses with them, one shares with them the food and drink, of the communion meals for family or clan, which are often held in [their] honour" [op.cit:6].

To this Mogoba adds that Jesus' words: "And behold, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20), have a special resonance with the African reader of the Bible. One member even added that when the women went to the tomb on that glorious Sunday morning, they did not know that Jesus Christ would rise or had risen. She says they went there in the belief that the departed loved ones were still alive and needed to be communicated with. She uses this incident to justify the African practice of visiting the dead and talking to them.

This is a great challenge to the so-called Mission Churches who have literally done away with the departed, grossly condemning what they erroneously describe as “ancestor worship”. Mbiti explains by quoting Ngada and Mofokeng: “Our ancestors are not angels. Human beings cannot become angels. Nor should they be compared with the saints who are venerated in some Christian churches. They are our parents and grandparents, our forefathers and foremothers, the spirits of those who went before us and who are nevertheless still with us and who still have an influence upon our daily lives... We do not believe that the spirits of our ancestors are pagan spirits or evil spirits of some kind” (MBITI 2002:8). Mbiti argues further the relationship between the departed and the living by citing the commandment “Honour your father and your mother...” (Exodus 20:12). He contends that the death of one’s parents “does not annihilate this honouring of one’s parents” (op.cit:9).

Exodus 13:17-22

When Mandla Mkhonza read this passage, his emphasis was on Moses taking the bones of Joseph with him when the Israelites went up out of Egypt (v19) in fulfilment of Joseph’s wish (Genesis 50:25). Mkhonza preached passionately as he explained the significance of the bones of the ancestors. He contends that the bones of Joseph were the Israelites’ link with their past, with their very being, their identity, their present and their future. He makes interesting parallels with the significance of the bones of the ancestors in African society. He notes that it is important to know where the bones of our departed loved ones lie, so that they may be visited when the need arises. He points out that when a Zulu head of the family died, for example, he would be buried in the yard, in a squatting position, facing the entrance of the house, with a spear and a shield in his hands. The belief was that the late father was ‘guarding’ his family. When a child of the family misbehaved, the child would be reprimanded and be warned that the father is watching him or her. The father would be consulted when important occasions were to be held, such as, marriage and lobola transactions, or the birth of a baby who would be welcomed into the family and introduced to the father. If there was tragedy and uncertainty in the home, the father

would be consulted for guidance and direction. The carrying of Joseph's bones, therefore, has a special resonance with the African way of relating to ancestors.

Mkhonza, interestingly, refers to the Africans' struggle to have the bones of Saartjie Baartman returned to South Africa for a proper burial. Baartman was taken from Cape Town to London in 1810, at the age of twenty, and was catapulted to fame as an icon of racial and black female sexuality. She was exhibited in circuses across Britain as a freak, because of her large posterior and genitals (CITY PRESS 4AUG 2002). "The image and idea of The Hottentot Venus swept through British popular culture as males were inquisitive about her unusually large reproductive organs and paid fees to see her" (op.cit:20). In 1814 Baartman was taken to France where she became the object of scientific and medical research that formed the bedrock of European ideas about black female sexuality. She died in 1815, but even after her death, she became an object of imperialist scientific investigation. Her sexual organs and brain were displayed in the Musee de l'Homme in Paris until as recently as 1995.

On 29 April 2002, a South African delegation led by deputy minister of Arts, Culture and Technology, Bridgette Mabandla, accepted Baartman's remains in a moving ceremony at the South African Embassy in Paris and a few days later they touch down on home soil, amid wild cheering and indigenous music by the Griqua people. Baartman was enrobed by Khoisan elders, in preparation for her burial on 9 August 2002, ensuring her a final resting place among the spirits of her ancestors in the Eastern Cape.

Mkhonza argues that just as the bones of Joseph would not rest in peace in a foreign land, Saartjie's bones would not rest in peace in France. Her dignity could only be restored if her remains were brought back home for a proper laying to rest. He says that Saartjie, like Joseph, did not go voluntarily to the foreign land. Furthermore, there in foreign lands they were stripped of their dignity. He cites Joseph's unfair imprisonment and Saartjie's forced prostitution. It was only fair, therefore, that when God liberated the Israelites, Joseph's bones should be taken to the land of freedom. In the same light, when God liberated South

Africa from the clutches of the most heinous crime against humanity - apartheid - it became imperative to fight for the return of Saartjie Baartman's bones. Not surprisingly, when the latter happened, there was a huge sense of victory and magnanimity among the Africans.

In a bid to explain the matter further, Mkhonza points out that many African families that went to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, did not go there purely for financial compensation; rather, they asked the TRC to help them trace the remains of their loved ones who died in foreign lands, exhume them, and fly them home for a proper burial. When the other members of the worshipping community took turns in preaching on this text, they reiterated the significance of the bones of ancestors both in the Biblical world and in African society. One could almost see "a meeting of worlds" - between the African commuter train worshippers and the "worlds" of the Bible, as expounded by Wimbush (WIMBUSH 1991:138).

Exodus 4:17

"But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it"

African commuter-train worshippers gave an interesting interpretation of the above text. On a Friday, which is the men's day to lead worship, many drew parallels between the staff in Moses' hand and the staff carried by African men. Old man Botile explains that when a young man goes for circumcision at the initiation school he carries a stick with him. After completing the initiation process and having been circumcised, the young man is given a new stick - "a stick of manhood" (Mr Botile is an UmXhosa). With this stick the new man performs certain functions. Since he walks bare-foot, the man uses the stick to remove stones, broken bottle pieces and thorns from his way. If he is to pass through a body of water, he beats the water with the stick in order to scare away any living creatures that may pose danger in the water. He also uses this stick to feel how deep the water goes, and thus whether it is safe to step in it. Botile refers to Moses' use of the stick at the crossing of the Red Sea. When the Israelites were pursued by Pharaoh's horsemen and troops, and were literally staring death in the face, the Lord instructed Moses, "Tell the Israelites to

move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground" (Exodus 14:15b-16). It was one of the great miraculous signs performed with the stick that saw the Israelites safely crossing the Red Sea while the Egyptians were swept into the sea. Botile and other commuters argue that the African man also uses the stick to, not only survive dangerous situations, but also to save his family from certain hazards.

Other worshippers pointed to the journey of the Israelites from the Desert of Sin, to Rephidim where they camped, and found that there was no water to drink (Exodus 17:1ff). Just when the people were about to stone Moses because of their thirst, the Lord instructed Moses to walk ahead of the people and stand by the rock at Horeb, and to strike the rock with his staff so that water may come out of it for the people to drink. "So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel" (Exodus 17:6c). The commuters allude to the rural past when men would carry sticks and go out to the bush to hunt in order to feed their families and communities. Just as the stick was used by Moses to quench the thirst of his people, African men used the stick to squash hunger for their people.

One old man recalled that in the country side, when young men are in the mountains for initiation, if there are dark clouds and rain is imminent, elderly sages are summoned to hold their sticks aloft in the direction from which the rain is threatening to come. They poetically reprimand the rain and literally instruct it to change course or go back to where it comes from. Incredible though this may sound, the clouds clear up and the rain is diverted or driven back. It will not rain for the duration of the 'initiates' stay in the mountains. The old man then looks at the part played by Moses' staff in the war between the Amalekites and the Israelites at Rephidim (Exodus 7:8ff). Moses stood "on top of the hill with the staff of God" in his hands (v9b). "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning" (v11). The old man draws parallels and asserts that in the same way that Moses used his staff to defeat Israelites' enemies (the Amalekites), the African sages use their staffs to ward off the enemy of the time (rain).

A woman commuter gave an insightful testimony to the interpretation of Moses' staff and its use. She says that the staff which we must take today so we can perform miraculous signs is Jesus Christ. She says that Jesus is the staff we must raise in order to defeat the devil. Jesus, the staff, will help us in times of doubt by giving us direction. In sadness he will bring us joy, and in darkness, light. When problems arose that seemed like the Red Sea floods, the staff, Jesus, will push them away and lead us through them and beyond. Not only is Jesus the staff we need to carry, but he is the staff that is raised (as at crucifixion) so that all who look up to him will be healed from their illness and sin. The commuter sing Psalm 23 and especially the line "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (v4d).

Following is the role of women commuters in the worship and Bible studies in the train. I believe that the women, because of their numerical superiority in the carriages and their history of inferior roles in society, deserve a section dedicated to them, in order to hear how they interpret the Bible.

Women in the Commuter Trains

It is interesting to note the passage on "covering the head in worship" (1 Corinthians 11:2ff) is used selectively as a guide to the conduct of men and women. The leader insists, in accordance with this text, that women should cover their heads when taking part in the commuter train worship service. Those who do not wear hats are allowed to place a handkerchief or any piece of cloth on their heads. Any woman who does not comply may not preach, pray or make any announcements in the service. Similarly, a woman who wears trousers may not participate in the service. Although the covering of the woman's head in worship may be conveniently justified by the above text, I want to argue that this is more of a cultural requirement than a Biblical instruction. It ties in with Okure's argument that the church is involved in a conspiracy with culture "to form a coalition against women" (Okure 1993:82). In addition, there is the instruction to women not to wear trousers in worship. Add to that the convenient omission of verse 4 of this text:

“Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonours his head”. Men may not preach while wearing short pants or without a jacket or jersey. The above text is read whenever new members formally join the commuter train worshipping community. It is also read to rebuke those who violate these regulations.

Ironically, on Paul’s teaching that “women should remain silent in the churches” (1 Corinthians 14:34a), there does not seem to be any problem. Evidently, with their huge numerical strength in these coaches, the women’s silencing would almost lead to the demise of these services. Hence, this text is hardly ever read in the commuter train worship carriages. There seems to be an unwritten understanding not to read texts that would cause uneasiness to the leaders of the services.

Women Commuters and the Bible

Whereas many texts are read from the Bible which are blatantly biased against women, the latter use other texts and stories in the Bible to counter this bias and strengthen the hand of women in the worshipping community. Men commuter worshippers read texts and stories such as the fall of humanity in Genesis 3:1ff to stress that sin came into the world through the woman, who misled the man into sinning. Genesis 27:1ff is read to show a woman’s unfaithfulness and wickedness as Rebekah is portrayed as a cheat, contriving to rob Esau of his promised blessing in favour of Jacob. The men have a field day as they lambast women for plotting evil, using the relevant texts to support their tirade. They refer to Judges 16:15ff where Delilah persists in persuading Samson to disclose the source of his strength, finally succeeding and betraying Samson into the hands of his enemies. They mention the two daughters of Lot, who got their father to drink wine and lay with him and fell pregnant (Genesis 19:30ff). As the men read and preach from the above-mentioned texts, one senses a feeling of self-righteousness in them, and a measure of humiliation and inferiority in the women. Some women half-heartedly share in this lop-sided interpretation of the texts.

However, many women commuter train worshippers are not prepared to take the above interpretations lying down. They are quick to refer to texts and stories that portray heroic deeds by women in the Bible. Their starting point is the birth narratives of Luke 1-2, wherein the birth story of Jesus is told from a woman's (Mary's) perspective. The point they are making is that when God embarked on the act of salvation for the world, he used a woman (Mary) to mother the Saviour of the world (Jesus). They exalt Mirriam for the role she played in helping Moses to be formally returned to his own mother to be weaned, for which the mother was paid (Exodus 2:7ff). Thereafter, Moses was adopted by the royal princess - the daughter of Israel's oppressor. Mirriam is later seen leading in song the celebration of the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea, "and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing" (Exodus 15:20f). Women commuters read with pride the words of God through the prophet Micah, "I brought you up out of Egypt... I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Mirriam" (Micah 6:4). In interpreting these texts, the women commuters assert their right to lead and be heard. In a subtle way, the women seem to protest against the downplaying of the women's role in the Bible by male interpreters and preachers. They refer to the prophetess Deborah, who successfully ruled Israel and was able to settle disputes among the Israelites (Judges 4:4f). They mentioned the prophetess Huldah, who reads from the Book of the Law and proclaims the Lord's warning of impending disaster for Israel since the latter had forsaken the Lord and worshipped other gods (2 Kings 22:14ff). Later, however, Huldah pronounces the Lord's forgiveness to Israel since King Josiah humbled himself and tore his clothes, and the King renews the Covenant with the Lord (23:1ff). The women commuter readers of the Bible find it empowering to have this extraordinary instance where a woman speaks for *Yahweh*. On the strength of the above, the woman commuters stake a claim in the leadership structures of the commuter-train worshipping community. They take comfort in the book of Esther, who rises from the ranks of the oppressed to become queen, and in the process saves the Jewish nation from a planned annihilation. Then, as if to rebut the argument that women are unfaithful and unreliable as portrayed by interpreters of the Rebekah and Delilah stories, the women commuters sing praises to Ruth, whom they see as a model wife, loyal, faithful to the last as she declares to Naomi, her mother-in-law: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay

I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God My God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried” (Ruth 1:16f). In their interpretation, the women commuters are arguing, implicitly, that not all women are unfaithful, and that women can and should be trusted and relied upon.

Women commuters seem to be saying “women are different, but not inferior”. They are very aware of the hierarchical model of the second creation story (Genesis 2:4ff), but they intentionally stress the partnership model of Genesis 1:27, where God creates male and female in God’s image. They are also very aware of the presence of the partnership model in the Bible as they find in Adam and Eve (Genesis 5:2), Deborah and Barak (Judges 4), Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:13), Mordecai and Esther (Esther 4), Lazarus, Mary and Martha (John 11:5), Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:1f). The women commuter worshippers refer to the above texts to argue that gender equality is not only a socio-political struggle, but is Biblically sound. Thus any reader of the Bible who is a serious Christian has no alternative but to embrace gender equality. Moreover, they argue, rightly so, that Jesus defied the culture of time of his earthly life by talking to women in public (John 4:7ff; Mark 7:24ff). Jesus ministered to women (Mark 1:29ff; 5:25ff) and women ministered to Jesus (Matthew 26:6ff). Jesus befriended women and he shared in their sorrows (John 11:33ff). All the gospel resurrection accounts are in agreement that Jesus appeared to women first after his resurrection (Matthew 28:1ff; Mark 16:1ff; Luke 24:1ff; John 20:1ff). Women commuter-train worshippers do read the above-mentioned texts, and they interpret them for their empowerment in their struggle against political, class and gender oppression. The one thing that women commuters put strong emphasis on is prayer. They believe that the future of the country (and the world) depends on earnest prayer and service by the women. So vital is prayer to them that they even choose to pray outside of the train carriages, in secluded places such as mountains.

The significance of the mountain for the African woman commuter-train worshipper.

Mbiti notes that in African religion “there are innumerable mountains, hills and sacred places with great religious significance” (MBITI 2002:19). These mountains, Mbiti adds,

have a symbolic meaning that meets the spiritual needs of the African Christian. The African (woman) commuter-train worshippers have incorporated this item in their identity, life and worship. They find reverence for the mountain in the Bible and read texts that support this reference. Following is how the Bible is read in the trains to elevate the status of the mountains.

The mountain occupies a special place in the hearts of the African women commuters. When there is a scourge in the community, such as the HIV-Aids pandemic, rampant crime or the recent spate of child rapes, the women commuter worshippers set aside a day on which they will gather on a particular hill to pray. The day set aside could be a Saturday or a public holiday, since most commuter worshippers attend various denominations on Sundays. When asked why they have to go to the mountain to pray, they are quick to refer to the Bible. They read Psalm 121:1ff, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills... My help comes from the Lord." They cite a number of significant incidents from the Bible that took part at or near the mountains. They believe that God has revealed Godself to humans, and God continues to reveal Godself there. They point out that it was at a mountain in Moriah where God tested Abraham by asking him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:1ff). Abraham passed the test, and on mount Moriah God made the promise to bless Abraham abundantly and make his descendants "as numerous as the stars in the sky and as sand on the seashore" (v17). Also in Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, Solomon built the Temple of the Lord (2 Chronicles 3:1ff).

At Horeb, "the mountain of God", the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Exodus 3:1). After his call to liberate the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, Moses is told by God that "when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God here at this mountain" (v12). When the Israelites complained bitterly of thirst and threatened to stone Moses, God instructed Moses to strike a rock in Horeb with his staff, and water poured out for the people to drink (Exodus 17:6ff). In their battle against the Amalekites in Rephidim, the Israelites relied on Moses standing on the hilltop with his staff, assisted by Aaron and Hur (v 9f). The Israelites won the battle. The theme of the

holiness of the Lord's mountain is evident in Exodus 19:1ff. When the Lord realized that the people may be tempted to want to see him, the Lord urged Moses to instruct the people to keep and observe a reverent distance as Moses went up to God on the mountain of Sinai. At this mountain the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments. It was at Mount Nebo that Moses saw the promised land, and there he died and was laid to rest, even though nobody knows Moses' burial place (Deuteronomy 34:1ff).

On Mount Carmel Elijah confronted four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah, and he challenged them to call on their god to bring down fire (1 Kings 18:17ff). When they failed to get an answer from Baal, Elijah prayed to the Lord and fire came down, consuming the whole-offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth, and licking up the water in the trench. The people cried, "The Lord is God" (v39b). When Elijah fled from Jezebel, he met the Lord at Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8ff).

When Satan tempted Jesus, he took him "to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their glory" (Matthew 4:8). Jesus passed the test, "and angels came and attended to his needs" (v11). It was on a mountain that Jesus taught the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1ff). On a mountain, while praying in solitude, Jesus saw the disciples in a boat buffeted by waves, since the wind was against the boat (Matthew 14:22ff). From the mountain, he went out to them and comforted them, "Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid" (v27). Jesus took Peter, James and John to a high mountain where he was transfigured in their presence (Matthew 17:1ff). There on the mountain Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus "and spoke of his departure, the destiny he was to fulfill in Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). The act of salvation was displayed on the mountain of Calvary, where Jesus hung on a cross of shame. Yet, after his resurrection, he met his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, where he gave them the Great Commission and assured them, "And behold, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:16ff).

The above (and many more) Biblical references provide the African women commuter-train worshippers with a powerful motivation to pray on the mountains on special occasions.

They are convinced, and have been vindicated by history, that God answers earnest prayers offered on the mountains. They sing along with the Psalmist, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills... my help comes from the Lord," so much so that even when they call everybody to prayer in the train carriage, they metaphorically say "*Ha re nyoloheng thaba-Masinyuke intaba*," translated, "Let us go up the mountain," meaning, "Let us pray". The women, affirmed by Biblical texts, become part of a very rich tradition of African women's religious organisations who would go up the mountain to pray for the safe return of men who had gone to the urban areas to seek employment; for men who had gone to war; for the cessation of hostilities in the political violence of the mid 1980's and 1990's; for the successful holding of the first democratic elections in South Africa; and for many other common needs of society. One is tempted to say it is no co-incidence that young men go to the mountains for circumcision and initiation into manhood. Just as Moses received the Law on a mountain and Jesus taught on a mountain, it sounds appropriate for young African men to receive training on the mountain.

Conclusion

Worship services (and thus, Bible reading) on the commuter trains have been a growing phenomenon and have moved from being haphazard to being formally organized. Worshippers on these trains are mainly workers, breadwinners and members of various denominations. School children also commute and take part in these services. Their ecumenical nature is an advantage from which we can be enriched as we interact with them in their use of the Bible. The strength of the Biblical interpretation in the commuter-train is that the readers are not bound or restricted by a particular denomination. There is thus no homogeneous method of reading the Bible. Each individual reader reads the Bible in his or her own language, from the perspective of his or her own culture, world view and life experience, and appropriates the Biblical message in a manner free from the constraints of conventional scholarly parameters. There is also respect for and tolerance of different (and sometimes conflicting) expositions of Biblical texts. The religious (and denominational) intolerance that we experience in township night vigils and funerals, for example, is not found among the commuter-train worshippers.

I believe I have attempted to show how the African commuter-train worshippers sometimes follow Biblical texts to the letter, that is, some texts are interpreted literally. In other instances, inculturation hermeneutics apply in their Biblical interpretation. The culture of the readers impacts heavily in the way they read the Bible. The commuters see the Bible as a book for them, about them and about God. They find a number of similarities between their cultural world and the cultural world of the Bible. Significantly, the commuter-train worshippers give space for African women's interpretation of the Bible. I should say from experience that reading the Bible on the trains brings an added dimension to the way I read the Bible in my church. I can safely imagine that this is the case with many commuters who attend their respective churches.

However, it is evident that the impact of Bible reading in the trains extends beyond the confines of the churches and other religious communities. The security guards that are deployed inside the trains and at the train stations testify to the decline in criminal acts such as muggings, assault and robbery on the trains, which decline they attribute to the worship services in their carriages. It has been heartening to see self-confessed thugs turning away from their ways and embracing the Bible, preaching and urging others to turn away from their wayward behaviour. The effects of the worship services are also felt at home and at work, as those who read and preach from the Bible try to be consistent and exemplary in their daily lives. The story of some pupils who commute and belong to the worshipping community is instructive.

School children Palesa, Nqobile and Gosa have related how the Bible reading community of the commuter-train worshippers impacted on their lives at school. They played a crucial role in reviving the once popular Students' Christian Movement (SCM) at their respective schools. The SCM had all but collapsed in township schools since the era of students' protest politics in the early 1980's morning assemblies at especially secondary schools, were turned into protest terrains a students preferred to sing liberation songs, chant political slogans, and listen to fellow comrades-in-struggle rather than moral and religious lessons from the teachers. The students who were part of the commuter-train worshipping

community turned the situation around in their schools. Having been inspired by hymns and choruses, and the reading and exposition of Biblical texts in the mornings on their way to school, these students taught their peers new songs and shared with them the message of the text for the day. Assemblies in the morning once again became places of highly inspired devotion and sharing of the message of the Bible. In many instances it is the students themselves (that is, the commuting students) who, with the blessings of the school authorities, led these devotions and preached on Biblical texts. Themba Shezi, principal at Diepdale High School, recalls how these students' vibrant devotions led to a huge rise in punctuality at school as others did not want to miss the morning devotions, thus minimizing the problem of late-coming. He alludes to the general improvement in the school's discipline as the message of the Bible penetrated the hearts of its student hearers and they tried to appropriate it in their daily lives - at school and at home. The SCM, formed and run mainly by the student commuters, grew rapidly and preached against alcohol and drug abuse, disrespect for adults (teachers and parents) and general laziness in their (school and home) work. Shezi points out that students and teachers were so inspired by the Bible-reading student commuters that they developed a desire to have Bibles, resulting in Diepdale getting a donation of Bibles from the Bible Society of South Africa. It is not only schools that became beneficiaries of this trend of Bible reading student commuters, but homes as well. The lack of discipline in the homes and the collapse of parental authority that resulted from the defiance campaigns of political activism gave way to a new ethos as the Bible reading youths turned things around. Parents of pupils who commute by train have testified to the impact that the commuter-worshipping community has had on the lives of their children, and on the environment as a whole.

Thus the African commuter-train worshippers have used the Bible not only to find answers and solutions to their problems, but also to transform the various sectors of society. I am inclined to call for due recognition of this rapidly growing community of Bible readers. I will now attempt, in the next chapter to reflect on how my analysis of this form of Bible reading relates to my analysis of African Biblical interpretation generally. Put another

way, I will try to highlight the connections between Chapter 3 on the one hand and Chapters 1 and 2 on the other.

Chapter 4

Final Reflections

This chapter will relate the reading of the Bible by the African commuter-train worshippers to the general African Biblical interpretation. I have argued that the method of reading the Bible employed in the commuter-trains is an African interpretation in its own right and does have a role in the (South) African hermeneutical field. The emphasis on the role of the ordinary reader as espoused in Contextual Bible study, has found expression in the African commuter reader who reads the Bible with freedom. The context of the commuter is ever present in his or her reading of the Bible. This is borne out by the way commuters interpreted the Bible in the context of the struggle for liberation from the oppressive apartheid policy. We have seen how the commuter used the “public transcript” to pull the carpet from under the brutal apartheid law-makers and law enforcers, while reserving the “hidden transcript” when the enemy was absent.

I wish to argue that the fact that African commuter-train worshippers do not have the western tools of interpretation does not necessarily mean that they read the Bible uncritically. For example, in their reading of the Bible in the liberation struggle, the commuters consciously avoid such texts as Romans 13:1ff which urge people to submit themselves to the governing authorities, “for there is no authority except that which God has established” (v1b). Reading verses like “...he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted...” (v2a) would obviously derail the defiance campaign that was used as a weapon to fight the racist, oppressive governments of South Africa. The commuter reads the Bible selectively and therefore critically, since the commuter chooses texts and stories that serve the socio-politico-economic, cultural and religious needs. I contend that this is a critical reading of the Bible. I argue even further, that the term “pre-critical,” which West uses, is not helpful in describing commuter reading.

In some instances, as shown by the literal interpretation and application of Biblical texts during the era of (political) train violence in the 1990's, the commuters displayed a tendency towards literalism and individualism. It is personal. For example, in blaming themselves for wrongdoing and therefore justly incurring "punishment in fulfilment of all that has been written" (Luke 21:22), the commuters hardly ever asked why the violence and the state-sponsored terrorism was not affecting other races in the country. The commuters did not interrogate the issue of why it was only Black South Africans who needed to repent in order to be saved: the land which God had promised to heal on condition that God's people humbled themselves and prayed and sought God's face and turned from their wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14), was after all a land that the Black people shared with the White South Africans.

The themes of ubuntu, ancestral veneration, as well as life and death, which have been a part of the African's life, are dealt with by the African commuter reader in a way that enhances the Inculturation hermeneutic. The commuters refuse to see their cultural norms and values as incompatible with the gospel. They find striking similarities between the ubuntu concept, for example, and the Semitic values that run through the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Both African society and the community that Jesus sought to establish are strong on relationships. The Acts 2:42ff community resembles a typical African rural community where nobody is allowed to die of hunger, but rather people are allocated a plot of land to farm and share with others. The African commuters have found that the cultural values, rather than alienate them from the Bible, do in fact enhance their understanding and interpretation of the Biblical message. The continued existence of the community of the living-dead (the ancestors) resonates with the communion of saints which the Christian creeds allude to. The finality of death, therefore, is rejected by both the African commuter reader of the Bible and the traditional Christian reader. It finds expression in Jesus' resurrection and Paul's teaching, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54cf).

The women commuter readers, perhaps unwittingly, join the list of African women theologians and Biblical scholars in going against the conventional reading and interpretation, which is unashamedly biased against women. They simply refuse to allow the Bible to be used to demean them. So they go out of their way to find texts which show some heroic deeds about women of faith and strong character in the Bible. They read these texts with a feeling of magnanimity and triumph. As shown in Chapter 3, they exalt the role of women by bringing out the suppressed women characters or their deeds. In addition to this, the women commuters read the texts which are commonly read to portray the weakness or wickedness of women, with a view to re-interpreting those texts to nullify popular interpretation and put forward their understanding of the said texts. For example, whereas men readers will generally find a "wicked" Eve in the story of the fall (Genesis 3:1ff), the African women commuter readers find a "weak and foolish" Adam who allows himself to be misled into disobeying God's command. It is little wonder that even in a male-dominated Biblical interpretational field, women commuters are still able to make their voices heard, and they occupy leadership positions from which they exert a lot of influence on the way the commuter-train worshipping communities' appropriation of the Bible is made. Also, their constant visits to the mountains for prayers of intercession at difficult times have earned them respect from the communities. It is often said that when men are at their wits' end, they rely on women of prayer and faith for their salvation.

To conclude, I wish to concede that I have just scratched the surface of this emerging phenomenon of Biblical interpretation in the African commuter-train worshipping communities. While I feel privileged that I have engaged in this ground-breaking field, I am acutely aware of the amount of work that is yet to be done in this field. African commuters in busses and trains have embraced the Bible and they read and interpret it unapologetically in their own way. I do believe that African Biblical interpretation can only be richer if this field of commuter reading of the Bible is researched thoroughly and then incorporated (albeit in part) in the whole field of African Biblical scholarship. I should end by paraphrasing the famous French mathematician, Rene Des Cartes: I hope that posterity will judge me kindly, not only as to the things that I have mentioned in this

research, but also as to those that I have intentionally omitted, in order to leave to others the pleasure of discovery (SOBEL & MALETSKY 1975:4).

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METRORAIL MANAGEMENT MEMBERS INTERVIEWED:

Interviews held on 22nd April 2002 at Metrorail Park, Loveday and Leyds Streets, Johannesburg.

- 1 Lillian Mofokeng - Marketing and Communications Manager of Metrorail (011) 774-4140. Interview conducted in SeSotho.
- 2 Zipho Mavimbela - Publications and Events Manager at Metrorail (011) 774-3522. Interview conducted in IsiZulu.
- 3 Willie van Rensburg - Customer Services Manager(011) 773-3873. Interview conducted in English.
- 4 Len van Gelder - Customer Services Department (011) 773-7475. Interview conducted in English.

COMMUTERS INTERVIEWED:

Consent to interview the below mentioned people around 'The Use of the Bible in Commuter-train Worship' was obtained.

1. Name of Interviewee: Mandla Mkhonza
Identity of Interviewee: Leader of Train Number 9019
Date of Interview: 12 August 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: On the train
Contact Details: 1612 Drieziek Ext 4, Orange Farms, (w) (011) 618-2760,
(c) 082 489 3557

2. Name of Interviewee: Elisah Stoffel
Identity of Interviewee: Worshipper on Train Number 9019
Date of Interview: 12 August 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: On the train
Contact Details: 13839 Ext 8A, Orange Farms, (c) 082 331 5997

3. Name of Interviewee: Mabel Rabotapi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 9 August 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2940 Section 1, Palm Springs, (w) (011) 830-0629/37
4. Name of Interviewee: Jeff Nzima
Identity of Interviewee: Official on Train Number 9019
Date of Interview: 9 August 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 9890 Ext 7B, Orange Farms, (c) 082 732 9013
5. Name of Interviewee: Mirriam Letebele
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 10 August 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 7128 Ext 4, Orange Farms, (w) (011) 836-5021.
6. Name of Interviewee: Emmanuel Makhafula
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 10 August 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 16616 Ext 9, Phase 2 Orange Farms, (w) (011) 490-3868,
(c) 072 176 2745
7. Name of Interviewee: Malefu Mumba
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 17 August 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 6022 Ext 2, Orange Farms, (w) (011) 860-5431

8. Name of Interviewee: Job Molaoa
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 17 August 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 6753 Ext 2, Orange Farms, (w) (011) 334-4556/7, (c) 072 315 7057

9. Name of Interviewee: Elsie Mphirime
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 24 August 2002
Language of Interview: Setswana
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 6970 Ext 4, Orange Farms, (w) (011) 860-7987

10. Name of Interviewee: Solomon Mogale
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 24 August 2002
Language of Interview: Setswana
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 773 Section B, Palm Springs, (h) (016) 681-2291, (c) 082 433 0074

11. Name of Interviewee: Rebecca Tladi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 31 August 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 3692 Section H, Palm Springs, (w) (011) 725-2893,
(h) (016) 593-6740

12. Name of Interviewee: Solly Xhoseni
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 31 August 2002
Language of Interview: IsiXhosa
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 1665 Drieziek Ext 3, Orange Farms, (c) 073 169 9966

13. Name of Interviewee: Moses Mazibuko
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 1 September 2002
Language of Interview: isiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 618 Zone 6 Ext 1, Sebokeng, (h)(016) 593-3097
14. Name of Interviewee: Betty Maoba
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 7 September 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 11216B Mazarin Street, Lenasia Ext 3, (w) (011) 854-9488
15. Name of Interviewee: Steven Mnune
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 1 September 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 571036 Zone 3, Sebokeng
16. Name of Interviewee: Sabata Nhlapo
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 7 September 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2626 South Avondale Road, Evaton, (c) 083 986 7006
17. Name of Interviewee: Rose Magoda
Identity of Interviewee: Official on Train Number 9027
Date of Interview: 27 April 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 10058 Zone 7B, (w) (011) 838-2651, (h) (016) 593-8946

18. Name of Interviewee: Nthabiseng Nene
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 14 September 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 8198B Zone 6, Pimville, (w) (011) 293-9200, (h) (011) 938-3777
19. Name of Interviewee: Anna Ngwenya
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 13 September 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 11707 Zone 7, Sebokeng, (w) (011) 945-1162
20. Name of Interviewee: Magauta Modise
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 14 September 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2407 Chiawelo Ext 2, (w) (011) 406-3517/3723
21. Name of Interviewee: Martha Kele
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 21 September 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2506-20, Eatonside
22. Name of Interviewee: Nomaliza Menziwa
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 21 September 2002
Language of Interview: IsiXhosa
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2203 Evaton North, (w) (011) 440-0342

23. Name of Interviewee: Matshidiso Pulutsoana
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 23 September 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: Train Number 9019
Contact Details: 9269 Zone 7A, Sebokeng, (w) (011) 838-6961, (c) 082 768 1217
24. Name of Interviewee: Elizabeth Sithole
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 23 September 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: Train Number 9019
Contact Details: (w) (011) 984-4473
25. Name of Interviewee: Tshidi Mosikidi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 27 April 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 9347 Zone 7, Sebokeng,
26. Name of Interviewee: Anna Letsoalo
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 27 April 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 1926 Drieziek Ext 3, Orange Farms
27. Name of Interviewee: Zodwa Maseko
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 4 May 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 58/27 Small Farms, Evaton, (h) (016) 596-2451

28. Name of Interviewee: Anna Maseme
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 4 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 70/10 Small Farms, Evaton
29. Name of Interviewee: Rebecca Tsolo
Identity of Interviewee: Youth Co-ordinator in Train Number 9017
Date of Interview: 4 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 26A Botha Street, Vereeniging, (c) 084 800 1112
30. Name of Interviewee: Rebecca Phale
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 11 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 1182 Zone 13, Sebokeng
31. Name of Interviewee: Manana Sasha
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 12 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2068 Donna Road, Evaton
32. Name of Interviewee: Stan Mokoena
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 12 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 14822 Ext 8A, Orange Farms

33. Name of Interviewee: Johanna Jagers
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 18 May 2002
Language of Interview: IsiXhosa
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: No 18 New Village, Zone 12 Extension, Sebokeng
34. Name of Interviewee: Paulina Phatoli
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 18 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2047 Ext 1, Orange Farms
35. Name of Interviewee: Josephine Shoba
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 25 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sepedi
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 7018 Small Farms, Evaton
36. Name of Interviewee: Frans Senwamadi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 18 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sepedi
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 15100 Ext 8B, Orange Farms
37. Name of Interviewee: Dorcas Masibuse
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 25 May 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 6835 Evaton West

38. Name of Interviewee: Jabu Nkosi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 1 June 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 14411 Ext 8A, Stretford
39. Name of Interviewee: Martha Mokoena
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 1 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2482/10, Eatonside
40. Name of Interviewee: Esther Makhura
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 1 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sepedi
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 990/91 Ext 1, Orange Farms
41. Name of Interviewee: Selinah September
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 8 June 2002
Language of Interview: IsiXhosa
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 268/4 Small Farms, Evaton
42. Name of Interviewee: Sello Mabunda
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 8 June 2002
Language of Interview: Xitsonga
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 10191 Zone 7B, Sebokeng

43. Name of Interviewee: Elizabeth Kodisang
Identity of Interviewee: Secretary Train Number 9027
Date of Interview: 15 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 584011 Zone 3, Sebokeng, (h) (016) 593-2205
44. Name of Interviewee: Maria Molata
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train worshipper
Date of Interview: 15 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 50/28 Small Farms, Evaton
45. Name of Interviewee: Lydia Segole
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 15 June 2002
Language of Interview: Setswana
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 1008 Lakeside, Evaton
46. Name of Interviewee: Florina Khanye
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 22 June 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 5420 Zone 12 Extension, Sebokeng
47. Name of Interviewee: Nomsa Mashinini
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 17 June 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 13622 Ext 8B, Orange Farms

48. Name of Interviewee: Wilheminah Lipale
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 22 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 8282 Zone 7, Sebokeng
49. Name of Interviewee: Francina Dlwathi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 17 June 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2650 Lakeside, Orange Farm
50. Name of Interviewee: Oupa Meko
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 22 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 793 Bodibe Road, Evaton
51. Name of Interviewee: Maria Malindi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 22 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 9896 Zone 7A, Sebokeng
52. Name of Interviewee: Elizabeth Miya
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 23 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 9842 Zone 7B, Sebokeng

53. Name of Interviewee: Mirriam Moleko
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 23 June 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: No 29 Lawley Station
54. Name of Interviewee: Sibongile Mazibuko
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 29 June 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 618 Zone 6 Ext 1, Sebokeng
55. Name of Interviewee: Sipho Ntshingila
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 6 July 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 8022 Lakeside Ext 4, Evaton
56. Name of Interviewee: Martha Radebe
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 29 June 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 575023 Zone 3, Sebokeng
57. Name of Interviewee: Maria Magalela
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 13 July 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 996 Polokeng Street, Sebokeng

58. Name of Interviewee: Rev Benjamin Mokoena
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 6 July 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 13971 Ext 8B, Orange Farms
59. Name of Interviewee: Mamasedi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 13 July 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 287 Zone 6 Ext 1, Sebokeng
60. Name of Interviewee: Tshidi Neboholo
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 20 July 2002
Language of Interview: Sepedi
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 11883 Ext 7B, Orange Farms
61. Name of Interviewee: Ntate Masilo
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 29 July 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: On the train
Contact Details: (016) 592-1982
62. Name of Interviewee: Margaret Maki Majozi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 20 July 2002
Language of Interview: IsiZulu
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 2166 Zone 13, Sebokeng

63. Name of Interviewee: Lydia Mokoena
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 27 July 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: At home, as per contact details below
Contact Details: 604039 Zone 3, Sebokeng
64. Name of Interviewee: Leon & Ernest
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshippers
Date of Interview: 29 July 2002
Language of Interview: Sesotho
Place of Interview: On the train
Contact Details: 513 1597 Ext 1, Orange Farms
65. Name of Interviewee: Themba Shezi
Identity of Interviewee: Commuter-train Worshipper
Date of Interview: 3 August 2002
Language of Interview: English
Place of Interview: At Diepdale Secondary School
Contact Details: Diepdale Secondary School, Diepkloof, (w) (011) 985-0132