

**PRIMAL WORLDVIEW AND THE BIBLE: AN AFRICAN
CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION TO A HERMENEUTICAL METHOD
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PRIMAL WORLDVIEW,
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE GIKUYU OF KENYA.**

BY

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Abstract.

The cross-cultural transmission of the Christian faith sustains its growth and expansion. Indeed the reception of the Christian faith is from one cultural framework to another different cultural framework. However, this largely depends on the translation and the interpretation of the Bible, which has certainly been in agreement to the way the recipient cultures conceive reality. From the time Christianity came into existence, the introduction of biblical concepts on which Christianity stands in terms agreeable to the way the recipients conceive reality continues to offer a clear understanding of the same. Indeed, this has been from the perspective of the primal worldview. However, this was not the case in Africa, where the primal worldview was demonised, degraded and anathematised by the missionary enterprises. This indeed denied the Africa converts a chance to engage with the Bible in ways they would call their own, for they conceive reality in terms shaped by their primal worldview. This study has the Gîkûyû primal worldview as its particular reference, to whom the missionaries transmitted the biblical knowledge selectively with the hermeneutical method they used.

Now there is indisputable evidence that Christianity is growing fast in places where people conceive reality from the perspective of the primal worldview. To sustain and maintain this growth, the Bible ought to be interpreted and translated from the perspective of the primal worldview. This is necessary because the growth of Christianity depends on the right understanding of biblical concepts. Yet they are incomprehensible unless they receive an interpretation that is compatible to the way people conceive reality. In that case, there is need to investigate whether the former methods of interpreting and translating the Bible have adequately communicated the Gospel to African Christians. It is also necessary to investigate whether there is need for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview. This study contends that the former hermeneutical methods have not adequately communicated the complete Gospel to the African Christians. In that case, there is need for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview.

Evidence that leads to the quest of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview is from the history of the expansion of Christianity and from the phenomenology of religion. The primal worldview has tools on which hermeneutics can

depend on, hence gaining valid operating principles. On the other hand, there is evidence from the Scripture that the interpretation of the new from the perspective of the old is possible. In that case, the old facilitates and enables the understanding of the new. The Epistle to the Hebrews is a perfect example, showing that the interpretation and translation of Scripture from the perspective of the primal worldview are possible. This will safeguard spirituality and the spiritual view of life, which hermeneutics need, and which the former hermeneutical methods seem to have jettisoned. However, the former hermeneutical methods are not all useless in the hermeneutical discourse. The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can use them as servants but not as masters. Besides, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview ought to have a future and significance, without which it can sink to oblivion. Two complementary aspects guarantee its future and significance. Firstly, it is its engagement with the ordinary readers of the Bible in their context. Secondly, it is in the use of the mother tongue, so that hermeneutics can be appreciable to both the ordinary and trained readers of the Bible. This is the hermeneutical method, which African Christianity must turn to with urgency to ascertain its growth.

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Chapter 1 Introduction.

1:1. *Background and Motivation of the study.*

African Christians have engaged with the Bible since Christianity came into the continent. They have used several hermeneutical methods in the attempt to unearth the meaning of the Scriptures. Yet there is suspicion whether the former interpretative grid brought by the missionaries and sustained by the churches they founded (and to which we belong) has enabled a clear grasp of the Scriptures. There is also scepticism whether other hermeneutical method developed by the church as a reaction to the method brought by the missionaries facilitates a clear grasp of the Scriptures. This is the background from which the study seeks to investigate whether the previous hermeneutical methods have communicated the Gospel adequately to the African Christians; and whether there is need for another hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. The major hypothesis on which the study holds is that the former hermeneutical methods do not engage the full measure of the African reality. This means that they have failed to adequately communicate the totality of the Gospel to the African Christians. These methods are certainly unable to “deal with the kind of questions that are relevant to the African context, and also because they lack the means to enter into these problems” (Parratt 1995: 194).

Nevertheless, each method can only deal partly with these questions and problems. Commenting on Christianity purveyed by Western missionaries, and which was of course founded on the historical-critical method of interpreting Scriptures, Tutu has this to say.

The African Christian has suffered from a form of religious schizophrenia. With part of himself he has been compelled to pay lip service to Christianity as understood, expressed and preached by the white man (*and indeed by the missionary founded churches*)¹. But with an ever greater part of himself, a part he has often been ashamed to acknowledge openly and which he has struggled to repress, he has felt his Africanness was being violated. The white man’s largely cerebral religion was hardly touching the depths of his African soul; he was being redeemed from sins he did not believe he had committed; he was being given answers, and often splendid answers to questions he had not asked.

(Tutu 1978: 366)

¹ The words in bracket and in italics, as well as any other word(s) in italics and in brackets appearing in a citation are the author’s own emphasis, unless otherwise stated.

The hermeneutical methods, which have so far reacted to this white man's cerebral religion, may also fail to do justice to the whole of the African reality. They too have their own shortcomings: introducing ideological interpretation to the biblical text. In reference to them, Parratt observes; "while such approaches have produced quite some striking results, they seem not to have invalidated the need to try...to get a meaning of the text informed by the original context-even granted the modern reader is alienated from that context by both time and culture" (Parratt 1995: 204). This observation emerged from the fact that the reactionary hermeneutical methods criticised the method inherited from Western Christianity as only interested on what the text meant to the original audience and to the author at the expense of the context in which the present readers found themselves.

The foregoing argument points to the fact that the former hermeneutical methods have not been able to engage the full measure of the African reality. This means that there is need for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. This method would enable people to conceive reality in terms agreeable to their primal worldview. This study consequently is a contribution to a hermeneutical method from a primal worldview perspective. The primal worldview is selected as a suitable premise for beginning the hermeneutical discourse, because of the postulate of affinity² between it and the Bible. The nub and core of this study is therefore to explore this postulate of affinity and its contribution to hermeneutics. The study attempts to show that hermeneutics has always enabled human beings to receive the Bible in terms compatible to their conception of reality. This is when biblical concepts are interpreted, translated and understood through the aid of tools and concept derived from their primal worldview. However, this did not happen in the African context, where the missionaries demonised the African primal worldview.

This study consequently draws from varied perspectives of scholars³ "who have discerned in primal religions a fertile soil for the Christian Gospel, and who have found this engagement fruitful for opening up new horizons on Christian faith and understanding"

² The definition and the usage of the terminology 'postulate of affinity' are found on the section on definition of terminologies in this chapter.

³ Walls, A.F. 1996; Turner 1977: 37, Taylor J.B. 1975 and Taylor J.V. 1963 are among the scholars who have that the primal religions offer a fertile soil for the Christian Gospel.

(Bediako, G 2000: 12). On the other hand, the study draws from other scholars⁴ who have noticed that the Bible commands a central place in the life of African Christians, and it is a central pillar of their faith. Indeed, the primal worldview continues to play a significant role in African people's conception of reality. This opens up an area that demands exploration, since Christianity is growing fast where the primal worldview has not been completely diminished. Africa is among the places where Christianity is growing rapidly and where the primal worldview still holds sway. Hermeneutics therefore ought to sustain and maintain this rapid growth. And since the primal worldview has a contribution to this growth, then hermeneutics ought to begin from a primal worldview perspective. This in itself is a motivation of the study. The revelation that there is an affinity between the Bible and the primal worldview and the emphasis on contextualisation and the use of contextual tools propelled the above motivation given that the affinity between the Bible and primal worldview may be the right place to begin contextualising the biblical text and searching for indigenous tools.⁵ A personal desire to interpret the Bible in a way that will enable African Christians to internalise the biblical message and enhance the living of the biblical faith, being integrated into their day-to-day life, has also propelled the motivation. This is indeed a desire to approach the Bible from the perspective of inculturation (indigenisation) and contextualisation. However, the above analysed background and motivation indicates a problem stated below, and which this study seeks to address.

1:2. Statement of the problem.

Specifically, this study aims to estimate the quality of the former hermeneutical methods in communicating the biblical message to the African Christians. Secondly, it seeks to identify whether there is need for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview. The statement of the problem therefore read as follows:

- ♣ Could it be that the previous hermeneutical methods have failed to make the Gospel adequately communicable to the African Christians so that there is need for a

⁴ Obeng 1997: 8; Waruta & Nthamburi 1997; Sibeko & Haddad 1997 and Masenya 1997 are among the scholars who hold that the Bible commands a central place in the lives of African Christians.

⁵ The said revelation on the affinity between the Bible and the primal worldview was exposed in the MTh taught course in African Christianity. This was basically in the subject of Christianity and the Primal Religions of the World and to some extent on the course of Gospel and Culture and on World Church History as Mission History. The emphasis on contextualisation and the use of contextual tools came about in the same course, especially on the subject of African Biblical hermeneutics.

hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview?

In order to deal with the major statement of the problem, the study addresses the following sub-problems.

- ♣ What is the evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview?
- ♣ What would be the operating principles of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview?
- ♣ What is the immediate evidence that can support the practicality of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview?
- ♣ What would be the relationship between the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview and the previous hermeneutical methods?
- ♣ What would be the future and significance of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview?

1:3 The Objective of the study.

The principle objective of this study is to achieve the following:

- ♣ To identify the evidence that leads to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview in African Christianity.
- ♣ To establish the operating principles of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview.
- ♣ To analyse the Epistle to the Hebrews as the immediate evidence of scriptural interpretation from the primal worldview perspective. This will also include interpreting the Epistle's themes from a primal worldview perspective.
- ♣ To examine the relationship of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview vis-à-vis other existing hermeneutical methods.
- ♣ To assess the future and the significance of a hermeneutics generated by the primal worldview.

The objectives of the study naturally emerge from the hypotheses underlined below, which form the research premises. The hypothesis for the major problem contends that:

- ♣ The former hermeneutical methods have not engaged the full measure of the African

reality.

Additional to the hypotheses for the major problem, the following statements are the hypotheses for the sub-problems:

- ♣ The history of Christianity and the phenomenology of religion offer historical and phenomenological evidence, which leads to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview.
- ♣ A hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can use tools derived from the primal worldview, and can labour on the postulate of affinity between the Bible and the primal worldview.
- ♣ The Epistle to the Hebrews offers immediate evidence on how to interpret Scripture from the perspective of a primal worldview.
- ♣ The former hermeneutical methods have tools, which a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can use, however not as a master but as a servant.
- ♣ The ability to make hermeneutics popular and contextual guarantees the future and significance of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. This entails the use of mother tongue in order that both the trained and ordinary interlocutors may appreciate it.

1:4 Justification of the study.

Is this study justified at all? What has the primal worldview got to do with hermeneutics? It is worthwhile to note that over the last thirty years, scholars have been calling for a truly biblical Christianity, which is authentically African in its expression⁶. There are other complaints that African scholars have not been seriously engaged with biblical studies⁷.

⁶ In the preface of the *“Modern Service”*, Bishop (now Archbishop) David M Gitari argues for liturgies, “which are both thoroughly biblical and authentically African...and contextually creative”. In the preface of *“A Modern Service of the Holy Communion”*, Gitari also eulogises the liturgy as “both thoroughly biblical and authentically African...and refreshingly creative”.

⁷ Fashole-Luke 1976: 168 laments the failure of the African Church in producing genuine biblical scholarship. He insists that African theology and modern African churches must take biblical scholarship seriously to avoid being “sterile, bankrupt and unworthy of the tradition which nourished Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. Again, “very few African theologians are putting their attention on Biblical studies...Only here and there do we have the beginnings of Biblical theology among African scholars” (Mbiti 1976: 165 cited in Gehman 1987: 55). Yet again, “the contribution of African scholars in the field of biblical exegesis have fallen short of their corresponding contribution to the study of African religion...so many talented African scholars have in the past opted to specialize in African traditional religion to the loss of biblical scholarship” (Parratt 1995: 56, 57).

Generally, this is the resultant outcry of the fact that hermeneutics, theology and liturgical worship continue to be Western oriented. Many scholars have thus lamented over the inadequacy of the Western method of thinking and learning, which is indeed inapt for African Christianity in as far as hermeneutics, theology and liturgical worship are concerned. There is therefore a compelling exigency for new models, which can interpret Scriptures to promote the fullness of life. Concerning the former hermeneutical models, African (and other like-minded) scholars have observed their inadequacy in dealing with the full measure of African reality. Consequently, Getui & Obeng observes,

These old models had been, and continue to be found incapable of challenging and overcoming the structures of injustices, and of developing new theological insights which would re-interpret the Gospel in ways and concepts that are more meaningful to the people of the third world. The oppressed and exploited peoples need new theological models and interpretation of the Gospel which can promote their struggle for liberation. In particular, these new models should facilitate a deeper rooting of the Christian message within the cultures of the people, in respective dialogue with individuals and communities in their specific religious heritage and contemporary religious experience.

(1999: 1)

Sentiments such as these are expressed in almost every theological treatise emerging from African (and other like-minded) theologians and scholars. There is therefore a growing need to have Christianity rooted in a people's primal religious heritage, and to have it resonate with contemporary socio-political/economical and religio-cultural experiences as they unfold in their context. Moreover, translating and interpreting the Bible in order that the readers may internalise its message and live with the same as part of their life is necessary for rooting Christianity in people's primal religious heritage and socio-political/economical and religio-cultural context. This happens to be a serious undertaking of this study, and its justification.

As Bediako, G. M. observes, "the insights of the primal African world-view are still dominant in the thinking of many convinced and obedient Christians" (1997: 16; Cf. her footnote 15). She also argues that the conversion of many "occurred without entertaining the loss of the primal worldview" (1997: 65). Ukpong likewise observes, "even Among Africans who became Christians, their conversion to Christianity did not bring about any change in their African worldview" (Ukpong 1999: 105). It therefore needs scanty

elaboration that most Africans still conceptualise reality in terms dictated by their primal worldview. “While Africans are being exposed today to Western education, traditional thought is still the source of the basic world-view of most of the people” (Olowola 1993: 7). This study is thus justified, especially in consideration of Waliggo’s observation, “no one can usefully expound the richness of the Bible to the African Christians without a serious consideration of their worldview” (Waliggo 1986: 20). On the other hand, O’Donuhue notes that, “African philosophy contains the seed of a universal wisdom, and a programme of African authenticity...” In view of this, Africa can immensely contribute to the universal community of faith, “if only she will return to the real roots of her traditional philosophy in the vision of human beings as joyful partners in communion with all that is” (O’Donuhue 1981: 49). This study consequently seeks to summon the African readers⁸ of the Bible to their traditional philosophy, rightly enshrined as a constituent of the primal worldview. It is therefore urgent and important that the African readers of the Bible embark on doing hermeneutics from the perspective of the primal worldview. That this aspect has been lacking in hermeneutics for a long time justifies this study, which seeks to reclaim a hermeneutical field that has been discretely removed from African Christianity.

Nevertheless, Magesa makes a valid observation in arguing,

Majority of African theologians recognize that human beings cannot describe reality of the Numinous except by imaginatively using the symbols, images and signs of their own existence and experience... Consequently, to understand a people’s God-talk, one has to be familiar with the symbols and the entire system of language they employ for this purpose; this is the necessity of studying the people and their culture, the necessity of knowing their philosophy, psychology and so on... This is also how we come to understand the principles people use to determine what is right and wrong and how their societies deal with such situations.

(Magesa 1997: 30)

If human beings cannot inherently describe reality, except by what they know, then people’s conception of reality should form the base of hermeneutics, in order to explain God’s message as detailed in the Bible. The primal worldview constitutes the appropriate

⁸ Unless where it is not qualified with the terms ‘trained reader(s)’ or ‘ordinary reader(s)’ in this study, the designation ‘African readers’ refers to both to the trained and ordinary readers of the Bible.

means of conceptualising reality decisively, thus enabling human beings to listen and to speak to God convincingly. It is not only necessary but also indispensable to listen to what God is saying, and to speak to God through the medium of a language one can understand. And seeing that “God wants all people to understand the message of his word, it is very important that the Bible makes sense to each group of people in the world” (O’Donovan 1996: 3). People can only understand God if they hear him speak in their language, and if they speak to him in their own language. This is indeed a justification of this study, which makes a case for the importance of the use of the mother tongues in the hermeneutical discourse.

1:5. Significance of the study.

The significance of this study is indeed explicit, for it introduces a hermeneutics that would enable a rewarding and creative incarnation of the biblical message. This study may be an answer to the remarks found in the cover page of Parratt 1995, quoted from Jean-Marc Ela’s *African Cry*, “the time has come to reinvent Christianity so as to live with our African soul”. Reinventing Christianity in Africa calls for the integration of the primal worldview into Christian theology and hermeneutics. This study therefore, is a contribution to the existing body of knowledge. It is a contribution to the church on matters related to the primal worldview and the Bible. It is also a contribution to the theological discourse by affirming that, that which was previously conceived as of no scholarly and/or academic value is of significant value and can illuminate biblical hermeneutics and theology. The study is thus a challenge both to the church and to society, impudently demanding that they realise how useful it is to approach the Bible from the perspective of primal worldview. The study consequently is of significance, given that it is venturing into a very fertile and uncultivated hermeneutical/theological and academic field.

The significance of this study is also in its quest to liberate the readers from the imposed Western cultural straightjacket, which hinders a contextual expression of the Christian faith. Its significance also resides in its attempt to liberate hermeneutics from all elitist attempts to create a division within the community of faith, and within the human family. The study thus repudiates any attempt that seeks to place hermeneutics as a reserve of the

trained elite at the expense of ordinary readers of the Bible. The significance of this study is also found in its endeavour to counter all exertions that seek to remove hermeneutics from faith, subjecting it only to scientific investigations, at best known only by the trained readers. As it were, any scientifically and rationally informed hermeneutical inquiry must become a tool that enriches the faith in a way that would incorporate the ordinary readers of the Bible. Any scientific and rational investigation of the Bible is therefore not an end in itself, but a tool that enables faith to seek understanding.

1:6 Definition of Terminology.

However, it is significant to define the terminologies employed by the study. Turner makes a persuasive case on the need to define terminologies.

Our approach to any range of phenomenon is both revealed and influenced by the names we bestow upon it. Serious study cannot dismiss the issue with the offhand popular remark, 'what is in a name? A name may prejudice the issue by saying too much or fail to delineate the field concerned by being too vague.

(Turner 1979: 49).

Thus key terminologies used by the study like, 'primal worldview' 'postulate of affinity' and 'hermeneutics' are defined below. However, the definition of the term 'primal' is deliberately left out because other scholars have served us well with its definition: that which is basic and prior, as opposed to primitive⁹. Correspondingly, the study favours the term primal as a theological category, which can augment hermeneutics methodologically. This study therefore concurs with Cox's assertion that the term 'primal' "conveys a theological meaning (*and*) if used more persistently, widely and uncritically...will implant a theological agenda into what otherwise endeavours to be an empirical science" (Cox 1990: 69). This means that the term is useful for hermeneutics and theology. The term 'primal' in this study thus denotes a "theological rather than an attempt to provide a description account of a type of a religious phenomenon" (1990: 69).

This study does not expect the term 'worldview' to cause a confusion in its meaning. As O'Donovan puts it, the term worldview

Mean just what the word says. It is the view which a person has of his world. It is the way

⁹ Turner 1971: 7, Taylor 1976: 3f, Cox 1990: 69 and Walls 1996: 119–139 successfully expounds the term 'primal', rejecting all other designations as unacceptable and untrue to the people they supposedly describe.

he understands and interprets the things which happen to him and to other people. It is a person's way of understanding life and the world which he lives. It is a person's belief about what is real and what is not real.

(O'Donovan 1996: 3).

In this regard, the term 'worldview' signifies how people conceptualise reality. The term is thus used to define the inner meaning of a concept that builds a people's philosophy of life. And since it is a worldview that enables people to define the inner meaning of a concept, hence enabling them to build their philosophy of life, people ought to be understood and judged from the perspective of their worldview. This must be the case given that a people's worldview refers to their cognitive and existential aspects. As C. Geertz contends, a people's worldview "is their picture of the way things, in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains the most comprehensive ideas of order" (Geertz 1968: 302f).

The term 'primal worldview' is therefore understood as providing a genuine theological apprehension of reality. It denotes a theological category of how people perceive reality and how they relate to the Supreme Being, to the supernatural powers and phenomena, to their fellow human beings, to the world of the non-human creation and to the world of spirits. This relationship is fundamental to hermeneutics, and the terminology 'primal worldview' is useful to hermeneutics and in that case, an important theological category. Nevertheless, the term 'primal worldview' should not be understood as a means of dragging the reader back to the traditional practices that have become obsolete and incredible. The term is understood as summoning the readers back to the "authentic human values cherished in Africa and needed everywhere" (O'Donohue 1981: 49). The usage of the term aims at reconstructing the diminishing ethical and moral values in the contemporary scientific and secularised worldview. Altogether, the term seeks to recapture the sacral nature found in the African community. These include the solidarity and respect for the life of both the human and non-human creation and the unquestionable faith in the being and existence of God, which are indeed theological.

The terminology 'postulate of affinity' requires a definition that will justify its usage. It denotes a self-evident fundamental principle, in which there is a spiritual attraction

between the Bible and the primal worldview. The term implies that the primal worldview and the Bible have a strong natural attraction and closeness to each other. The ‘postulate of affinity’ implies that the way the Bible and the primal worldview perceive God, human beings, non-human creation, the spirit and the spirit word has similarity in appearance, nature and essence. In that case, the ‘postulate of affinity’ enables an attraction of the Bible to the primal worldview and the primal worldview to the Bible. This means that the Bible and the primal worldview can have a functional amalgamation, and indeed their interaction would strengthen hermeneutics in African Christianity. The ‘postulate of affinity’ can thus enable the Bible and the primal worldview to be hermeneutically combined and to remain in that combination. In that case, the ‘postulate of affinity’ is considered as having relevance for hermeneutics and theology in African Christianity, and hence is a significant theological category. It is thus understood as a relationship that can “provide the opportunity for a new theological idiom...” (Bediako, K 2000: 6), and reclaim “an opportunity that seems to have been lost...in the history of Christianity” (: 8) in Africa and elsewhere.

Since this study is a contribution to the hermeneutical discourse in African Christianity, the term ‘hermeneutics’ will consequently command a central and significant position. It behoves us therefore to elucidate the meaning and usage of the term. Maimela and König (1998: 276) have adequately given us the background of the terminology ‘hermeneutics’. However, the study understands and uses the term from its Greek origin. The Greek verb *ἑρμηνεύω* (*hermēneuo*) is two dimensional in meaning. The first meaning favours a linguistic communication, which includes translating languages. The term also incorporates a meaning, which favours an interpretation and explanation dimension. This is the theory of text-interpretation. The study thus uses the term to include translation and interpretation, having the implication that, a profitable and clear interpretation of the Bible follows from the translation of the same into the language of the context where the interpretation transpires. Translation is therefore fundamental to the interpretation of a text, and that is what this study favours as the hermeneutical process. This study thus deviates from the prolonged seventeenth century understanding of the term, which only focused on the interpretation dimension (Cf. Jeanrond 1994: 12) as the universal meaning of the term. The translation

dimension is now gaining recognition given that each translation is a hermeneutical process, and as observed, “every translation is by itself, an interpretative tool” (Keegan 1985: 11).

1:7 Scope and Delimitation.

Hitherto, the study has shown its background and motivation followed by an exposition of the statement of the problem, the objective of the study, justification and significance of the study. The most central terms, which the study employs, have also been defined. The remaining part of this chapter contains a literature review and a discussion on the conceptual/theoretical framework that informs this study. The conceptual/theoretical framework includes the concepts of inculturation and contextualisation. The chapter then closes with an explanation of the research methodology.

Chapter 2 however seeks to identify the evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview. The history of Christianity and the phenomenology of religion offer the evidence. The history of Christianity portrays a cross-cultural transmission of the Christian faith, from the earliest period until recently. Indeed the enlightenment legacy and the missionary legacy broke this method of Christian expansion in Africa, since they read the Bible in a way that subjugated the African culture and worldview. On the other hand, the Phenomenology of religion does not entertain a dichotomy between the religious and the secular. The biblical message is well received, where the dichotomy has not permeated into peoples’ thought system. However, secularism is encroaching and there is need to stop it. It comes with the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. Its arrest is necessary and unfailing, given that secularism in Africa is a foreign system. Since the enlightenment and the missionary legacies appear to be a catalyst for secularism, the phenomenology of religion, which disavows secularism and can arrest its challenges, hence providing evidence leading to the quest of a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview.

Chapter 3 establishes two operating principles of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. The first principle is to labour on the postulate of affinity between the Bible and the primal worldview. The issues considered relate to God, human beings, the non-human creation, spirits and the spirit world. The second is on the use of tools derived

from the primal worldview. While there are manifold tools derived from the oral tradition, the chapter only includes a discussion on proverbs and stories. Chapter 4 is an analysis of the interpretation of Scriptures from the perspective of the primal worldview. The chapter discusses the conception of reality of the Epistle to the Hebrews, considering its primal background Jewish as well as Hellenistic. The epistle is analysed as having evidence of scriptural interpretation from the perspective of the primal worldview. The argument is that the epistle is an interpretation of the Jesus event recorded in the Gospels from the perspective of primal worldview. The chapter also interprets several of the epistle's themes from the perspective of the primal worldview.

Chapter 5 examines the relationship between a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview and the other existing hermeneutical methods. The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview relates to the former hermeneutical methods by using them not as masters but as servants, in order to disclose a holistic interpretation of the text. It also contributes to them by infusing spirituality and the spiritual view of life, which the former hermeneutical method apparently suppressed. Chapter 6 assesses the future of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. If the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview is to have a future and significance, then it must engage with the ordinary readers in their context. This means working 'with' and not 'for' and listening 'to' and not 'for' the ordinary readers. It also means evoking a contextual reading of the Bible. This therefore enhances the development of a 'popular contextual hermeneutics'. However, to make it popular and contextual, the use of the mother tongue is relevant. This is because the majority of the ordinary readers can only communicate in their mother tongue. Thus, the engagement with people in their context and the use of the mother tongue guarantees the future and significance of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. Chapter 7 is the conclusion of the whole treatise.

However, the study has its own delimitation. In any case, it will not discuss all elements incorporated in the primal worldview. While this is important, the study acknowledges the fact that including all may widen the scope and then fail to get into the depths of the point the study wishes to unearth. As it were, the study will thus deal with the primal worldview

on God, human beings, the non-human creation and spirits and the spirit world, which are considered as important elements in the hermeneutical discourse of African Christianity. The study will seek to refer to various primal worldviews of the African people, but the Gíkûyû worldview will take prominence. However, the study takes into consideration that the essential elements of the primal worldview of most African societies are interrelated with each other¹⁰. Secondly, the study will not offer a detailed verse-to-verse exegesis of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The study will only comment on several themes in the epistle. While verse-to-verse exegesis is important, the nature and scope of this study may not permit it because of limited time and space. There is only one chapter dealing with the Epistle to the Hebrews.

1:8 Literature Review.

The literature available does not directly deal with the topic of our research. The study will by no means duplicate any existing literature. However, the study will use existing literature on primal religion and biblical hermeneutics as its reference materials. Bediako; G (1997) is one of the essential works consulted. She argues for the affinity between the Bible and primal religions and worldview. She successfully shows that the religious itinerary of Europe began from the perspective of the primal worldview. Burnett, D (1988) argues that the primal religions pervade every nation, even the western countries, where a secularised worldview informs their perception of reality. However, the Westerners do scorn the constituents of the primal world. Nevertheless, they are influential to the religious itinerary of many Europeans. He demonstrates how the West engages with the horoscope, which is indeed of primal inclinations. He thus outlines the importance of taking cognisance of the primal worldview in the interpretation of the Bible. This brings the Gospel to people conscientiously so that it may bear with their primal belief. Taylor, J. V (1963) argues that, for Christianity to grow into acceptable proportions in Africa, there

¹⁰ Cf. Magesa 1997: 16, Taylor, J.V 1963: 19, Maquet 1972: 16 and Burnett 1988: 19. Maquet asserts, "Africinity...is based on a similar experience of the world shared by various societies and on the dissemination of several cultural traits among these societies (*with*) similar ways of adapting to the natural environment and the diffusion of cultural traits" (Maquet 1972: 16). Burnett reveals "although the worldview varies from one society to another, one can identify certain common traits in those societies we call 'primal'".

is need to understand the African primal worldview. He demonstrates how elements and tools derived from the primal worldview can practically aid the apprehension of biblical insinuations. Turner, H (1977: 27–37) rejects the use of derogatory terms to describe the religions and worldview of traditional societies. He promotes the use of the term primal and offers a six-feature analysis on primal religions, which may apportion valid tools to a hermeneutics generated by the primal worldview, and to theology. He also outlines the contribution, which primal religion can make to the study of modern religion.

Healey, J & Sybertz, D (1996) detail the richness of African narrative theology, which derives from the African culture, and more so from the African proverbs and stories. Certainly, African proverbs, riddles, idiomatic expressions, stories, drama, songs and myths, which are constituents of the primal worldview, may be necessary to theology and to hermeneutics. Lamin Sanneh argues for the translatability of the Gospel into the mother tongue. This ensues from the fact that languages and cultures have historically promoted the spread Christianity. He avers that the historical development of Christianity is rightly identified with the need to translate the Christian message out of the Aramaic and Hebrew languages (1989: 1). The translation of Scriptures into the African languages proved beneficial. Sanneh consequently reveals, “scripture translation produced consequences for external transmission as well as for the internal appropriation of the message” (1989: 2) not only in Europe but also in Africa. He demonstratively unearths the fact that language and culture are essential constituents of translation. West (1991) deals with hermeneutics. He emphasises that our hermeneutical discourse depends largely from the context on which we begin reading the Bible. He also draws attention to a reading of the Bible ‘with’ and not ‘for’ the ordinary people. He makes provision for the hermeneutics of liberation. Ukpong (1995) argues for the hermeneutics of inculturation, which takes into consideration the elements of the primal worldview as its very important tools.

Thiselton (1992) offers an examination of various hermeneutical traditions in the history of biblical hermeneutics. Hughes, Graham (1979) details how the Epistle to the Hebrews is a New Testament example to the interpretation of the Scriptures. He clearly demonstrates how the writer of the epistle was interpreting his religious past in light of the Jesus event. This is a relevant book to the study because interpretation of a people’s

religious past detailed in their primal worldview is possible in the light of the Jesus event. Magesa 1997 challenges his readers to accept the moral and ethical values that reside in the African primal worldview and religion, and promote the fullness of life. These define how human beings ought to live. The unity between the natural, the human and the spiritual is an essential ingredient for effecting abundant life. This infuses community life with purpose and harmony. The book is a clear demonstration of the link between the African worldview and the ethos of culture, religion and morality, which enhances the fullness of life. Magesa's study is relevant to this study, which also has a propensity for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview that is pertinent to the outpouring of abundant life. Tanner, Kathyryn (1997) proposes beneficial implications when the educated elite attains a fuller understanding of the value of culture for the theological enterprises. She argues that theology is part of culture, therefore a product of human beings and so shaped by concrete social practices. This makes theology much more an integral part of everyday life. In that case, theology belongs to the ordinary people as well as to the educated elite, who must connect academic theology to the daily life of the ordinary people. By so doing, "academic theology would...lessen the gap between itself and theological activity elsewhere" (Tanner 1997: 71). Tanner's treatise is relevant to this study given that the ability to make the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview popular and contextual guarantees its future.

Several other works consulted have not been included in this literature review. Moreover, as we have stated above, this study will not duplicate any of the existing literature. It stands as a unique contribution to the existing body of knowledge. This is because the study will argue for the use of the existing hermeneutical trajectories as tools for a hermeneutical method based and illuminated by primal worldview. The study aims to contribute to the field of biblical hermeneutics and theology, by arguing for the value of primal worldview as an essential factor to hermeneutics and theology.

1:9 Conceptual/Theoretical Framework.

The study adopts a conceptual/theoretical framework informed by inculturation and contextualisation. Inculturation is a relatively new concept in the history of African Christianity. However, it is not a new option in the history of Church.

The New Testament itself shows this with its different theological presentation of Jesus which witness to the early church's proclamations of Jesus Christ to different people in their different cultural situations. The early centuries of the church's life witnessed a massive inculturation of the message as it passed from its birth in the Hebrews culture of God's people of the old covenant to become the religion of the empire, so culturally diverse from its original milieu.

(McGarry, Cecil, S.J: preface to Waliggo et al. 1986: 8).

Though relatively new in Africa, inculturation is an old process in the history of Christianity and which African Christianity is a legitimate heir. However, it is an inheritance that was lethargic and uneventful until the 20th century, when the African Roman Catholic bishops and theologians popularised inculturation as a significant theological category¹¹. This happened because of the discovery of culture as a plural phenomenon, a discovery that has forced a revision of Christian theology, Bible reading and church history. The resultant occurrence was the concept of inculturation, which seeks to have Christian theology and hermeneutics planted in the cultural context in which people live. However, the formulation of the term underwent a metamorphosis from a series of terms implying similar concepts. The mean proportion hence became a passage of one terminology to the other.¹² However, the term inculturation is now used to express the reality that underlines the importance of culture, as a reliable means of realising the incarnation of the biblical message. It is "the recognition that faith must become culture, if it is to be fully received and lived" (Shorter 1988: xi). The study thus adopts the inculturation framework purposely to endeavour inculturating the biblical message. It must be admitted that inculturating the biblical message is the most sanguine and sagacious method of inculturating Christianity in Africa. Nevertheless, inculturating the biblical message needs a hermeneutics grilled in an African pot. This will enable the African Christians make biblical message part of their thinking, instantaneously amalgamating their worldview to the biblical worldview. Precisely, the biblical message thus becomes intrinsic to the African Christian life and ultimately a truly African Christian

¹¹ As observed, "the concept of inculturation (and the term itself) gained currency in the 1970's, largely because of the efforts of African bishops and theologians who saw it as an ally against the consequence of cultural alienation and a guarantee of a genuinely African Christianity" (Shorter 1988: xi).

¹² The terminologies include adaptation, indigenisation, reformation and incarnation (which is still in use for just as Christ (who is the Word of God) became incarnate in the human culture, and took the form of human beings, likewise the written word of God (Scriptures) need to be incarnated in a peoples' culture). Waliggo 1986: 11–12, 32–45 concretely discusses these terminologies.

aspiration.

This study also takes in contextualisation as a concept that informs its framework. This is a concept not to far dissociate with the inculturation concept in its meaning. They may be related words; given that contextualisation is the attempt to make the biblical message relevant to the African setting, while inculturation seeks to internalise the biblical message translating it as part of the readers' life. In that case, they are two sides of the same coin. Rightly stated, "cultural contextualisation of the Christian truth involves a dynamic process of sympathetic understanding leading to empathetic identification with the culture so that Christianity may be "inculturated" within the indigenous forms of the recipient people" (1988: 329). If contextualisation leads to inculturation, inculturation calls for contextualisation. However, contextualisation involves a serious reflection on the context of the interpreter of the Bible. This is necessary given that, "the Bible's life-giving message must be served in an African cup so that it will be understood and assimilated. If this fails to happen, Christianity remains shallow because of its foreign character" (Eitel 1986: 31f). Contextualisation thus denotes elucidating and applying the biblical text, and linking the message to the contemporary needs and aspirations of the people in their context (Cf. Magesa cited in Obeng 1997: 30).

By adopting inculturation and contextualisation as its theoretical/conceptual framework, the study avers that hermeneutics will be 'popular and contextual'. Hermeneutics will be popular because inculturation aims at internalising the biblical message into peoples' lives so that they may live it as their own. It will be contextual because contextualisation endeavours to make the biblical message relevant to the context in which people live. The study's theoretical/contextual framework proposes the 'popular contextual hermeneutics' as a possible hermeneutical method relevant to African Christianity, hence clamouring for a shift in the hermeneutical methods. Besides, inculturation and contextualisation are unachieved in churches and in Sunday sermons. Neither can they be realised in the academy of the elite and trained professionals. They are only feasible at the grassroots, where the trained elite must seek an active and non-patronising engagement with the ordinary readers of the Bible. In using them as the theoretical/conceptual framework, this study contemplates a theological, hermeneutical, scholarly and academic reclamation of

“the foundational meaning and purpose of the Scripture: to enhance life” (Magesa 1997: 32). This is similar to the aspirations of the primal worldview: to enhance life. Nonetheless, the primal worldview is a breathtakingly relevant premise to begin contextualising and inculturating hermeneutics.

1:10 Research Methodology.

Library and Archival research, participatory observation and focus on study groups are the premises on which the research methodology of this study balances. Library research will include a study of relevant secondary materials of benefit to the study. Archival research includes the search for primary materials, especially written sermons by early missionaries and pioneer African preachers, both lay and ordained. Participatory observation will include visiting different churches in order to observe the way the preachers are using and interpreting the Bible. The illustrations used to drive home the meaning of the text will be of interest. Illustrations are helpful when it comes to remembering the interpretation of the text. This has emerged from informal discussions the researcher held (prior to the beginning of this research) with some Christians, who confessed that the illustrations, especially those based on stories, proverbs, songs, riddles and idiomatic expressions and real life experiences stimulates the mind to remember biblical interpretation. The aim is to solicit evidence that allows the use of tools derived from the primal worldview as an operating principle of the proposed hermeneutical method. The other aspect to observe will be the people’s response. This may provoke some discussions with some members purposely selected. The study groups will include the youth, the old, ordinary and trained readers of the Bible.

Chapter 2 Evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview.

2:1 Introduction.

The primal worldview ought to shape hermeneutics in African Christianity given that it upholds spirituality and a spiritual view of life that is necessary for hermeneutics¹³. However, what would be the evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview? Could it be that the history of the expansion of Christianity and the phenomenology of religion provide historical and phenomenological evidence leading to this quest? The history of Christianity apparently has overriding evidence that the translatability of the biblical faith happened in accordance to people's primal worldview. Bediako notes,

The translatability of the Christian religion signifies its fundamental relevance and accessibility to persons in any culture within which the Christian faith is transmitted and assimilated. Nowhere is this character of Christianity more evident than in the view of Scripture.

(Bediako 1995: 109).

Yet on the other hand, the enlightenment legacy and the missionary legacy overlooked this fact. Both denied the African Christians a chance to receive the biblical faith according to their primal worldview.

Thus the expansion of Christianity relied heavily on the translation and interpretation of biblical concepts in terms agreeable to the people's primal worldview. This did not happen by chance. As observed,

When scores of local tribes coalesce into nations, the same elements that made up their primal beliefs and practices reappear in combined and more articulated forms. Developed religions do not withdraw their roots from the primal soil...Though some of the developed religions of the ancient world have disappeared, their heritage, in turn, infuses the religions of today.

(Noss & Noss 1994: 41).

Notwithstanding, the expansion and growth of Christianity are notable in societies that conceptualise reality from the perspective of the primal religious thoughts and worldview (Cf. Walls 1976: 180). This indicates that the primal categories of the phenomenology of

¹³ The meaning and usage of the terms, 'primal worldview' and 'hermeneutics' is discussed in chapter one on the section dealing with the definition of terminologies.

religion benefited the expansion of Christianity. Definitely, the primal religions of the world have traded their terms and concepts with Christianity, which have categorically aided translation and interpretation of the Scripture. It is incontestable that the history of Christianity and the phenomenology of religion accumulate proportional evidence leading to the quest of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview.

2:2 Evidence from the history of the expansion of Christianity.

a. Translatability/Indigenising principle.

The translatability/indigenising principle has aided the appropriation of the biblical faith in terms agreeable to people's worldview. The memorable Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15, which enabled Christianity to break "free from its absolutized Judaic frame and, through a radical pluralism, adopted the Hellenic culture to the point of near absolutization" (Sanneh 1988: 50) is evidence to the point we are making. It was no longer a requirement for the Gentiles to apprehend the Gospel message as if they were Jews. Indeed the God of the Jews was also the God of the Gentiles (Rom. 3: 29). The translation and interpretation of Jewish Scriptures now could happen through the Gentiles primal categories. "It may be claimed that philosophy, mystery ideas and social cult practices alien to the initial movement so transformed the faith that what resulted is actually the product of the Hellenistic world" (Filson 1950: 27). Walls rightly observes, "By their translation into Greek and use by the converted Hellenistic Gentiles, the Hebrew Scriptures took on a new purpose and were applied within a new universe of thought. They became an authoritative source book for Greek Christians seeking to build a coherent worldview" (Walls 1996: 33). The translation of the Hebrew Scripture was thus "crucial for the development of an indigenous Hellenistic Christianity" (1996: 35).

The fall of Rome saw the translatability of the Christian faith taking shape according to the worldview of the so-called barbarians. Sanneh observes, "in Gaul and outlying regions Christianity was again in the context of a lively admixture of cultures...its power was manifested in belief in miracles and demonic powers" (1989: 71). Be that as it may, the translation of the Scriptures into the European mother tongues facilitated the real grasp of the Bible and Christian teachings. Besides, Latin was the unifying hermeneutical language in Roman Catholicism. Yet a growing demand to interpret the Scripture in the vernaculars

of Western Europe accelerated the Reformation, subsequently leading to new interpretations of the Scriptures. The Reformation enabled translatability of the biblical faith “not only into local languages but into local cultural settings of Northern Europe” (Walls 1996: 40). As it were, “the new religion discovered a compatibility with indigenous cultures” (Sanneh 1989: 71). Consequently, translatability enabled the rooting of the biblical faith in the cultural context of the European people. This is synonymous to what Walls refers to as “the indigenizing principle”, which does not separate the individual from his/her cultural setting and hence allows him/her to feel at home with Christianity (Cf. Walls 1996: 7–8).

The growth of Christianity in Africa is likewise synonymous to the translation of the Scriptures into the African Languages. Translation has helped people to read the Scriptures in accordance with their perception of reality. As observed, when “the Scriptures are read with different eyes by people in different times and places...each community recognizes in Scripture that God is speaking to its own situation” (Walls 1996: 11, 12). However, it is unfortunate that translatability into the African cultural setting was behind schedule. The European missionary enterprise, which was fundamentally informed by the enlightenment aimed to produce Africans who would be partakers of European Christianity, which was synonymous to civilisation and indeed to European culture. They received and interpreted the Scriptures aided by Western categories. Rightly stated,

In the mind of the missionary movement, there had been a general hesitancy about ascribing to Africa’s pre-Christian religious traditions and social cultural forms of life any substantial theological status. Not many had been convinced that African societies gave evidence of any ‘preparation of Christianity’.

(Bediako 1995: 111).

The European missionaries in that case did not consider the African primal worldview as having any relevance to the translatability process. They departed from the norm, and this was a serious setback to hermeneutics. Indeed translatability in Africa was “a mild affair compared to the turbulence that attended its European counterpart” (Sanneh 1989: 137).

Nevertheless, the translatability of the Gospel is not marginalised by human action. That the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory (Jn.1: 14) validates the infallibility of translatability. Certainly, the incarnation provides evidence

that it was God's purpose to have his Word translated into the cultural and linguistic terms acceptable to peoples' conception of reality. As observed, "any confidence we have in the translatability of the Bible rests on that prior act of translation. There is a history of the translation of the Bible because there was a translation of the word into flesh" (Walls 1996: 26). According to Sanneh,

Translation assumed that the Word of God would find its true destiny when embodied in concrete local idiom, lending credence to the theological insight that the Word of God had always carried the burden of incarnation, and that its historical manifestation in Jesus Christ concentrated and made visible a process that is occurring throughout history.

(Sanneh, in Bediako 1995: 121)

Consequently, translatability gives Scripture new vitality and purpose. It "makes the bold, fundamental assertion that the recipient culture is the authentic destination of God's salvific promise..." (Sanneh 1988: 31). It enables people to see themselves as they are in the light shed by the Scriptures. The doctrine of incarnation therefore makes translatability indispensable, and indeed an act of God, which human actions cannot preclude.

Translatability has therefore been instrumental to the survival of the biblical faith. It has enabled biblical concepts to remain plausible when translated and interpreted from the rich variety of the receiving cultures and the primal worldview. However, the failure to embark on a serious translatability and effective indigenisation caused the demise of Christianity in North Africa, which did not survive the Islamic onslaught¹⁴. Certainly, the ability of the Scripture to identify with "each culture as its natural destination and as a necessity of its life" (Sanneh 1989: 69) has historically benefited hermeneutics. The ability of Scripture to identify with culture has enabled people to receive and perceive the Bible in accordance to familiar terms and concepts residing in their worldview. The translatability/indigenising principle is perceptibly and pragmatically valid historical evidence that leads to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview.

¹⁴ Sanneh 1989: 69 contends, "the failure to produce a Punic version of the Bible was an ill omen for the church in North Africa, for it left indigenous population excluded from any meaningful role in Christianity...without the native Scriptures the local population construed the church as an instrument of foreign domination and became as a result alienated from the Romanized Christians. When Islam spread in the region in the seventh century, it encountered only a ghost of a long spent force, which it proceeded accordingly to lay".

b. *The enlightenment legacy.*

The Western cultural trappings of Christianity denied the African Christians an early chance to develop hermeneutics as they conceived reality. This was perpetuated by the enlightenment legacy, which has had widespread ramifications that have unceasingly crippled hermeneutics in Africa. The enlightenment legacy has incessantly rejected the norm that “Christianity was first accepted in terms of a traditional world view and in relation to traditional goals” (Walls 1989: 12). The enlightenment therefore has been an infectious setback to hermeneutics in African Christianity, especially by its elevation of a rationalised scientific worldview in people’s conception of reality. Having challenged the previously held notion that human beings were intrinsically linked to their creator and wholly dependant on God for salvation and providence, it has unremittingly relegated this notion to the primitive world. Human beings were no longer depraved hence they did not require God’s grace for their salvation and providence. The Scripture was no longer the source of the salvific truth regarding human beings. Having rejected God’s creative power, the enlightenment legacy has been hostile to religious faith and to the Bible. It has persistently preferred a worldview that calls human beings away from being actively involved in cultivating for the much-desired relationship between them and God. Indeed, the enlightenment and all its manifestations overturned the traditional worldview on God, human beings, the non-human creation, the spirits and the spirit world. It was a radical departure from the biblical worldview and it however caused embarrassment to the reading of the Bible. This was “by applying the secular worldview to their interpretation of Scripture (*affecting*) the revelation presented in those Scriptures” (Burnett 1988: 247). However, the enlightenment legacy and all its manifestation are a conclusive failure. A critical analysis of modernism and post-modernism approaches to the Bible proves that the enlightenment categories can no longer sustain the hermeneutical discourse. They have insidious influences that can no longer be ignored by the hermeneutical discourse in African Christianity. Indeed modernism and post-modernism as facets of the enlightenment legacy are historical factors leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview.

i. Modernism.

Modernism is famous for expounding the biblical message as mythical, and which modern human beings ought not to believe. It began with the enlightenment and reached its peak in the 20th century, laying emphasis on the existence of one rational truth. Accordingly, “human achievement in science and technology seemed to open up a new age of progress, rendering the wisdom of the past ages obsolete” (Veith 1994: 31). It relegated the biblical worldview, which corresponds to the primal worldview, to the periphery.¹⁵ As observed, “it was bound to have dilutionary effect on the biblical worldview” (Imasogie 1993:51), since “the worldview of the Christian theologian retained only a veneer of the biblical worldview” (1993: 52). According to modernism, miracles did not happen. In that case, a modern human being ought not believe such myths, which now should be “critically received as reflecting the culture and preoccupation of an ancient people” (Veith 1994: 191). It beheld religion and its books with suspicion designating them as superstitious. The assumption was that human beings had become “so oriented to the scientific method...that he simply cannot believe in miracles, divine revelation, and a God unseen. Seminarians began studying the Bible, not as the authoritative word of God, but as any other ancient document, using the historical critical methodology¹⁶ of ‘modern scientific’ scholarship” (1994: 192). Bultmann the renown New Testament scholar, and to our judgement a good one according to the thought system of his own time, could therefore argue, “it is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles” (Bultmann 1964:5). Thus Bultmann perceived miracles and personal spiritual powers as representing mythological formulations and assertions, and therefore a feature of uncritical thinking.

The resultant phenomenon was Deism, which held that God created the world, but was no longer interested in the ordering of the world he created. Modernism speculated that God “constructed nature in all its intricacy and left it to run like a vast machine” (: 33).

¹⁵ Cf. Imasogie 1993: 46–53, who evaluates the effects of the Enlightenment showing how it negatively informed the nineteenth century theologians and missionaries perception of the Scriptures.

¹⁶ The historical-critical method is discussed in Chapter 4.

Conversely “miracles, revelation and supernatural doctrines such as the incarnation and redemption are excluded on principle” (: 33). Therefore, there was no need of a creator. “Nature became completely self-contained. Science could now explain everything” (: 34). The deistic religion thus produced a *Deus Absconditus* god, yet the *Deus Absconditus* god could not and does not appeal to the common people. Nevertheless, Deism opened a Pandora’s box of liberal attitude to the Bible. It did not offer any prolific engagement of modern reason with the Bible. It only underscored anachronism and reductionism¹⁷ (i.e., categorising biblical miracles and the spirit world as mythologies of ancient time and trying to explain them in simpler terms agreeable to the modern human being), consequently leading to the attenuation of biblical authority.

Arguably, modernism has failed drastically since it had no base for providing a long-lasting hermeneutical model. A *Deus Absconditus* notion is a threat to the survival of hermeneutics and the debasing of human values. Modernism could not deliver, having rejected the validity of ancient hopes, dreams, legends and myths as contemptible and repugnant to people’s conception of reality. That which modernism rejected “appears to have a seductive and tenacious power over the minds of men” (Painter 1987:123). This implies that the primal worldview is operative in people’s conception of reality. A hermeneutical method informed by modernism does not correspond to the reality describing the situations in which people live, especially in Africa. It is therefore unrealisable how a hermeneutics informed by modernism can engage in total the whole of the African reality. There is therefore an urgent need to begin interpreting Scriptures from the perspective of the primal worldview. If the biblical writers “could use mythological motif and languages” (1987: 157), which are constituents of the primal worldview, then there is no gainsaying that the primal worldview informed their conception of reality and hence can shape the hermeneutical method. Indeed the whole Bible has a very close attachment to the primal worldview. It is indeed a dangerous triviality that ignores the primal worldview and that seeks to divorce hermeneutics from the primal categories of a people’s worldview and of the Bible, while the Bible itself is

¹⁷ This study uses and understands ‘anachronism’ as an error of assigning something to an earlier age, while ‘reductionism’ is used and understood as a belief that complex data and phenomena can be explained in terms of something simpler acceptable to a certain period in time.

of primal orientation.

ii. Post-modernism.

The onslaught against modernism gained vitality through the rise of post-modernism, which criticises modernism not only for “its uncritical dependence upon human reason alone, but its assumption that there is such a thing as objective truth” (Veith 1994: 42). Post-modernism sounds valuable to hermeneutics, especially when it gives room for contextual hermeneutics, and in its denial that there is no existence of any absolute, which is scientifically empirical and in that case the only universal absolute. It is beneficial to hermeneutics in as far as it deconstructs the paradigms of modernism. It is supportive to hermeneutics in as far as it advocates that there is no culture superior to another in the hermeneutical discourse. As observed,

The post-modern age has room for Christianity in ways modernism did not. Its openness to the past, its rejection of the narrow rationalism, its insistence that art refers to meanings and contexts beyond itself—these insights are all useful to the recovery of a Christian worldview. But the post-modernist rejection of absolutes, its triviality and relativism, and its penchant for self-gratification underrates Christianity.

(Veith 1994: 120).

That means that post-modernism is not an unmixed blessing for hermeneutics and theology. Indeed its worst part perfectly shields its better part. It is an out-and-out systematic dismissal of every honoured moral absolute. Tanner’s assertion concerning post modernism worldview vis-à-vis theology is tellingly applicable to hermeneutics.

The postmodern view forms no uncriticizable basis for a simple unilateral reevaluation (sic) of theology. This view of culture may turn out to be theologically unserviceable or in insurmountable tension with commitments of a religious nature that many Christian theologians would be loathe to compromise. Indeed, the new directions that a postmodern understanding of culture suggests for theological research are not theologically neutral...The postmodern view does, however, have this going for it: it seems a more plausible account of culture than the modern view current since 1920s.

(Tanner 1997: 61).

The proponents of post-modernism do not favour theology and hermeneutics. They are for human liberty, which gives human beings freedom to do whatever they want. It assumes the configuration of a virus that assault the inherent meaning and purpose of life by

contending that objective discovery of meaning is impossible, for it is purely a human phenomenon. Consequently;

While there is no ready meaning in life, individuals can create meaning for themselves. By their own free choices and deliberate actions, human beings can create their own order, a meaning for their life that they and they alone determine. This meaning has no validity for someone else. No one can provide a meaning for someone else. Everyone must determine his or her own meaning, which must remain private, personal and unconnected to any sort of objective truth.

(Veith 1994: 38).

More than that, it denies the transcendent, consequently assuming there is no God. It considers everything as good and possible, even that which is against the Bible, and is a threat to human beings' attempt to realise the abundant life. It is indeed a symbol of the devaluation of all moral absolutes, which regulate human relations with fellow human beings, with the non-human creation, with the spirit and the spirit world, and with God. The primal worldview can take care of this chaos since it is the constituent of moral absolutes denied by post-modernism. Incontestably, the primal worldview guides real culture to "promote strict ethical guidelines (*for*) no culture would teach that there are no absolutes" (1994: 148).

However, the primal worldview absolutes should not be taken uncritically. Uncritical reception of any absolute is the equivalent of a failure to appreciate peoples' intelligence and creativity. After all, this may add up to ideological impositions over and above the silent majority, who are the ordinary readers of the Bible. At all events, we may need to employ critical tools to the primal worldview absolutes, since the past is not absolutely innocent. Origen's counsel to his student, Gregory Thaumaturgus is telling in this regard. The Israelites constructed the Ark of the Tabernacle in the wilderness with gold taken from Egypt. By implication, the Ark of the Tabernacle was constructed with materials related to the Israelites past, horrendous as it was. As Walls observes, "materials that were being misused in the heathen world were thus used, thanks to the wisdom of God, for the worship and glorification of God" (1999:104). However, it is expedient to watch out because the same gold taken from Egypt was used to make the golden calf idol. Biblical scholars therefore must employ the principle of discrimination as they seek tools from the African primal worldview in order to facilitate relevant hermeneutical articulation and

theological formation. Consequently, being critical to the primal worldview absolutes in hermeneutics and theology is a necessary prerequisite, given that each culture has a potential to harbour both godly and demonic elements concurrently.

Nevertheless, the primal worldview's absolutes can strengthen biblical absolutes, which correspondingly relates to each other. Indeed the primal worldview elevates moral responsibility, which is unfashionable to the post-modernist. Certainly, post-modernism has an insidious influence over the spirituality of human beings, and it promotes a *laissez faire* where people believe what they want. Without a moral framework, post-modernism can only produce a state akin to that of Judges, where "every one did what was right in his eyes" (Jdg.21: 25). The obvious outcome would be the "disappearance of the external standards of public conduct...and the dissolution of the internal foundations of identity...People (*would*) no longer acknowledge the authority of social institutions or their own obligation to society" (Veith 1994: 82). Lacking a moral framework means that post-modernism denies all worldviews. A phenomenon that denies all worldviews will ultimately deny the biblical worldview, which agrees with the primal worldview. In that case, modernism and post-modernism are adversaries of biblical hermeneutics, if taken uncritically. Both are ambivalent to hermeneutics and theology, for they have no answer to the questions about human existence. Nevertheless, they stand as historical evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview.

(c). *The missionary legacy.*

The 18th century saw an upsurge of missionary movements whose aim was to evangelise the whole world as soon as possible. However, the missionaries were children of the enlightenment, and who assumed European superiority over other cultures. The Great Chain of Being and the Four Stages Theory¹⁸ gave impetus to the European superiority and to the abasement of Africans down to the lowest form of human existence. According to the Great Chain of Being, Africans only differed with the highest species of animals to

¹⁸ Bediako 1997: 49–57 discusses the Great Chain of Being and the Four Stages Theory of human development. She uncovers how the judgement of theologians and philosophers was influenced by such unscientific theories to rate the African people as primitive and backward and how the white race was rated as the pure and the super race. It is incomprehensible how people who were supposedly well-versed rationally could conform to theories that could not be verified and/or substantiated scientifically.

the lowest degree. According to the Four Stage Theory, Africans were still in the most primitive stages of hunters and gatherers. Their religion could not offer any preparatory foundations of appreciating the biblical faith. The Edinburgh missionary conference of 1910 validated the assumption that African religions were not in any way *praeparatio evangelica*. However, we must accept that the missionaries were children of their own age. Besides, this does not mean that their failures, which persist in the African hermeneutical discourse, are negligible and trivial. On the other hand, we should not assume that the missionary Euro-centric mentality has disappeared among contemporary Euro-Americans partners in mission. Thomas Jonsson, referred to as ‘missionary, pastor, Bible teacher, author and motivational speaker’ and who has founded churches and Bible schools in Africa is on record to have written, “the African people have lived in darkness in many areas, especially in the truths of the Word of God” (Jonsson 1998: 2). Accordingly, the resultant condition is the lack of God’s blessings. They have thus “lived in hunger and poverty and believed that this has been their destiny, and if you are living in a poor country, you are doomed”. He further notes, “God wants to prosper his people, not only the Europeans or the Americans but God wants to prosper all his people, including the poorest nation in Africa” (: 2). Jonsson’s allegations make it clear that the African church still feels the missionary impact, long before they ceased to control the African Church. Parratt has rightly observed,

Historically the missionary penetration of Africa was done, in the main, by Europeans with a fundamental view of the Bible, and such an approach is still characteristic of the African Christians...This fact has tended to circumscribe biblical studies on the continent.

(Parratt 1995:62).

He further argues that biblical fundamentalism “...imposes upon the Bible an artificial viewpoint instead of allowing it to speak for itself”¹⁹ (1995: 63).

The foregoing suggests that hermeneutics in Africa has witnessed “the problem of

¹⁹ The point made by Parratt can be illustrated with examples from modern preachers. Pastor Pius Mûrû, a Kenyan televangelist preaching on a Kenyan Broadcasting Television on 05:02:2000 from John 4:4ff argued that since the woman conversing with Jesus at the well was a prostitute, she had sexually transmitted disease, which were healed automatically when she accepted Jesus. He then invited his listeners to accept Jesus for they could be healed automatically. This could have touch people’s emotions at the moment yet when their problems do not cease after accepting Christ, then they understand Jesus as only able to save from sins and not from ailments perceptibly caused by the manipulation of mystical powers of spirit and the spirit world.

hermeneutical translation from one framework to another or in the context of paradigm shift” (Painter 1987: 58). The translation is from the enlightenment framework of conceiving reality, which the missionaries wrongly imposed upon the African Christians who had their ways of conceiving reality. While the enlightenment culture and worldview was alien to the Africans, the missionaries neglected the African worldview in the hermeneutical discourse, preferring the alien culture. Consequently, the missionary legacy has continually violated the translatability/indigenising principle, which delineates the apprehension of the biblical faith within the conceptual framework of the receiving culture. While the missionaries demonised and anathematised the African primal worldview and their ways of life including their cultural and traditional practices, the missionary legacy has perpetuated the same into and through the missionary founded churches. This has denied African Christians a chance to conceive the biblical faith in terms perceptible to their conception of reality. This has only helped in constructing “dual religious systems”, where

...a people follows the religious practice of two distinct systems. The two systems are kept discrete; they can operate side by side. Sometimes one system is followed more faithfully than the other... in other instances the two systems may be followed almost equally²⁰.

(Schreiter 1985: 45).

The prevailing dualism in the lives several African Christians is certainly a missionary legacy. Its persisting nature has caused untold suffering to African Christians. Magesa observes that, “yet, the ambiguity and psychological suffering this (*dualism*) has caused in the life of many Africans is considerable (*and lacks the*) development of the wholeness of life” (Magesa 1997: 287). This dualism resulting from the missionary legacy is certain historical evidence leading to the quest of a hermeneutical method shaped by the primal worldview, which perceives life holistically, not dualistically.

Evidence points to the fact that the missionaries’ exposition of the Scripture was ‘other worldly’. They laid much emphasis on the world to come at the expense of the world that

²⁰ Howell’s study on the Kasena people of Northern Ghana religious itinerary has interesting revelation. It naturally occurred that “in times of crisis and illness some Christians would seek help through divination and participate in traditional sacrifice and ritual as well as requesting prayer or mass” (Howell 1997: 1). Ostensibly, the Kasena oscillated between Christianity and traditional practices. Citing Fr. Augustine Kazaresam, Howell reveals that the Kasena “are Christians on Sundays and for the rest of the week they are ‘real’ Kasena” (1997: 1). This was a clash of two worldviews.

is. Punishment and reward belonged to the other world, and not to the physical world. This was not compatible with the Gĩkũyũ worldview, “which held that God’s judgement was experienced in the present life”²¹ (: 36). The missionary message with its prominent eschatological component emphasising the discontinuity between the demands of this world succeeded in amplifying the dualism. “The missionary message was dualistic: it emphasised radical discontinuity between the demands of this world and of the world to come. On the other hand, the Kikuyu world view did not emphasize a sharp distinction between the physical and the spiritual world” (Karanja 1999: 38). The missionary message has immensely contributed to the encroaching secularism²² in Africa by degrading nature and matter as evil. Rightly stated, “Western spirituality with its dualism has hardly inspired us to respect nature, hence our effort at preserving the environment have very little spiritual empowerment” (Wangiri 1999: 82). Indeed, it has “destroyed the sense of the wholeness of life that is as much part of biblical tradition as it is of African culture” (Parratt 1995: 165).

The missionary legacy boasts of the earliest translation of Scriptures among the Gĩkũyũ people. The Gĩkũyũ vernacular Bible was among the first written literature in Gĩgĩkũyũ (the language of the Gĩkũyũ people) and which was available to the ordinary readers. That the missionaries pioneered translation work is milestone to the apprehension and use of the Bible by the Gĩkũyũ people, both Christians and politicians. However, in their translation process, the missionaries avoided Gĩkũyũ words that were a direct equivalent of a biblical word. The missionaries deliberately chose to ignore other Gĩkũyũ words in the translation of the Scriptures so that the Bible may not appear to support some of the elements of the Gĩkũyũ culture, which the missionaries had demonised²³. As observed, “there was an obvious correlation between mission’s theology and attitude to culture and its choice of terms for biblical translation” (Karanja 1999: 135). In that case, “Kikuyu knowledge of the Bible was mainly derived from the missionaries, who imparted it rather selectively” (1999: 141). Nonetheless the Gĩkũyũ primal worldview has tools capable of

²¹ For a detailed discussion of this, see Hannah W. Kinoti’s Ph.D. thesis, “Aspects of Traditional Kikuyu Morality” (University of Nairobi: 1983).

²² Secularism is discussed on the section dealing with the evidence of the phenomenology of religion below.

²³ Karanja 1999: 134f offers an interesting discussion on the words the missionary used in their translation endeavours, which would have received better alternative words from the Gĩkũyũ mother tongue.

enhancing the translation and interpretation of Scriptures. However, the missionaries' depreciation of the Gîkûyû culture denied the Agîkûyû (Gîkûyû people) a chance to engage with the Bible in local terms, idioms and concepts best known to them.

The *prima facie* evidence shows that the missionaries' demonisation of the African worldview denied hermeneutics in African Christianity a life chance. When the Bible is introduced to people in terms perceptible to their conception of reality, they gain new ways of perceiving God, the non-human creation and fellow human beings. The introduction of the Hebrew Bible to agree with terms and concepts of the Greek primal worldview enabled Greek polytheism to become monotheism. Paul converted many polytheistic Greeks to monotheism when he interpreted Scripture from the known to the unknown. (Acts.17: 23ff). The cult of 'gods many and lords many' (1 Cor. 8: 5) eventually became the preparation for the interpretation of the only true God who made the worlds and does not live in houses built with human hands. Jesus Christ was easily understood as the only Lord and Saviour of those who sought salvation from various philosophical schools of thought. This could have happened in Africa were it not for the missionaries' demonisation of the African primal worldview, denying the Africans a valid hermeneutical heritage. Indeed, the missionaries failed to realise that "...the kerygma is translated from one conceptual framework to another and must continue to be translated if it is to be understood" (Painter 1987: 115). It is certainly deplorable that the missionaries sought to destroy the African primal worldview, which had adequate tools for transmitting the biblical faith they had come to propagate. Instead of appreciating the African primal worldview, "the missionaries appear to have been surprised, even antagonized, by examples of faithfulness, hospitality and forgiveness, standard by which they were purporting to the whole enterprises of mission itself" (Sanneh 1989: 162). In that case, "Western form of Christianity has not met the felt needs of the primal peoples, and in order to do so adequately, it is necessary to consider more closely the traditional religion of these people" (Burnett 1988: 10). Having not met the felt needs of the African Christians, Western form of Christianity and the hermeneutical method it uses does not and cannot engage the full measure of African reality. Unequivocally, the missionary legacy provides evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method shaped by the

primal worldview.

2:3. Evidence from the phenomenology of religion.

a. Turner's six-feature analysis of primal religion.

What this section discusses obtains qualification from Harold Turner's celebrated guidance into the phenomenology of the world's primal religions. Turner's hypothesis is laudable evidence leading to a quest for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. He offers a six-feature analysis, which constitutes a valid point of departure for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. The first of his six-feature analysis is the undeniable kinship with nature. He asserts,

There is a profound sense in many primal societies that man is akin to nature, a child of Mother Earth and a brother to the plants and animals which have their own spiritual existence and a place in the universe. This is seen not only in the way plants and animals and indeed any object in the natural environment may enter into a totemic spiritual relationship with men or become tutelary and guardian spirits, but in the way the environment is used realistically and unsentimentally but with profound respect and reverence and without exploitation.

(Turner 1977: 30).

It is now commonplace to find exploitation of the environment escalating, which is practically the same as denying human beings the realisation of the abundant life. Hermeneutics generated by the primal worldview is a hermeneutics of life. It seeks to translate and interpret the Bible in a way that would enable human beings to enjoy life in its fullness. This feature as Turner defines it would thus enable an interpretation of the Scriptures that would facilitate human beings to make sense of their natural setting in the world.

Turner's second feature says that in the primal religions, there is a deep sense of human weakness. Human beings live in a state of finitude coupled with a feeling of weakness, impurity and sinfulness. They need a power greater than their own to go against and overcome the above-mentioned feelings. He associates this feature to Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* who outlines "man's basic reaction to the Holy in terms of a sense of creaturehood" (1977:31). Turner then validates his argument stating,

This sense in primal peoples is no mere reflection of their lack of technological, economic

and political power...rather it is an authentic religious sensibility coupled with realistic assessment of man's condition, a sensibility and an assessment that have been hidden from people like ourselves by the proliferation of our technical and social-political power.

(: 31).

This sense of creaturehood makes human beings feel like a worm before the Holy One. Because of this finitude, human beings feel “overwhelmed with confusion, disorder, a sense of chaos, images of destruction, incurable boredom or sense of overwhelming guilt, meaninglessness or ignorance” (Barnhart 1977: 11). The social, political and economical vices that permeate the scene of human life invited by human weakness and wickedness quickens these feelings. In response to this, a universal religious phenomenon exists, seeking to diminish and overcome evil, misery and anything else that threatens the life of human beings. The other side of it seeks to conserve and increase whatever human beings value and cherish. Prozesky argues that religion fulfils the above by “giving believers a sense of hope, meaning or certainty...” (1984: 18). The Bible's concern is the ultimate well being of the reader. The primal worldview is also concerned with the well being of the human beings. The phenomenology of religion having concern with the ultimate welfare of human beings is resultant to this human finitude and limitation, which “impinge directly on an individual or people's well-being” (Cox 1992: 146). Without the religious phenomena that deals with these finitudes and limitations, human life would be an illusion and in a state of meaninglessness, hence a useless passion. A hermeneutical method that consequently seeks to grapple with and snag the issues that labour to make life a useless passion and usher it into a state of meaninglessness finds nourishment in a primal worldview that holds similar concerns. The primal religious phenomenon that deals with human finitude and limitation is therefore animate evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview.

The third feature holds that human beings are not alone in the created universal, for there also exists a spiritual world inhabited by spiritual beings more powerful and ultimate than human beings. These spiritual beings can either be benevolent or malevolent. In that case, whatever happens to human beings must have a cause. The question therefore is not what caused something to happen, but who did it. The evil or the malevolent spirits wreak havoc to the life of human beings. Turner observes,

But behind all the terrors of the evil spirit world there is still greater comfort that men are not left alone in this mysterious universe and without direction, for there is the world of the gods and these provide the model for all human needs and activities.

(: 31).

This simply means that the primal worldview can shape a hermeneutical method that seeks to interpret the relationship between human beings and spirits and the spirit world. The existence of spirits and the spirit world is a religious phenomenon found both in the Bible and in the primal worldview. A better understanding of spirits and the spirit world, so to speak, is from the perspective of the primal worldview. The Bible is very clear on this especially where it insists that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but with powers and principalities of the air (Eph.6: 11f)²⁴. Thus like the African primal worldview, “the biblical worldview also takes seriously the spirit world and its continuing impact on the life of this world” (Quarshie 2000:23). Both the primal worldview and the New Testament presuppose a conspicuous presence of unseen spirits. It thus behoves us to interact with the Scriptures from the perspective of the primal worldview. Indeed, a hermeneutical method shaped by primal worldview would enable a better comprehension of the Bible. Bediako, K. rightly observes, “...the spiritual universe of the African primal world does offer valid perspectives for articulating Christian theological commitment” (Bediako 1995: 93).

Turner argues that the fourth feature completes the conviction of the third feature. This is “the belief that men can enter into relationship with this benevolent spirit world and so share in its powers and blessings and receive protection from evil forces by these more-

²⁴ Some scholars have noted how the erstwhile historical-critical hermeneutical method has been unable to interpret this text in a way that is beneficial to human beings since it does not consider the primal worldview important in the hermeneutical discourse. Criticising the nineteenth century theologians’ readings of Eph. 6: 12 via the historical-critical method, Imasogie (1993: 52) has this to say. “These were no more than cultural clichés that lacked the existential dynamism they once had prior to and during the medieval period. Under an ethos such as this, biblical reference to demon possession, angels and spiritual forces operating in the affairs of men could still be mouthed although with diminishing overtones. But on the intellectual level the theologian found it necessary to interpret them, at best, as symbols without ontic content or, at worst, as the pigment of the imagination of the primitive age under the influence of an ancient worldview. By virtue of such reinterpretation of the Bible, Christians could talk of Christ’s power to save from sin but enthusiastically of his power to destroy the works of the devil and to save, to the utmost, those who are committed to him. For instance, the nineteenth century theologian could still quote Ephesians 6: 12, ‘for we are not fighting against human beings, but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers of this dark age’ but not with the same meaning Paul gave them when he penned those lines in Ephesians”.

than-human helpers” (: 31). The more-than-human helpers are the transcendent powers, and human beings must have a relationship with them. In that case, the religion of the primal people does not go for “a merely man-made religion with gods of a human dimension” (: 31). Turner rightly argues, “across the primal world there seems to be a longing for the true life of man that is not yet achieved and that can only come from the gods...the transcendent source of true life and practical salvation” (: 31f).

The fifth feature concerns man’s after life. Accordingly,

Man’s relationship with the gods, his kinship with them indeed, is such that he shares their life and power not only in this world but also beyond death, which is not the end...the ancestors, the ‘living dead’ remains united in affection and in mutual obligations with the ‘living living’...Life therefore is full of hope, for the living and the dead will be reunited and both will share in the immortality of the gods.

(: 32).

The sixth and final feature conceives the physical as the sacramental of the spiritual. In this, Turner notes,

The ‘physical’ acts as the vehicle for ‘spiritual’ power, in other words, that men live in a sacramental universe where there is no sharp dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual...In addition, there is the belief that the physical realm is meant to be patterned on the model of the spiritual world beyond, like all other things connected with the live of man in this world, which is therefore conceived as a microcosm of macrocosm.

(: 32).

Turner goes on to assert that the six feature structures “may be used for the understanding of other kinds of religion besides the primal and will be found readily applicable to the Christian tradition” (: 32). He also continues to argue for the beneficial relationship of the primal religions and Christianity, noting that the history of Christian expansion reveals that its expansion has mainly and rapidly occurred in places of the world where people still holds to the primal religious systems (: 37). This study goes further to enunciate the six-feature analysis as essential in a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. This is because the expansion of Christianity largely depends on the interpretation of the Scriptures in terms perceptible to peoples’ conception of reality. Turner’s six-feature analysis is thus an assertive tool for understanding not only other religions, but also for understanding and interpreting the Scriptures. The six-feature

analysis would enable the comprehension of the nature of the biblical world. Indeed, the phenomenology of religion has assertive evidence that warrants the primal worldview to shape hermeneutics. This is even overdue, given the fact that biblical hermeneutics and theology have “hitherto been moulded by a word-view from which the living forces of the primal imagination seem to have been expelled” (Bediako 1995: 96).

b. The primal worldview’s efficacy in the hermeneutical discourse.

Following Turner’s six-feature analysis, it would be logical to conclude that the primal worldview has efficacy in the hermeneutical discourse. Peoples’ conception of reality is not constructed on a *tabula rasa*. William Robertson Smith noted this long time ago, when he argued that peoples’ religion does not start with a *tabula rasa* and that a new scheme of faith can only deliver when it appeals to religious instincts and susceptibilities that already exist²⁵. People’s conception of reality is rightly situated in their primal worldview, which enables them to receive reality in their terms. As a result, the reality presented by the Bible, which has had creative encounters with the primal worldview, ought to be received from the perspective of the primal worldview. As it were, “the essence of Christian teachings was to be found in germ in their earliest beginning in the primal religion, and that this, indeed, was their authentication” (Bediako G 1997: 370f). Innumerable religious phenomena found in the primal religions “provide the key to the relationship between the old and new religion” (1997: 362). Altogether, there are overriding evidence that the primal worldview is a fertile ground for the appropriation of the Christian gospel, and so to speak, *praeparatio evangelica*. On the whole, there is evidence that people inclined to the primal worldview respond to the biblical message overwhelmingly.²⁶ Secondly, evidence points to the fact that converts to major religions do not jettison their life-long held beliefs. “Long-held beliefs do not merely disappear overnight, but often become incorporated within the newly adopted religion” (Burnett 1988: 10). For the most part, the phenomenology of religion ostensibly provides articulate means of investigating a people’s conception of reality, which is instrumental to the hermeneutical discourse. It is

²⁵ Cf. W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, London, 1889 cited in Tutu 1978: 365f.

²⁶ Burnett 1988: 9 argues, “...anthropologists and missionaries have studied tribal societies in greater detail, they have come to appreciate that these societies are not ‘simple’ or ‘childish’, but complex and mature. At the same time missionaries have witnessed an amazing response to the gospel by such people. Literally thousands of people from these ethnic groups have become Christians...”

through the primal worldview that peoples' perception of the present can be analysed according to their past experiences. In that case, the dangers of obliterating the past should be widespread for God initially meets with the people in their past. Rightly articulated, "God starts where people are in their own historical, cultural and personal context, in order to reveal himself to them in a way which is particularly comprehensible and meaningful" (Burnett 1988:22). Indeed the primal worldview uncovers the implications of God's encounter with human beings in their historical, cultural and personal context. In so doing, it provides a detailed "style of thinking...an effort to describe the actual state of affairs as disclosed by the phenomena of the world" (Cox 1992: 15).

At the centre of this style of thinking, is the experience of the numinous. God is the '*holy other*' whose mysteries are imperceptible to human intellect alone. There is an ultimate unity of the total creation in him, engendered to a single principle underlying the totality of life. For that reason, a relationship between God, human beings and the non-human creation is necessary. The primal worldview explains this relationship and its maintenance for it affixes "the relationship between gods and human beings and on living communion as the original form of that relationship..." (Bediako G 1997: 363). Conversely, the phenomenology of religion manifests a universally consistent expression of the sacred. The manifestations of the sacred referred to as hierophanies by Mircea Eliade (1959), permeate chronically into and through the so-called secular. These manifestations in the phenomenology of religion can favourably examine and disapprove any dualistic tendency that dichotomises life into the sacred and the secular.

c. The postulate of affinity.

The affinity between the primal worldview and the Bible gives evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. Remarkably, there are "surprising parallels between religious practices of the primal societies and some practices described in the Bible" (Burnett 1988: 21). Indeed, the postulate of affinity between the primal religion and the Bible is a certain vindication of the uniqueness of Christianity in matters pertaining to its rapid expansion in areas of the world that have had their primal worldview intact and not seriously eliminated. Bediako, G. M. observes,

It will therefore be in the context of the vibrant and expanding Christian presence among

peoples of a primal religious background, among Christians who have not lost their primal perspective in embracing the Christian faith, who start from a positive, rather than a negative perception of the primal world-view, that the relationship between the primal and biblical religion may more fruitfully be explored, and the uniqueness of Christian faith vindicated in a plural setting through the universality of its appeal as ‘infinitely culturally translatable’”.

(Bediako, G 1997: 374f).

That which is in the primal worldview, and is conducive to the rapid growth of Christianity in the areas of the world where Christians have not lost their primal perspective, simply means that the Bible may be understood clearly. It scarcely needs elaboration therefore, that the postulate of affinity is relevant for hermeneutics. Bediako G rightly observes,

Since early religion and society are so closely intertwined and religion holds a central, harmonious and relevant place in the life of the society, the interpretation of early religious institutions will most fruitfully proceed in consonance with the existing social framework, as a guarantee almost of its accuracy...religious experience and expression and moral values of religion cannot go ahead of the experience and form of expression of the culture.

(1997: 345f).

The postulate of affinity can enable human beings to internalise and live the biblical faith as their life. Biblical concepts, when perceived from the perspective of the primal worldview will have found new meaning in people’s life. The reading of the Bible from the perspective of the primal worldview would illuminate a profound understanding of how Jesus contended with the spirits that incapacitate the attainment of the abundant life by causing cosmic disorderliness and which were unperturbed by the loss of human health. Jesus would be rightly perceived as not being indifferent to the spirit world, inasmuch as the Bible is clear on how he efficaciously contends with the demonic and spiritual powers to liberate human beings. The primal worldview denotes a picturesque understanding of spirits and the spirit world. The spiritual powers inhabit the same world human beings live, wielding greater power than human beings. “To cope with the issues of life he must recognise these powers and come to terms with them” (Burnett 1988: 28).

The phenomenology of religion thus has complementary phenomena relevant to hermeneutics. As observed, “certain categories in particular tend to complement one

another and thus add understanding to their meaning and use across religious tradition” (Cox 1992: 79). There is in turn a “common thread running through all religion from the earliest primal to the most modern. These common themes were not arbitrary, but provided the essential motive power for the development of human beings away from physical and mechanical perceptions of the world to the spiritual and ethical, which achieved its culmination in Christianity” (Bediako G 1997: 348). Thus myths and rituals as common themes in the religious phenomena can conveniently enrich the interpretation of the Scriptures. Certainly, “all religions live within a mythical framework, tell sacred stories and express aspects or meanings of the myth in rituals” (Cox 1996: 62)²⁷. Bultmann’s²⁸ attempt to demythologise the Bible is a representation of a gross failure that attempted to distance hermeneutics from the primal perspective. God’s manifestations and his relationship with human beings and the non-human creation divulged by the Scriptures are straightforward in myths and re-enacted in rituals. Through myths and rituals, the religious person re-experiences the manifestation and the presence of the sacred reality in comparison to human being’s life encircled by a perilous secularism. A dramatic re-enactment of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ restate the understanding of the biblical teaching of dying to the self and raising to the newness of life in Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:1–4). Tools derived from the primal worldview are certainly appropriate aids to the understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in relation to the life of human beings.

d. Secularism.

The desire to civilise through the abasement of the phenomenon of religion created the secular worldview, which views life in compartments. The secular worldview popularises the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. This is contrary to the primal worldview, which perceives life as an integrated whole, where all aspects revolving around human beings contribute to the attainment of the abundant life. In that case, the primal worldview is fertile in appreciating biblical values, to which the secular worldview is repulsive. The secular worldview has indeed promoted the destruction of the material

²⁷ Cf. Smart, N 1973 *The Phenomenon of Religion* (New York: The Seabury Press) Pp 79–120, who has a detailed discussion of how myths and rituals preserve a religion from generation to generation.

²⁸ Cf. Bultmann’s “The New Testament and Mythology”, 1941 and 1964.

world. It has indeed created a rigid imaginary boundary between the material and the spiritual, which the primal worldview does not have. The primal worldview guarantees the preservation of the material world for the benefit of the human being's attainment of the abundant life. On the other hand, the secular worldview can only lead to nihilism, the acceptance that life lacks meaning. Such a worldview is indeed repugnant to biblical values, which call for the human being's realisation of the abundant life.

Ukpong rightly states, "religion is not only for the purpose of gaining a happy place in the after life, but also for the material well-being of the human person here on earth. Thus the political, social and economical are seen as inseparable from religion" (Ukpong 1999: 105). Secularism, unknown in African primal worldview, denies this. Consequently, it is menacingly intruding into modern Africa, given that the world has become a global village. Shorter & Onyancha 1997 outline the invasion of secularism in Africa vividly. Their study focused on urban Nairobi, and the rural Gîkûyû occupied district of Kîambu. They observed, that, "secularism is a phenomenon that is not usually associated with Africa; however, in view of the globalisation process, of the power of the mass media, and of the rapidity of urbanisation on the continent, it would not be surprising if it was already on the horizons" (Shorter & Onyancha 1997: 5). This intruding secularism is thus challenging Mbiti's observation that, "Africans are notoriously religious" (Mbiti 1969: 1). Secular values are increasingly penetrating the African context, both in urban and in rural areas, eroding and displacing religious values. This is a very dangerous trend for it renders the Bible almost invalid, without authority in people's lives. Nevertheless, the phenomenology of religion rejects secularism, which is an "explicit unbelief, the denial of the existence of God or any religious dimension to human life" (: 15). Secularism is also rejected because it can lead to a materialistic perception of life. This is wayward for the church, which may be tempted to identify with the rich at the expense of the poor. The Bible too is in danger of being interpreted to suit the whims of the rich and the powerful. This is noticeably evident in the preaching of the Gospel of prosperity, which decries poverty as a sign of unbelief. The poor are thus the manifestation of the lack of faith. However, a Bible reading that excludes the poor predicts the death of the church.

Secularism if allowed to continue becomes a new authority in determining matters

pertaining to the life of the society and/or the individual. It indeed seeks the dissolution of the traditional heritage, which accepts the value of religion in regulating matters pertaining to human life. Nevertheless, secularism is inadequate for the life of human beings and for their total spiritual health. Indeed secularism dries up the soul, corrupts and defiles the morals of a society. Secularism defies the fact that it is impossible for human beings to reach and live up the full heights of a potential being without drawing to the deep resources of the Spirit, which only the phenomenology of religion has the ability to offer. Definitely, secularism fragments the cohesiveness and the integrity of human life, which the phenomenology of religion considers as unified both in its social and personal contexts. However, the phenomenology of religion is capable of arresting its encroachment. It is capable of preserving the quality of human existence and nurturing it from the mediocrity that secularism extends to it. This is the attempt to segment the human life into compartments that are not compatible with each other.

Secularism thus allowed to penetrate Africa, where the church is growing very fast, is detrimental to hermeneutics. It must be countered through a different reading of the Bible, which does not separate faith from real life. Better alternatives to secularism must be provided, and as it were, the phenomenology of religion, especially in its primal perspective, can do this. Referring to the primal religion as “cosmic religion”, which “is the basis of all religion” (: 26). Shorter & Onyancha reckon that it is the most formidable force to counter secularism. This is because the cosmic religion facilitates “dialogue of human beings with the physical environment, which is in organic continuity with human beings and provides a sacramental link with the world of the spirits”. (: 26). The phenomenology of religion thus provides adequate tools to wrestle with secularism, which is a threat to a hermeneutics seeking for the attainment of the abundant life. This is corroborating evidence leading to the quest for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. Secularism must thus be rejected and hounded with contemptible venom so that it may not escalate in the spheres of African Christianity. Indeed “modern secularism with its denial of the transcendent power” is just but “a human deviation away from the primal apprehension...” (Cox 1996: 73) of reality. The African readers of the Bible must therefore face the challenge of secularism with a different hermeneutical

method that does not dichotomise human life between the secular and the sacred.

2:4. Conclusion

The evidence adduced from the history of the expansion of Christianity and from the phenomenology of religion points to this one fact: “the Bible’s life-giving message must be served in an African cup so that it will be understood and assimilated. If this fails to happen, Christianity remains shallow because of its foreign character. What is needed is a biblically balanced contextualized theology (*and hermeneutics*)” (Eitel 1986: 32). The Bible thus ought to be interpreted such that it will be inculturated and contextualised to the life situation of the Africans. Shaped by the primal worldview, hermeneutics will be answering the questions that the African Christians themselves will be asking as they arise from their context. It will no longer answer questions that the African Christians are not asking, and/or answering them thinking that they are fitting to the African context. It will no longer ignore the issues, which encircle the lives of the African Christians. The evidence offered above answers affirmatively a question posed by Charles H. Kraft in the forward of *Imasogie* 1983: 9. “Cannot the Bible be properly interpreted outside the academic ghettos of Europe and America?” Indeed it can, and in this instant, from the perspective of the primal worldview. However, it is necessary to expose the operating principles of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview, to which now we turn.

method generated by the primal worldview. The study is restricted to the affinity between the biblical and primal worldview perception on God, human beings, non-human creation, spirits and the spirit world. This affinity offers a hermeneutical circle, and a cordial relationship of the components of this circle is vital for human beings attainment of the abundant life. In that case, human beings must master this relationship well, and know how to go about it for it is central to the attainment of the abundant life. The relationship involves “the sacrality of life, respect of the spiritual and mystical nature of creation, and especially of the human person; the sense of family, community solidarity and participation; and an emphasis on fecundity and sharing in life, friendship, healing and hospitality” (Magesa 1997: 52f).

The postulate of affinity thus becomes a significant scheme, on which hermeneutics receives its operating principle. It enables a reading and interpretation of the Bible that directs human beings to the attainment of the abundant life intended for them. In this respect, “the created order other than human beings must be approached with care and awe as well, not only of its communion with God, but also because of its own vital forces and mystical connection with the ancestors and other spirits” (1997: 53). Magesa’s observation means that the created order has communion with human beings (including the ancestors), God, spirits and the spirit world. If hermeneutics has to be interested in the total welfare of human beings, it cannot avoid the hermeneutical circle and the relationship demanded therein. Taking cognisance of the hermeneutical circle means that the biblical faith will receive an authentic incarnation leading to a genuine inculturation and contextualisation.

a. *The affinity on the non-human creation.*

In the Gîkûyû primal worldview, the non-human creation is regarded as important for human life, since human life is directly dependent on the non-human creation and its vital forces. As it were, the earth is the home for human beings, and which they share with other living and non-living beings. Precisely observed, “the cosmos is a home shared by many existents (*embracing*) a sensitivity to the symbiotic interrelationship of living and non-living resources in the interest of the whole” (Gecaga 1999: 28). It does not make sense therefore when human beings abuse the environment. Indeed human beings need

liberation so that they may not deviate from their moral and ethical obligation to the non-human creation. As observed,

To callously disturb the created order by abusing it disrespectfully means nothing else, ultimately, than to tamper dangerously with human life...The implication of such a course of action often goes further than this. If the world is disturbed, God, the spirits and the ancestors-or, in other words, their powerful, invisible, but diffused life forces throughout the universe-are likewise unsettled. There is no telling what calamity might befall a community as a result of such behaviour. For God and ancestors desire peace and order above all.

(Magesa 1997: 61).

Hermeneutics must therefore disclose that the created order is a gift from God to human beings who should safeguard its right to exist. The environment must be preserved through a deliberate reading of the Bible, for “the whole creation is an expression of God and as we begin to understand the creation, we also begin to understand something about the creator” (Gitari 1996: 20)³¹. Indeed the creation portrays the glory of God, which both the Bible and the primal worldview recognise³². Since human beings are dependent on the non-human creation, they must serve it so that it may serve them to attain the fullness of life, without which human beings faces the risk of extinction. Hermeneutics must therefore maintain the solidarity between human beings and the non-human creation. This can lead to a sound theology of the environment that denotes human beings as the stewards of the non-human creation. Precisely, “proper stewardship of creation brings liberation for nature and human beings...” (Gitari 1996: 123).

³¹ Paul makes this very clear in Rom 1: 20. “Ever since the creation of the world his (God’s) invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they (human beings) have no excuse”.

³² The Gikûyû people understands the existence of God when they perceive “the evidence of his great power and wisdom in the world...” (O’Donovan 1996: 42). This is well elaborated in the oral tradition, a very significant mode of communicating cultural values from one generation to the other. Songs form part of the oral tradition, and the following words of a famous Gikûyû folk song are evidence of how they have discerned God’s power in the created order, both human and non-human.

Nîwega Ngai mûtumbi nî gûtûmbîra indo ingî nyingî.

Ngai witû tûgîciona nîtûonaga hinya wakû.

Ona ningî nîtûmatagia wîtkio witû.

(Thank you God our creator, for having created for us manifold things
Our God, when we see them we see your power.
Also we deepen our faith).

However, the wanton destruction of the environment is just visible in our situations. Correctly stated, “it is difficult to live in the present world without being conscious of the unprecedented peril that hangs over us. The progressive destruction of our life support system is today such common reality that it cannot escape our attention” (Ongong’a 1999: 51). Human beings have failed to be good stewards over the non-human creation. Their deficiency to deal with the creation has caused an ecological crisis. Hermeneutics therefore cannot overlook the primal worldview, which has an affinity with the Bible, as far as the responsibility of human beings to the non-human creation is concerned. As much as human life ought to be preserved, the non-human creation too must be preserved. Justice for humankind will be called for with equal valour and proportions, as will be justice for the non-human creation. As much as the hermeneutics of liberation calls for a radical and revolutionary change in the social, political and economical institutions that perpetuate injustice to humankind, the same must be upheld for ecological imbalances, which threaten the stability of the non-human creation, hence perpetuating injustice against it. Hermeneutics in Africa must therefore ensure that the non-human creation is not exploited, but used for the benefit of human beings, yet not without the appropriate rituals. Hermeneutics must seek for “the responsible development of natural resources and the judicious administration of the earth” (Gecaga 1999: 37). In any case, hermeneutics must avoid a selective interpretation of the Scriptures, which may sanction the exploitation of the non-human creation. In a manner of speaking, the exploitation of the non-human creation is blasphemous from a biblical and primal worldview perspective.

b. The affinity on human beings.

The Gîkûyû primal worldview considers a human being to be human because of other human beings³³. Individual human beings can only exist in a community and for the community. This community includes the yet to be born and the departed. The departed ancestors act as the mediators between human beings and God, and also between human beings and spirits and the spirit world. Consequently, the community in the visible world and the community in the invisible world are united. This is what Parratt calls the ‘vital

³³ A Gîkûyû idiom states, “mûndû nî mûndû nî ûndû wa andû”, meaning that a human being is a human being because of other human beings (Cf. the Zulu “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” and the Sotho “motho ke motho ka batho” with a translation similar to that of the Gîkûyû idiom above).

union', which corresponds to the vertical (the link with God, the ultimate source of life) and horizontal (the link between human beings and their folk and the world of things) dimensions of religion (Cf. Parratt 1995: 31f). Certainly, even when human beings are of a higher order they are not separate from other beings. It is only *Ngai* (God) who exists independently of the human and non-human creation. It is thus common in most African societies that human beings are supposed to live a life of sharing. Indeed the welfare of an individual depends on the community. The individual has a duty to the community, while the community has a duty to the individual and more so to the less fortunate in the community. In view of this, the oppression of individual human beings is supposed to be on the periphery. To oppress a human being according to the primal worldview is to oppress the whole community. As it were, "every individual person is an intimate part of the larger entity that must be preserved" (: 62). Several Gikûyû proverbs therefore deplore oppression³⁴. Nevertheless, there is much oppression currently. Hermeneutics therefore must ask the following pertinent questions. Why is there an accumulation of community and individual suffering in Africa? Why do communities suffer from activities wrought by the individual? Why do the individual suffer when there is a community that ought to be caring? However, the question 'why' is a political question, and which cannot be avoided, if some of the causes of the suffering are political. Given that the Gikûyû primal worldview urges for the promotion of life, hermeneutics will then operate on the same principles. This is a certain way of uncovering the biblical fact that God is not a respecter of persons.

Such a hermeneutical method will not only enhance human beings to realise the abundant life, but also to empower human beings. Through and through, human life will be preserved and perpetuated in the best way possible. This includes the life of the yet to be

³⁴ A Gikûyû proverb teaches *gûtirî wa nda kana wa mûgongo*- (there is no distinction between the child carried at the mother's belly and the one carried on the back). The logic behind this proverb is that the child carried on the mother's belly has more opportunity to suckle more than the one carried on the back. However, even if this is an obvious case, it must not be allowed to happen. Another one instructively states, *ciira wa ngîa ûtuagwo ta wa gîtonga* – meaning, the verdict of a poor man's case must be delivered as that of a rich man. Customarily, the rich were able to feed the council of elders who arbitrated disputes. However, the elders must not be influenced by the generosity of the rich in their verdict and oppress the poor, who as it were have nothing to feed them. Precisely, *Ngai ndatîyagîra andû maûthî* – God does not respect people because of their physical appearance. Therefore, justice must be delivered and upheld according to the facts presented not according to the consumed roasted meat.

born, who are part of the community. Indeed the preservation and the perpetuation of the human life in all its stages ought to be ultimately crucial and the most enhanced reality. It is for this reason that Jesus Christ became incarnate, emptied himself and assumed human nature. The significance of the postulate of affinity thus enables a restoration of the glorious picture of human beings as created in the image of God. Operating on the postulate of affinity, hermeneutics will certainly deconstruct the prevalent forces delivering insecurity to human's life. The word of God will thus speak to human beings assuring them of their beingness and existence even at the midst of insecurity. Noticeably, a secure personality will surely have "concern for the world and the neighbour" (Painter 1987: 162). Human beings will accordingly resonate with the very important biblical principles: the love of God and neighbour and the responsibility of the non-human creation. At any rate, human love for God and neighbour makes human existence realisable. The same is true for human beings' responsibility of world. However, this requires faith, for "the response of faith will involve the believer in love for the neighbour and obedience to God's command" (Painter 1987: 215). This in turn will invoke the realisation that human beings' "relation to the world must be considered because the believer is called to be responsible for the world" (1987: 215). Alternatively, this will rekindle the revelation that "the world is God's creation and he ('man' referring to human being) is God's creature, that his life has been given to him and that he is responsible for the life of his neighbour and for the life of the world" (: 215).

c. The affinity on spirits and the spirit world.

The belief in spirits and the spirit world is very central in the primal worldview of the Gikûyû people, and also for other African people. Parratt rightly observes that there are "close parallels between the biblical world and that of traditional Africa". (Parratt 1995: 59). He further notes "it needs scarcely to be emphasized that the traditional world was, like that of the Gospels, one which supernatural powers impinged on the world of humans at all points, and in which all life was subject to the influence of the spiritual powers" (1995: 59). The Bible too recognises the spirits and the spirit world and how Jesus Christ

dealt with the demons that denied human beings the fullness of life in Christ³⁵. As it were, “this is one of the major areas where African traditional beliefs identify more naturally with the biblical world-view than do the Western ideas, where scientific knowledge has often led to categorise belief in spiritual powers as ignorant and superstitious” (Nevius 1963: 245).

This affinity thus offers a genuine operating principle for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. There is no discrepancy in asserting that many things transpiring in the physical world are related to the events that happen in the spirit world. As it is precisely stated, “common to the biblical writers and African traditional thought, that causality is not simply a matter of natural consequence but of interplay of spiritual powers” (Parratt 1995: 59). The malevolent spirits cause cosmic disorderliness since things that take place in this world are designed in the spirit world. The malevolent spirits adversely challenge the status quo; an order entrenched by God for the benefit of human beings. Human beings are surely the most exposed and vulnerable targets for the malevolent spirits. However, there are benevolent spirits, and an intact relationship with them enables human beings to withstand the malevolent spirits. In that case, God and the benevolent spirits must be placated so as to enter into an alliance with human beings in the struggle against the malevolent spirits, eventually frustrating their schemes.

Hermeneutics ought therefore to seriously encounter spirits and the spirit world, which influence the life of human beings, either benevolently or malevolently. What the Bible refers to as principalities and powers (Eph. 6:11f) must be interpreted with terms perceptible to the reality in which the Africans find themselves. Human beings, who are hitherto constantly engaged in a spiritual warfare, must thus likewise oppose the malevolent spirits, which oppose God. Certainly, many of the African people (and the Gikûyû are not exceptional), live in fear of spirits and the spirit world. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in relation to spirits and the spirit world needs to be

³⁵ There is a conspicuous presence of the benevolent and malevolent spirits in the New Testament. The malevolent spirits are the demons that oppose God and threaten the stability of the abundant life destined for human beings. Jesus Christ in many instances confronted, exorcised and chased them out of human beings. (Lk.9: 37–43: 11:14–23). There is also evidence of the benevolent spirits. They are otherwise known as angels, which minister to God and human beings (Heb. 1:4–2:8).

expounded in detail. There is a convincing argument that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was/is a victory over spirits and the spirit world (Cf. Abijole Bayo 1988: 118–129). Without ignoring the conspicuous belief in spirits and the spirit world, hermeneutics will need to have an elaborate blue-print on how human beings can understand and handle the same. This is by cultivating a lasting relationship with God through Jesus Christ, in order to keep away the malevolent spirits. Dealing with spirits and the spirit world must not be taken as a simple matter. Any seasoned reader of the Bible must be aware that, “their presence and relationship to human beings means that they are part of human beings by the interconnection of vital powers and this cannot be ignored” (Magesa 1997: 56). The power and victory of Jesus over spirits and the spirit world must be made real to the African Christians, who really need the same in their mastery over spirits and the spirit world.

The Scriptural teachings on spirits and the spirit world can provide the adequate means of contending with the spirit world, which is a perceived reality amongst the Gikûyû and indeed amongst many African Christians. The Gikûyû primal worldview can provide adequate tools for understanding spirits and the spirit world as proclaimed by the Bible. Consequently, those acts referred constantly (and may be erroneously) as the Acts of God can thus be perceived otherwise because according to the primal worldview, things do not just happen. Whatever causes human suffering are the manifestations of the malevolent spirits, who have the ability to manipulate nature so as to deny human beings the abundant life. Hermeneutics will thus sharpen the Africans to take the whole armour of God and stand, for theirs is a spiritual warfare. In that case, Christians will not just watch, as people die because of floods in Southern Africa. Neither will they just sit and watch as people die of hunger in the arid and semi-arid districts of North Eastern, Eastern, and North Rift Valley in Kenya. They will not just watch as Africa is being torn apart by corruption, ethnicity and other social vices. They will not just watch when the government becomes a terror to good conduct. They will not just watch when leaders of religious cults lead their followers to commit suicide or mass murder through unjustified eschatological oratory. They will not just watch as people bomb buildings, causing death to hundreds of people

and injuring thousands in the name of a religious faith and in the pretext of serving God³⁶. All this happens through the manipulation of people and nature by the malevolent spirits, who are adversary to good governance; hence they are deleterious to human existence. Christians therefore will put on the whole armour of God and continuously wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6: 12f).

d. The affinity on God.

According to the Gĩkũyũ primal worldview, God is real and his existence unquestionable³⁷. Indeed, *Ngai* is the only God and cannot be confused with anything else either on the underworld, in the waters, on earth or even in the air. There is nothing in the whole creation that can be compared with God and nothing that could match his superior power. The Gĩkũyũ people therefore never venerated and/or adored any thing that is created as if it was synonymous with God. Wanjohi observes that the Gĩkũyũ people “have never been known to worship more than one God” (Wanjohi 1997: 10). They have been classified among the people who adhere to strict monotheism (Cf. Shorter 1975: 10). Their proverbs concerning God connote monotheism since the adjectives describing God are in singular formulation not in plural, thus portraying God as one³⁸. The Gĩkũyũ primal worldview accepts God as

³⁶ Floods and famine had struck the mentioned areas when gathering material and writing this study. During the same period, a simultaneous bomb blast on 7th August 2000 aimed to hit the American embassy in Nairobi and Dar-es-salaam killed hundreds and injured thousands of people. The Nairobi bomb blast brought down the Ufundi House and extensively damaged Co-operative House. It caused loss of property and this will definitely impoverish the shareholders for a long time, since both buildings belonged to co-operative movements, which are largely owned by ordinary workers. It was also during his period that a leader of a religious cult in Uganda led his followers to commit suicide and murder as a sure way of going to heaven.

³⁷ Fr. Cagnolo notes the undeniable faith in the being and existence of God. He states, “‘There is no people without God’ stated Homer long time ago, or ‘without a religion’ wrote Plutarch; and we are glad to confirm these statements because since our arrival among these people, we found that the Kikuyu believes in a Supreme Being, Spiritual, Ruler, and Governor of the universe...Ngai with singular only- as Supreme Being and source of all things and the ‘ngoma’ or the innumerable spirit of the dead, with no connection with God, but in connection with us” (Cagnolo in Wanjau 1999: 12).

³⁸ The point we are making is clear in the proverb, *Ngai ndabaaranagia gĩhithi kĩa mĩndũ*, literary translated to mean: God does not look upon a person’s face. It is used to mean that God never discriminates people because of their physical appearance. If the Gĩkũyũ people were polytheistic, then the proverb would read, *ngai itibaaranagia gĩhithi kĩa mĩndũ*, meaning that the gods do not discriminate. The adjective supposed to mean ‘discriminate’-*itibaaranagia*- is in plural. However in the right proverb, it is not in plural and so among the Gĩkũyũ, God is one. Other Gĩkũyũ proverbs are in agreement to this monotheism. For example, *Ngai ndagiagwo* (God is never pestered), *Ngai ari tha* (God is merciful), and *Ngai ndariaga ngima* (God does not eat stiff porridge) points to this monotheism.

the creator, provider and the sustainer of life³⁹. He is the owner of all things, hence referred to as *Nyene* (Owner). He is the source of all righteousness, hence referred to as *Mwene-Nyaga* (The owner of righteousness). He is the Almighty, hence referred to as *Mûrungu mwene hinya wothe, ûhoti na wathani* (Almighty God the owner of all-power, might and authority). He is invisible and has a superior presence in the created order. He is benevolent towards human beings, a fact as well true in the Bible as in the African primal worldview. As observed, "...the traditional view of God in Africa is very close to the biblical revelation of the Almighty God" (O'Donovan 1996: 41). Hermeneutics can thus build on this affinity between the Bible and the primal worldview to elucidate God's self-revelation. This is beginning from the known to the unknown. Given that the Africans worshipped God through intermediaries, the mediation of Jesus Christ will not be a mystery. The Gîkûyû concept of mediation will thus not be an error. However, it will be a beginning point of understanding how the mediation, which the Gîkûyû people knew has been perfected by, in and through Jesus Christ (Cf. 1Tim 2: 5f). According to the Gîkûyû primal worldview, the relationship between God and human beings is restored and sustained through sacrifice. Consequently, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, which restores and sustains the relationship between God and human beings, will be clear. Working on the postulate of affinity, hermeneutics will enable clear understanding of atonement, which restores the hitherto broken relationship between human being and God. A restored relationship with God becomes a rite of entry and a means of acceptance into the community of faith, the people of God. These include not only the earthly extended family, but also the eternal and everlasting community, which endures forever and ever.

It is thus clear from the above that life must be enjoyed in its fullness. Notwithstanding, the primal worldview on God, spirits and the spirit world, human beings and the non-human creation has a remarkable affinity with the Bible. Hermeneutics from the primal

³⁹ Alongside Gîkûyû proverbs, other African Proverbs can enhance the unquestionable faith in the being and the existence of a monotheistic God. A Twi proverb "*Obi nkyere abofra Onyame*" literary means that nobody needs to point God to a child. African proverbs can also assist human beings to accommodate other truths about God. The Bible reveals that God's creation is good. A Twi proverb state that "*Osansa Se: Ade Onyame aye ye*" literary meaning that the hawk says, everything created by God is good. To show God's mastery over the world, an Akan proverb states "*Asasetrew, na Onyame ne panyin*", literary meaning that the world is wide, but God is the master. There is a straightforward pronouncement of God's providence. Indeed, "*Onyame na owo basin fufu mano*" Meaning that God pounds fufu (a dish made from pounded cassava or yam) for the person with one hand.

worldview perspective can build on this affinity as its operating principle. Indeed the relationship of God, human beings, non-human creation, spirits and the spirit world is of fundamental significance to hermeneutics in African Christianity. Hermeneutics in Africa cannot fail to address the ordered reality in the universe. It must address itself to the issues of human existence, especially the basic human rights of food, clothing, shelter, education and good governance. In that case, human beings are bound to be creative for their existence. As it were, “conditions of our physical and economic survival need regulation to ensure resolution of conflicts in a manner that would not threaten our survival” (wa Thiong’o 1993: 77). The significance of the postulate of affinity as an operating principle will hold the interesting interaction between God, human beings, the non-human creation, spirits and the spirit world. This then demands it to be grounded on the moral and ethical value the Gĩkũyũ worldview, for morality and ethics are the centre of human life. These enables “self-understanding and provides the basic framework for any interpretation of the world, persons, nature or divinity” (Sidima 1990: 142). Similarly, “these values are the basis of a society’s consciousness and outlook the whole area of a society’s make-up, its identity...values that do not distort our identity, our conception of our rightful place in history, in the universe of the natural and human order” (Wa Thiong’o 1993: 77). There is no doubt therefore that hermeneutics will be a live-giving force, geared towards promoting life.

3:3 Use of tools derived from the primal worldview⁴⁰.

The oral tradition provides the tools, which hermeneutics can use as its operating principle. The significance of the oral tradition should not be underrated or even supposed to have become moribund in our own times⁴¹. The oral tradition has persistently kept information intact from generation to generation. Ngũgi wa Thiong’o elucidates the significance of the oral tradition when writing about its usefulness during the struggle of

⁴⁰ See the section on ‘definitions of terminologies’ in chapter one for the definition and usage of the term ‘primal worldview. On the other hand, while the primal worldview has manifold tools well established in the oral tradition, the study will only deal with the use of proverbs and stories.

⁴¹ The oral tradition is still living among the Gĩkũyũ people. One just need to attend the East African Revival Fellowship meetings from the district to the local church level and find out that the sermon which was preached in the district level is repeated by different preachers at the local church level, the area level and the division level. This revelation came during the researcher participatory observation during the months of March–June year 2000.

independence in Kenya. “The oral tradition has always been very rich and it is not surprising that it was the one most utilised by the anti-colonial forces to make statements of resistance” (wa Thiong’o 1993: 88). The transmission of the oral tradition was and is through songs poetry, proverbs, riddles, stories and idiomatic expression. However the study only considers proverbs and stories yet this does not mean that they are superior than songs, poetry, riddles and idiomatic expression since all of them are significant tools in the oral tradition that are pertinent to hermeneutics. They are all equally relevant tools from the primal worldview, which “are windows into the African world-view” (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 43)⁴² and which can “make us better expositors of Scripture” (Griffiths “Forward” in Burnett 1988: 7). They can indeed provide windows into the meaning of the biblical text and also restore human dignity and identity, which the contemporary generation violate. Since they are a deposit of Gîkûyû wisdom they can eloquently communicate the message of the Bible, the divine-human book of life, hence proffering an understanding of the Scriptures as a deposit of the wisdom of life. The Scripture in turn will provide means to safeguard human dignity and identity, as is the case with the Gîkûyû worldview. As the oral tradition played a significant part in safeguarding the erosion of values and virtues that enabled human beings to live cohesively, the Bible will do the same. Consequently, the Bible will recapture the hallowed nature, which enabled human beings to have solidarity and respect for both human and non-human life. These tools will eventually lead to reclaiming and recovering the relevant spirituality and the spiritual view of life in hermeneutics. Nevertheless, we now turn to the use of proverbs and stories as illustrations of how tools from the primal worldview can offer hermeneutics an operating principle.

a. Use of proverbs.

Wanjohi (1997) outlines several Gîkûyû proverbs, which are theological and philosophical, and hence, watershed to hermeneutics. The proposed hermeneutical method is that which enables human beings to deal with the problems of life. The proverbs can enable this, for they “touch on every aspect of life of the people who create them. There

⁴² The source of this information is Donald Jacobs in a private letter written to one of the authors, February 1996.

are proverbs on political, social, educational, religious and economical issues” (Odaga 1984: 68). Kalilombe on the other hand argues,

Proverbs are a mirror in which a community can look at itself and a stage on which it exposes itself to others. They describe its values, aspirations, preoccupations and the particular angles from which it sees and appreciates realities and behaviour. What we call mentality or way of life is best pictured in them.

(Cited in Healey & Sybertz 1996: 35)

As Wanjohi argues, “their concern is to give practical advice on how to view and handle the problems of life” (Wanjohi 1997: 14). Incidentally, if there is anything that human beings desperately seek, it is the ability to understand and handle life, and to understand themselves and their environment. The proverbs apparently discern the real character of life, that human beings should not border their life to one extreme.⁴³ They are all-embracing, rejecting any extreme that would consider any particular view of life as the norm. Thus the Gikũyũ primal worldview as disclosed by the proverbs, is not “narrow and reductive, trying to resolve reality into only one dimension or mode” (1997: 39). Gikũyũ proverbs thus cover almost their whole culture and worldview. They engage with the unperceived (unseen) and perceived (seen) reality concurrently, taking care of ethical and moral realities vis-à-vis the unperceived (unseen) as well the perceived (seen) reality. They regulate the behaviour and relationship of human beings with the supernatural, fellow human beings and the non-human creation. Nevertheless, there is a wide range of proverbs dealing with the social reality. This includes the maintenance of the social relationship between human beings and fellow human beings. The aforementioned is indeed “an indication of the versatility of Gikũyũ proverbs in providing of reality as comprehensive as possible” (Wanjohi 1997: 40).

The Gikũyũ proverbs depict reality antithetically. One may describe a phenomenon positively, while another may describe the same phenomenon negatively. It is not a contradiction that they depict reality in both positive and negative terms. The opposite

⁴³ We can cite two English proverbs, which illustrate the point we are making. It is commonplace to hear people say, “Out of sight, out of mind”. On the other breath they say, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”. These proverbs are essentially contradictory and they depict an apparent non-compromising stand. Some psychologists have argued that these proverbs are contradictory; hence they cannot adequately explain human nature. However, they do portray the danger of leaning to any of the two extremes. They regulate life to acceptable proportions.

expresses that life has extremes, and leaning too much on one extreme, there is a danger of living an illusory life, divorced from the reality as it is on the ground⁴⁴. The antithetical proverbs are not contradictory, but they expose a possibility to mediate between the two extremes for the whole truth is neither in any of the extremes. As Healey & Sybertz points out,

The very fact that many African proverbs have opposites has an important message. This reveals the complex nature of some proverbs which are apparently contradictory but are “true” in their own context and usage. This is part of the African worldview which accommodates pluralism...and is “both...and” approach

(1996: 41).

African proverbs can considerably reveal reality as perceived by a people when used in hermeneutics. Hermeneutics will then avoid leaning towards any extremes. Hermeneutics will thus travel the Odysseus’ path, avoiding the Sylla of the left, and the Charybdis on the right.⁴⁵ In any case, reason (*Kihooto*) will be central to the hermeneutical discourse in order to judge what reality is. It will then be clear that the antithetical nature of the Gîkûyû proverbs shows human finitude, the incompetence “to do two things at once” (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 41). Indeed they show the difference between human beings and God, a difference that is persuasively established in the Bible⁴⁶. The antithetical character of the Gîkûyû proverbs depicts human limitations. In that case, there must be a mean between the two extremes.

Hermeneutics can use Gîkûyû proverbs, which considers justice and reason as the equitable configuration of a well-balanced life in the society. They regard truth and

⁴⁴ Some of these antithetical proverbs include, *Mwîtwari ndarî haaro* (The person who minds his/her own business has no trouble). Antithetically, *Mûrîa wike akuaga wike* (The person who eats alone dies alone). *Gûkîra kurî ngatho* (Silence is golden). Antithetically, *Gûkîra ni gûthurana* (Silence is hatred).

⁴⁵ Sylla and Charybdis were immortal and irresistible monsters in Greek mythology that beset the narrow waters traversed by Odysseus in his wandering. Odysseus supposedly had to find his way between these two monsters if he was to survive. If he strayed too much to the one side Sylla would devour him, and if he strayed too much to the other, he would be sucked into the mouth of Charybdis. To succeed and survive Odysseus had to find a narrow way between these two monsters (Cf. Homer *The Odyssey* Book 12: 460–480 and March 1998: 279).

⁴⁶ The following two antithetical proverbs uncover this fact with certain terms. *Kuuga ti gwîka* (to say is not to do) is antithetically countered by *Kuuga na gwîka* (to say and to do). However, this situation is only possible with God. It is only God who can always say and do. Human beings at times may do what they say, but not always. There are times when they say and they do not do. In most case, human actions do not tally with their words. However, what God says must come to pass and this tally with the biblical insinuation that God is not a human being so that he can lie (cf. Num 23: 19).

intelligence as vital and necessary in regulating the relationship of human beings with fellow human beings, non-human creation and God. The proverbs thus require reason (*Kihooto*), which enable the intelligible discernment of the truth and benefits of this relationship. They reject any attempt to violate another person's right through evil desires. This means that human beings must cultivate a relationship that does not deny individuality. It is the individuals that make the community. A Gîkûyû proverb, *rûî rûnenehagio nî tûthima* (A river is enlarged by its tributaries) clearly demonstrates the importance of the individual. At the same time the individual must not forget that he/she is an individual among individuals, and so must consider the rights of other individuals. Societal life is thus good, and what hampers it can only be evil. A Gîkûyû proverb thus insists, *Kamûingî koyaga ndîrî* (Many people together lift the ndîrî – a heavy wooden mortal). Obviously, the Gîkûyû proverbs “fit in very well with relationships and community values” (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 42). However, living together has disadvantages as well. *Hiti cia huura îmwe nîcio ithûûraine* (Hyenas of the same lair hate each other), and *Mathenwa marî kîondo kîmwe matiagaga gûkomorania* (Many axes in one basket are bound to hit against each other), are clear illustration to this. Nevertheless, human beings must live as individuals as well as a community. Two proverbs are worthy mentioning to show the inseparability of the individual and the community no matter what happens. The first one states, *nyûmba na riika itiumanagwo* (meaning that a clan/family and an age group are inseparable. The proverb is used to caution an individual that he/she cannot be separated from his/her clan and/or age group no matter what the individual may do or have). The other one says, *tûcara tûingî tûmenanaga tûkîrîa na ti tûkîruta wîra* (meaning that many hands despise each other only when eating but not when working. The proverb is used to emphasise that though individual interests of different people in a group may be contradictory, yet people should appreciate the benefits of these individuals while working as a group). However, it must therefore be noted that some of the proverbs were formulated from stories that depicted the reality as it is on the ground. Consequently, stories and proverbs have an inseparable obligation to explain reality. While a story may lead to the formation of a proverb, the proverb may act as the punch line of the story, thus explaining the logics behind the story. Consequently, that people's individual differences

must not hamper community living is well explained through stories and proverbs that are punch lines of the story, making them complementary to each other⁴⁷.

On the other hand, the proverbs accept that the created order shows a mark of imperfection while the creator God is ultimately perfect. However, God's creation is good in as far as God who said it was good created it. Nevertheless, the imperfection we are stating here is resultant of the fall as is the case in the Bible. Gikûyû proverbs are elaborate on this human imperfection and the perfection of God. In that case, there are proverbs, which depict the changing character of human beings and their finitude. Such proverbs remind human beings of the need to be humble, especially when they are in good health and wealth⁴⁸. Proverbs too have moral implications, which reminds human beings of their finitude, even when they are prospering. In that case, nobody, including the affluent in the society, should assume any other status superior or inferior to that of a human being. They obviously "point to the necessity of being simple, modest and humble at all times: in time of robust health, when we are exercising power, when we are enjoying great riches, as well as in times of sickness, weakness and poverty" (Wanjohi 1997: 100). Central to the Bible is the message for humility. Numerous biblical texts summon human beings to be humble so that God may lift them up (cf. Job 22: 29; Ps. 138: 6; Pr. 3: 34; 29: 23; Ezek. 21: 26; Mt. 23: 12; Lk. 14: 11; 18: 14; 1Pt. 5: 5 – 6; Jas 5: 6). Biblical texts that speak of humility can thus be interpreted with the proverbs, which remind human beings their limitation and finitude. Besides, God is contrasted by the Gikûyû proverbs as perfect and

⁴⁷ Several stories and proverbs attenuate the importance of living together as a community even when there are visible individual differences. One of these is a very popular story of two cold porcupines and a proverb derived from the story enables an understanding why individual differences should not curtail the community life. The story says that one cold night two porcupines found themselves alone on the plains. There was no shelter or place to keep them warm. They only had their body heat. But they were scared if they stood too close together during the night one could prick and even kill the other by mistake. After experimenting they found the right distance to stand next to each other. They were close enough together that their bodies gave heat to each other, but far enough apart that they would not prick each other during the night. A proverb emerged from this story, *-mîgwî ya njege ndîgiragia igwaatanie ûrugari-* meaning that arrows of porcupines do not prevent them from warming each other.

⁴⁸ The following proverbs are cited as an illustration of the point we are making. *Wainaga nî eroragîra, warûûgaga nî atobokaga* (A person who used to sing and dance can be a spectator, a person who used to jump pit can now fall into the pit). *Îrûûgamaga nî ikurumaga* (That used to stand up; now is crawling). *Kamau mweru nî airaga* (The fair skinned Kamau can become dark skinned). *Njamba ndîrumaga imera igîrî* (A warrior does not have authority over the others for two seasons).

all-powerful, unlimited and infinite and not as finite and limited as human beings are⁴⁹. The human and non-human creations are limited and finite because they have a beginning. On the contrary, God has no beginning or end. “He is absolute and eternal” (Wanjohi 1997: 103). The proverbs thus state an undeniable fact that they can enable the operation of a genuine hermeneutics in African Christianity. Indeed by using the proverbs as an operating principle, hermeneutics will gain momentum and dynamism. It will be critical and reflective of the issues that emanate from life situations of human beings

Using the proverbs as an operating principle, hermeneutics will bring the biblical message and faith closer to the African Christians. As Mbiti rightly affirms, “proverbs are a rich source of African Religion and philosophy. They contain and point to a deeper spirituality, as well as theological and philosophical insights. In this case, they form a bridge between traditional African religion and biblical teaching” (Cited in Healey & Sybertz 1996: 28). In using the proverbs, hermeneutics will move Christians towards “a complete transformation in the Christian life” (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 18). They can enable African Christians to live, as they ought, living and practising the biblical faith as part of their life. This will enhance the preaching of “the gospel and develop an inculturated and contextualised African Christianity” (: 18) because the biblical faith, upon which the Christian faith resides will have penetrated in the “hearts and souls of the African people” (: 19). In that case, “the traditional African wisdom of proverbs will continue to speak to universal experience and find new applications in the modern world” (: 37).

b. Use of stories.

Among several African scholars, stories have been regarded as the fifth Gospel,⁵⁰ which offers a new context for doing contemporary theology. Stories may also include myths, legends, fables and folk tale. “These are the vessels in which the cultural, social and spiritual heritage of Africa is embedded and transmitted” (: 42). By the use of stories, hermeneutics will consequently become a story-telling affair in African Christianity. The

⁴⁹ Concerning God, the proverbs inform us that *úhoro mutue ní Ngai ndurí úcuuke* (What God has decreed cannot be questioned). *Guoko kwa Ngai gútieraga* (The hand of God does not waver). [This means that God’s work is perfect]. *Mwaki wa Ngai úraaragio ní magoto* (God’s fire is kept burning all-night by dry banana fibres).

⁵⁰ Cf. Healey & Sybertz 1996: 33.

readers of the Bible will be treading on a well-known ground, having for a long time embedded and transmitted African cultural, social and spiritual heritage through story-telling exercise⁵¹. In one way or another, numerous Gîkûyû stories are relevant to hermeneutics. Among them are the stories, which expose a redeemer who comes in when human beings are hopeless and indeed having been annihilated⁵². The saviour-centred stories expose how when used by biblical hermeneutics the divine intervention to save humankind by confronting evil powers will be well understood. These stories are windows of the primal worldview, which can reveal God's plan for the redemption and salvation of humankind, conspicuous in the Scriptures.

Other stories put emphasis on good personal relationship in the earthly life, which has a profusion of benefits⁵³. They put emphasis on the importance of a person-in-community relationship given that an individual is somebody because of the community. Precisely, "a person is first and foremost a member of the community and secondly an individual" (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 106). Indeed community life is a value that hermeneutics has to

⁵¹ One instance where story telling enabled a clear grasp of a biblical text can be cited. The text used in that instance was John 14:28–31. This text belongs to a larger discourse, where Jesus was telling his disciples about his departure. The interpretation of that text has lived with the Christians of that congregation for over ten years. The story told was about two girls who had been captured by an ogre. The ogre was feeding them, but one day it fed them with its blood. However, one girl refused to take the blood, while the other took. When they escaped, the ogre followed them calling its blood, which could answer. The girl who did not take the blood hid herself, but the one who had taken the blood could not hide, because the blood could answer when called. The preacher then exclaimed; "I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold of me" (Jn 14: 30). The message was simple. If you have taken anything from the devil, you cannot run away from him. Nevertheless, if you have not, even if he calls, he will not find you. To be free from the devil is to refuse to have anything to do with him, or what belongs to him, and if one has, the best hiding place would be in the cleansing blood of Jesus for the devil has no hold of him (Jesus).

⁵² One of the saviour centred story is about a monster, which had devoured all people from one village, save one pregnant woman who managed to hide. Thereafter, she delivered a baby boy, who always wanted to know why they were the only people in the whole village. The mother always told him to grow up a strong boy, and when she is fully convinced that he is strong, she will tell him. Finally the now strong young man was told about the monster, which he killed and redeemed all the village people, which were previously devoured by the monster.

⁵³ This is especially conveyed in a common story of two brothers who sought their fathers blessing because they were embarking on a journey. The father blessed them, telling them to put marks on every tree they passed lest they be lost. The first one literally put a mark on every tree he passed. However, the second one made friends with every home he passed. When they came back home, their father wanted to go with them where they had gone. They surely went with the first one and he saw all the literal marks he had made in trees. Nevertheless, they went home hungry. Yet when they went with the second son so that he may see the marks he had made, they passed many homes where they were well received. They went home well fed. The father commended the young son for having made lasting marks on relevant 'trees'. (The Gîkûyû symbolically use 'tree' in reference to human beings).

pursue, if it is to enhance the growth and expansion of the biblical faith in Africa. If community life is so important, then the community itself must read the Bible. The importance and meaning of community life is well elaborated in the story telling, which happens within the community. The reading and interpretation of the Bible as a story telling exercise will find relevance in this community. This will certainly facilitate a clear expression of the biblical message within the community. When the Bible is expressed “in terms of African tradition with fresh images and new words, will reach people in a more direct way” (1996: 204). This is indeed of utmost importance, given that the Scripture as the word of the Lord was initially received through the oral tradition. The Scripture was more heard than read, which is the case even in the contemporary African context. Accentuating the oral tradition of the proverb-story-telling tradition, which is the wisdom of life, means that the Scriptures as the word of life will become the wisdom of life and an integral part of human life. Other Gîkûyû stories uncover the fact that God takes care of the poor, the marginalised and the less fortunate in their society⁵⁴. Such stories remind the Gîkûyû people why they should not despise the poor, the marginalised and the less fortunate because God takes care for them. They can capably enrich a hermeneutical method that considers the preferential option for the poor as inescapable. Precisely, hermeneutics cannot avoid the preferential option of the poor, the marginalised and the less fortunate. While using such stories, hermeneutics will challenge people living in a community to be mindful of the welfare of the less fortunate. It will summon human beings to live a cohesive community life.

When hermeneutics uses tools from the primal worldview, it will thus enable the rooting of the biblical faith in the local African cultures and society. As Healey & Sybertz acknowledges, “the guide to this journey are African proverbs, sayings, riddles, plays, songs, cultural symbols and real life experiences” (: 13). They also add that, “the values

⁵⁴ A Gîkûyû legend exposes this with certainty. The legend concerns a rich polygamous man who among his many the wives, Wacû was the most despised. The rich husband never gave her any present. The legend continues to say that one day, the rich husband held a banquet. Moreover, Wacû knew that there was nothing for her in the banquet and so she went to work in the garden. In the middle of the banquet, a raven swooped down in the courtyard where the meat was being roasted, and snatching the biggest and juicy piece of meat it fled. Nevertheless, the meat was too hot for the raven to hold for long. When it could not hold it any longer, the raven let it go, but this time to where Wacû was working. From this legend, a proverb was coined, (*Nyama*) *cia korire Wacû mûgûnda* – (Meat) found Wacû in the garden.

and wisdom of African proverbs, sayings, stories and cultural symbols can respond to the contemporary concerns of people everywhere. The African experience that is expressed through proverbs, stories and songs⁵⁵ can speak profoundly to the burning questions on the meaning of life, suffering, peace and human relationships” (: 14). It is not an exaggeration therefore to conclude that, “on the overall journey of life, African human and spiritual values can call people back to their roots and give them new meaning and purpose” (: 15).

3:4 Conclusion.

The operating principles of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview points to the necessity of enabling human beings to realise the abundant life intended for them. This therefore does not jettison any phenomenon that may hinder or enhance the realisation of abundant life. It must then operate on a hermeneutical circle, which includes God, human beings, non-human creation, spirits and the spirit world, and the relationship therein. The hermeneutical circle is complementary because it involves,

A number of intricate relations, which are described in terms of a circle because there can be no simple movement from one side to the other but each side interacts with the other. Hermeneutics which fails to recognize this complexity would almost certainly distort what it sought to understand.

(Painter 1987: 56)

The primal worldview gives us the right point to enter into this circle. In it we find an elaborate interaction between God, human beings, non-human creation, spirits and the spirit world. As it were, the non-human creation provides the environment in which human beings live. Things happening in the environment construct the rationale feature of human beings, giving them the tools of approaching the biblical text because the same environment raises questions concerning their existence. As observed, these questions

⁵⁵ Songs are useful tools from the oral tradition, which can be beneficial to hermeneutics. Though this study only expounds the use of proverbs and stories, it is worthwhile to mention that churches found among the Gikūyū people have recently began interpreting biblical passages with songs composed using folk tunes and biblical words. We are indebted to mention the ACK Ìthare-inĩ Church Choir, which on 25/11/2000, during the graduation ceremony of St. Andrew’s College of Theology and Development interpreted 1Kgs. 21 (Naboth’s vineyard) using a folk tune. They sang how jealous motivated Ahab to colluded with his wife to murder Naboth so that king Ahab may grab Naboth’s vineyard. Commenting on this method of interpreting Scriptures using folksongs, Dr. Douglas Waruta said that he was very much impressed by the interpretation of that text using a song, which was sang in a language the congregation could understand, to show what jealous and greed can motivate people to do and why people should avoid the same. Dr. Waruta, who is the chairman of the religious studies’ department of the university of Nairobi, Kenya, was the guest speaker during the occasion.

“arise because of the structure of man’s being and consciousness in relation to himself and the world...Man’s life in the world provides the possibility of understanding the texts which are the expression of life moments in writing” (1987: 56).

The operating principles of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview must therefore be geared towards generating the abundant life for all human beings. It must accordingly resonate with the plight of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised. The guiding motive will be the question; does a particular reading of the Bible promote life? If it is in the affirmative, then it should be systematically incorporated into the people’s way of life. That which disrupts the realising of the abundant life, either through preventable illness or poverty will not be entertained. The question of the escalating poverty of the majority and the affluence of a few will be central to hermeneutics, which will have social, political, economical and religious issues as its essential agenda. It will be focused on the establishment of social order that is credible and attractive, promoting solidarity in communal life and social responsibility towards each other and towards the non-human creation. The rich therefore and the poor will collaborate in the work of liberation. Nevertheless, the poor themselves must be allowed to take the forefront in the elimination of poverty. They must be empowered.

The significance of the postulate of affinity and the use of tools from the primal worldview in that case can enable the right articulation of the biblical texts. The operating principles uncover the text without neglecting the hermeneutical circle, which enables a rewarding understanding of the relationship required by the circle. Additionally, our understanding is backed by a tradition which “involves conceptions, ways of thinking, which arise from an understanding of reality...That understanding of reality sets the conceptual framework in the terms of its worldview” (: 57). The operating principles would thus enable the readers to approach the text with their original conceptuality, failure to which “opens the possibility of importing unsuitable conceptuality...” (: 57).

The postulate of affinity and tools from the primal worldview can bring the historical realities into view, enabling a rewarding scrutiny of the values they can offer to human existence. Be that as it may, “the meaning of human existence is a consequence of man’s

relation to the environment, his fellow men and God” (: 59). The operating principles are certainly expressive and they can enable hermeneutics to engage with the full measure of African reality. They certainly verify the observation that “the part should be understood in terms of the whole, yet the whole is the sum of the parts” (: 61). Human existence is therefore incomprehensible without the non-human creation. In that case, the continued destruction and misuse of the natural environment does not augur well for human existence. The existence of the non-human creation qualifies the existence of human beings, their freedom and responsibility for the future. Indeed the operating principles will shape “the understanding of existence, the philosophy of life” (: 95) as they find expression in the biblical text. In that case, the characteristics of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview are very clear. It must enable the human beings to realise the abundant life. This is possible when it operates on the hermeneutical circle that includes God, human beings, the non-human creation, spirits and the spirit world, and to maintain the relationship demanded by the circle. This method must also resonate with the plight of the poor and the marginalised so that they may realise the abundant life. This method must also establish a social order that is credible and attractive to human existence. However, it is in order to inquire whether a hermeneutical method following the elucidated operating principles is practical. To this now we turn.

Chapter 4 Interpreting Scripture from the Perspective of the Primal Worldview: The Epistle to the Hebrews.

4:1 Introduction.

Having established the operating principles of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview, the study proceeds to analyse the Epistle to the Hebrews as scriptural evidence for a hermeneutical method from the primal worldview perspective. Generally, the New Testament is an interpretation of the Old Testament taking into account the Jesus event as the interpretative grid. The New Testament tries to understand the new from the perspective of the old. Nonetheless, the Epistle to the Hebrews offers a meticulous scriptural evidence of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. The author of the epistle is apparently interpreting the Christ event, which is central to the New Testament corpus, from the perspective of the primal worldview. To all intents and purposes, the epistle is a resolute demonstration that a hermeneutical method from the perspective of the primal worldview has scriptural evidence as well as historical and phenomenological evidence. The study also interprets the epistle's selected themes from the perspective of the Gîkûyû primal worldview. This is intended to demonstrate the practicality of the hermeneutical method generated from the primal worldview. However, it is expedient to first elucidate the epistle's conception of reality, and its background, which is informed by the primal worldview.

4:2. The epistle's conception of reality and its background.

According to the primal worldview, reality is determined not only by what is visible, but also by that which is invisible. As in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Gîkûyû primal worldview maintains that the physical is the sacramental of the spiritual, i.e. what we perceive is not the whole reality. Accordingly, the epistle considers what happened in the old dispensation as the shadow of the reality. To this end, it conceives reality in primal categories. Jesus Christ and his self-sacrifice are the reality, for he existed even before the old dispensation⁵⁶. As it were, the reality must precede the shadow, in order that the shadow may appear. The reality and the shadow in that case have a link, and both are

⁵⁶ This is indeed reminiscent of Jesus' discourse with the Jews where he affirmed that even before Abraham was, he was. The Jews could not stomach this assertion for they considered it blasphemy and so they sought to stone Jesus to death (Jn 8:48–59).

essential in conceiving reality. On the other hand, reality is not determined by the facts of history. This follows from the fact that while the seen and the unseen world form a complete whole, the unseen cannot be historically analysed. The God who speaks is not categorically bound by the historical events that are discernible. His word, which naturally bears the character of God, is also not bound by visible historical events. In that case, the word of God “belongs not properly in history but to that order of existence which is beyond the mutability of historical existence” (Hughes 1979: 41). Reality thus cannot be judged only with the visible historical occurrences. Precisely, “the essential location of the word of God is not in history but beyond it, and its function is to summon men from within history towards the meta-historical ‘Rest’ of God (4: 1ff)” (: 41). Consequently, phrases like ‘the heavenly call’ (3: 1), ‘the powers of the age to come’ (6: 5), ‘eternal inheritance’ (9: 15), implies that reality is more than meets the eye. What we see is just but a shadow of the real thing.

Fundamentally, the epistle like the primal worldview’s concept of the universe encompasses the heavenly and spiritual realm and the material and the mundane world. In that case, there are spiritual realities, which are invisible, and the mundane reality, which is accountable historically and is visible. Naturally, “spiritual realities are disposed over against the material world of sense experience” (Hughes 1979: 42). Several texts from the epistle clearly argue for the existence of the spiritual realm, through which we can conceive the reality of Christ’s uniqueness. Hebrews 1: 7 depict angels as spiritual beings. The terms that describe the angels, that is, ‘wind’ and ‘fire’, are well understood in the primal world. Wind and fire denote powerful natural agencies, which are behind the elements of nature. The angels are thus spiritual agencies, which are more powerful than human beings. However, they are not stronger than the Son, who enables human beings to maintain their identity and dignity as human beings. While human beings do not have the capacity to control the spirits and the spirit world, the Son who partook the same nature with human beings has destroyed their power. He has indeed destroyed death and him who has the power of death (Heb. 2: 14). Christ therefore can adequately meet the expectations of people whose thoughts are managed by the primal worldview. The malevolent spirits, which cause havoc, are now under the control of Jesus Christ, our merciful and faithful

high priest in the service of God. The epistle in any case affirms the African people's conception of reality vis-à-vis spirits and the spirit world.

According to the law, Jesus was not fit to become a priest, and for this reason undeserving to be the high priest. He was of the tribe of Judah, "of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood" (7: 14). Nevertheless, the most appropriate way of making sense to this fact is to believe that the arrangements concerning Christ's priesthood were fashioned in the spiritual realm. The Levitical priesthood was instituted and established by the law. However it is obsolete because the priest dies, yet the priesthood of Jesus, which belongs to the order of Melchizedek, abides forever. No historical and/or scientific analysis can offer adequate tools to apprehend such a formulation. Nevertheless, such a formulation is better understood through the primal apprehension of reality, which has room for real spiritual engagement. An approach based on the primal apprehension of reality increases a spirituality that conceives life in the spiritual realm and in the physical realm without dichotomy. We can only make sense of Melchizedek and of Christ as a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7: 11–28) via the primal conception of reality. Melchizedek had no father, mother or genealogy and yet he was there. His existence flows from a decision made in the spiritual realm, where real decisions are made. Interpreting the order of Melchizedek as a spiritual reality means that the epistle can still be held and relied upon, even in the 21st Century. Indeed, the physical and the spiritual inform human beings' conception of reality.

The physical and the spiritual interact in the human life. When the epistle therefore introduces a concept of another creation, people inclined to primal faith understand. Christ is presented as a high priest with a "more perfect tabernacle not made with human hands, that is, of this creation" (Heb. 9: 11). Here we find a deep attachment to primal worldview, where human work is below perfection when compared to God's work. Realistically, Heb. 9: 11–14 make sense only when we believe that these things happened beyond the physical world, beyond the realms of human cognition. The tabernacle made by human hands is less perfect because it is human workmanship. But its perfect idea resided in God, who directed Moses on how the tabernacle was to be built. Therefore the real is in the spirit world, where "the highest place is occupied by God" (Bujo 1992: 20). Whatever

happens in the physical world is just but the shadow of what happens in the spiritual realm. According to verse 14, Christ and his priestly function are eternal by means of eternal Spirit. He is who he is and he did what he did by means of eternal spirit, making him and what he did eternal. However the English translation of this text can offer confusion because of appending the definite article ‘the’ to ‘eternal spirit’. The Greek text has no article, and also the Gikûyû vernacular translation. Without the article, the act of Christ is eternal and so happened in the spiritual realm. The phrase “through eternal spirit” refers to the means by which Jesus is our high priest in the spirit world forever and to the means by which he performs his superior priestly function. He offers his priestly function continually in the spiritual realm and in the physical world by means of eternal spirit. In that case, the salvation he offers is also eternal, happening in the physical world because it was designed in the spiritual realm by means of eternal spirit.

Hebrews.10: 19–25 shows that Jesus as a human being entered where no other human being can enter. However, by his entering, he has opened the way for us. His very human flesh (humanity) is our point of engagement with the divine. In his going, we go with him. He has taken our humanness to God. As Aaron brought the twelve tribes of Israel to God, Jesus as our representative brings us to God. Reading this text in the vernacular, we are taken beyond the cross, into the spiritual realm, where we see what was happening from eternity to eternity. The larger and important narrative is that which we do not see, and the smaller narrative is that we see and reflects what we do not see. Through Christ, the physical human being interacts and intersects with the spiritual realm. Since Christ brings us to God, we thus need sincerity of heart and the unwavering faith. This faith will enhance the understanding that the activities of Christ mentioned in this epistle take place in the spiritual realm. The epistle therefore teaches more than doctrine, for it is a spiritual reality, which we cannot ignore or seek to explicate scientifically. The idea of the holy, operating in the invisible world and with its shadow like manifestation in the physical world is a reality.

The epistle therefore conceives reality in primal categories. In that case, the epistle’s background is also furnished, equipped and stocked by the primal worldview. As it were, the interpretation of key themes in the epistle can only be understood and interpreted from

the perspective of the primal worldview. For instance, the epistle's theme of purification is traceable to the primal worldview. In the theme of purification as observed, "one recognises the myth of primal man..." (Hughes 1979: 32). In that case, understanding the background of the epistle as primal in character and orientation is of utmost significance. The continued use of the Jewish Scripture (the Old Testament) and Greek philosophy compels this study to advocate for a background, which is informed by Jewish and Hellenistic primal worldviews. Indeed the Jewish cultic background as enshrined in the Old Testament and the Greek philosophical background as in the Platonic school are at the least undeniable. As observed, the epistle has "parallels between some Hebrews and some form of primitive Gnostic thoughts" (1979: 32). On the other hand, the writer's formulation is clearly informed by the "Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom tradition" (Lane 1991: liv). In any case, peoples 'traditional wisdom' is well articulated in their primal worldview.

4:3. The epistle as an evidence of scriptural interpretation from the primal worldview.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is therefore a clear demonstration that the Scriptures can be interpreted from the perspective of the primal worldview. The epistle may support a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. The Jewish cultic practices and the Hellenistic philosophy, which are indeed primal, are used to interpret the Christ event. They are used in a way that point to the superiority of the new dispensation through Jesus Christ. The Christ event on the other hand is used as the interpretative grid of the Old Testament Scriptures. In that case, the interpretation of the Old Testament conformed to the prevailing Christian traditions, which received the Old Testament as a pointer to Jesus Christ. The Christ event was a fulfilment of the Jewish cultic aspirations well revealed in the Old Testament. The hermeneutical method employed by the writer of the epistle affirms that "the same God who delivered the law to Moses by the hand of the angels has such spoken historically in his Son, who has been made lower than angels in order that he may enter into the sphere of human life as a participant in it"⁵⁷ (Tenney 1985: 361).

⁵⁷ Cf. Heb.2: 9-10, 14-18.

Graham Hughes (1979) has painstakingly expounded the epistle as a New Testament example of biblical interpretation. He contends that, “the writer of Hebrews is the theologian who, more diligently and successfully than any other of the New Testament writers has worked out what we now call hermeneutics” (Hughes 1979: 3; Cf. p. 30). If we have interpreted this citation rightly, then “what we now call hermeneutics” is what the writer of the epistle reveals as continuity from the old dispensation to the new dispensation. This continuity enables the interpretation of the Gospel from the perspective of their traditional religious aspirations. However, there is a discontinuity, given that the old dispensation is partial and piecemeal, having come *πολυμερῶς και πολυτρόπως*. Yet the continuity is there, given that, “that which was received by ‘the fathers through the prophets’ may be recognised as that which has now come ‘to us’ in a Son” (1979: 102). The evidence deduced from the epistle demands from us that we consider the fact and factor of continuity and discontinuity when interpreting Scriptures from the perspective of the primal worldview. There are remarkable parallels of continuity from the primal worldview to the contemporary worldview. However, there is a discontinuity given that the contemporary worldview is informed by new unfolding. The Christ event was a new unfolding, which had continuity with the Jewish cultic and Greek philosophical aspirations as enshrined in their primal worldviews. However, the Christ event had discontinuity because of its superior revelation. The fact and factor of discontinuity therefore demands a critical evaluation of the past. This will dissociate hermeneutics from ideological presuppositions that only locate the readers of the Bible to facts that have no continuity with the Gospel of Christ.

Nevertheless, the epistle offers evidence as to how we can interpret Scripture from the perspective of the primal worldview. The write of the epistle interpreted “his own past in the light of his new found Christian conviction, and an interpreter of those convictions in the light of his past” (: 137). He would have wished his readers to understand the Christian faith to which they were professing from its historical setting. The Jews profoundly elevated the law, the sacrifices and the priests as having contributory value to their lasting relationship with God. On the other hand, the Greeks very well knew that the visible things they see are just a shadow and a copy of the best things to come. They therefore

should not waver from their faith in Jesus Christ, who has had perfected their cultic worship, and the best that was to come, the reality of the shadow. They were to hold firm the faith, just as their ancestors, who belonged to the old dispensation did. Failure to this, the readers would be disoriented the eschatological rest in a similar way to those who disobeyed God in the old dispensation.

The events of the old dispensation thus enable the interpretation of the Jesus event in ways agreeable to the Christian tradition. This enables identifying the old dispensation with “the light of the new form of the word so that they can actually be identified with the *logoi* of Jesus” (1979: 62). This is evidence to the fact that elements of the primal worldview can be identified with the Jesus event, enabling a rewarding hermeneutical discourse. Just as the epistle uses the old dispensation through the screen provided by the Christ event, hermeneutics could use the primal worldview’s dispensation through the screen provided by the Christ event to interpret the Bible. In that case, the epistle is relevant to the hermeneutical method, which seeks to interpret the Bible from the perspective of the primal worldview. It is a clear indication that the past can be interpreted in the light of the Christ event. The past can also facilitate a clear expression and understanding of the word of God spoken through the Son. The epistle is therefore a model on how primal worldview traditions can facilitate a clear understanding of the word spoken through the Son. It is indeed an example of contextual hermeneutics, for the writer allows “his own situation and that of his readers to be a factor in deciding the applicability of the traditions under which they stand...” (: 129). In that case, we can use our own situations to interpret the epistle’s themes.

4:4. Interpretation of the epistle’s themes from the perspective of the primal worldview.

The Epistle to the Hebrews can be considered as an application for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. It offers the readers an opportunity to delve into primal imagination in order to develop appropriate and authentic tools to unearth the meaning of the biblical world, which challenges and encourages them in their contemporary life situation. It also gives the readers an opportunity to delve through the primal worldview and the biblical world with the purpose of seeing how they can inform

one another. Confronted by the epistle's attachment to the primal worldview, the reader is summoned to think of the numinous, the idea of the holy. This engenders the realisation that life operates in a spiritual realm, and so a spiritual reality. Approaching the epistle from the perspective of the primal worldview requires us therefore to ask the following question. How and to what extent can the primal worldview be for Christians the vehicle of divine self-revelation? To illustrate the point we are making, we now turn to interpreting the epistle's themes from the perspective of the primal worldview.

a. Faith in God and the Existence of God.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is an epistle of faith. Faith is its backbone, for its major themes cannot be comprehended without faith. Faith thus magnetise a real and existential continuity of the old covenant in the new covenant. Rightly observed, "just as in the earlier one, the ultimate important constituent element becomes the faith perspective brought by the Christian to the task of interpretation" (Hughes 1979: 108). Certainly, the "faith of the interpreter should prove to be of such determinative importance in the process of interpretation. In the end, we might say, interpretation is itself an act of faith" (1979: 109).

In the Gikûyû primal worldview, symbols through which God is revealed are the basis of faith. A shrine would thus constantly induce human beings to have faith in the one the shrine is bestowed to. Jesus Christ, through whom God's has come in these last days is the basis of our faith from beginning to end. The epistle thus contains unswerving faith in God and does not question the existence of God. This corresponds to the primal worldview, whose faith in God is unwavering, and the existence of God is undeniable. That the readers are summoned and encouraged to hold fast the confession (Heb. 4: 14) implies that they are to maintain faith in God, who spoke in the past through the prophets and is now speaking through the Son. However, unbelief is the most dangerous inclination for human beings. The writer thus finds Psalms 95 an adequate Old Testament text to illustrate the dangers of unbelief. Those who disobeyed God in the wilderness had their unbelief leading to their consequent destruction; hence they could not enter God's rest. The voice of God who in the past spoke through the prophets and now speaks through the Son must be heard today, and none should be stubborn. The Greek word *ἀκούω* (used about 430

times in the New Testament) does not only mean to hear, but also to hearken, to listen, to heed, to obey, to understand and even to take in or admit. The Gîkûyû word *kûigua*, which translates the Greek *ἀκούω* also mean to hear, to obey and to understand. However, the use of the aorist subjunctive *ἀκούσητε* suggests that unbelief is a possibility, which is not profitable for the realisation of the abundant life.

In that case, faith in God leads to obedience and understanding of what God says. Therefore, since the promise to enter God's rest still abides for those who have obedience through faith, then human beings are summoned to fear God lest they come short of the rest. The Greek aorist passive subjunctive *φοβηθῶμεν* while it has the concept of reverence to God, and therefore not the negative fear, in this passage it is used to denote the aspect of being fearful, afraid and alarmed. The Gîkûyû word *gwîtigîra*, which translates *φοβηθῶμεν* also has the concept of being afraid, fearful and alarmed. The reader in all ways must thus fear, and be afraid and alarmed not to miss the rest. Faith in God and in his existence is thus necessary for human beings' realisation of the abundant life. This faith builds the Gîkûyû in their "belief that God helps them to be assured that in facing the struggles of life they are not alone, for God, who is all powerful is with them, to bring them the necessary help" (Wanjohi 1997: 168).

b. Revelation (Heb. 1:1-4).

The first four verses of the epistle open with the theological doctrine of revelation, which has historical continuity. God who spoke in the past through the prophets has also spoken in the last days through the Son so that he may be known. Indeed the act of speaking among the Gîkûyû people enables people to know each other, and to understand each other better. This leads to respecting and loving each other, hence a Gîkûyû idiom says, "*kwaria nî kwendana*" (to talk is to love one another). The act of speaking is therefore revelatory. However, who is this God who reveals himself to the Gîkûyû person through speaking?

The Greek *ὁ θεός* is translated in the Gîkûyû Bible as *Ngai*. However, *ὁ θεός* translated in English can be read as 'the god'. Nevertheless, the Gîkûyû name of God has no article for he could not be confused with anything. So, how did the Gîkûyû understand *Ngai*? Firstly,

the traditional sources reveal that *Ngai* is probably not the original Gĩkũyũ name of God. The name could have been borrowed from the neighbouring Maasai, whose name for God is *Enkai*⁵⁸. Nonetheless, *Ngai* among the Gĩkũyũ is the provider and divider of gifts. However, *Mũrungu* is the most original Gĩkũyũ name of God. The prefix *Mũ-* in the name connotes humanity hence God is understood anthropomorphically. The name also denotes God as Almighty. The Gĩkũyũ people also know God with the name, *Mwene-Nyaga*. *Mwene* means owner, while *Nyaga* means brightness or righteousness. In that case, God is the righteous one, or rather the owner of righteousness. He is indeed the dazzling one. The Gĩkũyũ also conceived God as '*Baba*'. This is the Gĩkũyũ name for father⁵⁹. God is also perceived as merciful. God is thus prepared to help humankind to realise the fullness of life. He could willingly and readily forgive "if repentance was shown and sacrifices were made to prove the sincerity of the people" (Leakey 1977, 3: 1077). The Gĩkũyũ also understand God as having a dwelling space. He dwells both in the sky and in the earth. As Leakey observes, "the Gĩkũyũ conception of the deity was one that provided for God's presence at once. He was all-pervading, He was everywhere and yet he has his special abode as well" (1977, 3: 1078)⁶⁰.

The Agĩkũyũ know God as the creator of all that is⁶¹. So when the Gĩkũyũ people read in Hebrews 1: 2, that God is the creator of the worlds, this is understood as both the physical and the spiritual world, forming a united whole. The created 'worlds' (*αιῶνας*) in Heb 1: 2 in that case is a symbolic reality that represents and discloses its meaning only to the community of faith. This community is rightly informed by Heb.11: 3 that, "By faith we understand that the world was created by word of God, so that what is seen was made out

⁵⁸ Leakey observes, "in addition to the adoption of the Maasai name, it is probable that certain Maasai concepts of the deity were also borrowed. However in Gĩkũyũ, the name *Ngai* has a connotation of a divider. So God is the one who provides and divides things to his people" (Leakey 1977, 3: 1075).

⁵⁹ The usage of the name however is not a Christian influence. Leakey argues that, "although my first impression was that the deity as Father was due to the Christian influence, discussion with very senior elders has satisfied me that the deity was commonly addressed as *Baba* long before the Europeans entered the country" (1977, 3: 1076).

⁶⁰ Leakey's use of the past tense does not mean this is not the belief held by the modern Gĩkũyũ person. God is still perceived as he was in the past.

⁶¹ The Gĩkũyũ people believe that, "*Ngai nĩwe wakũmbire andũ, andũ matingihota gũkũmba Nga*" –[God created human beings, human beings cannot create God] (Gathigira 1933: 31). This belief enables the Gĩkũyũ to understand God as the only Creator. Since the Gĩkũyũ cannot create God, they have no idol representing God. Their primal faith enables them to apprehend the one God, who created the worlds through his word and wisdom.

of things which do not appear”. This enables the Gîkûyû to conceive the world as both physical and spiritual, thus upholding the unity of the universe. Unlike the Western world, there is no dichotomy between the animate and the inanimate, sacred and profane, religious and the secular, physical and the spiritual (Cf. Mbiti 1969: 49–50). The understanding of the world as physical and spiritual is indeed a worldview among many African people.

The Gîkûyû have thus known God in various and diverse ways. Besides, he is not flesh and blood, yet he has human attributes. “He could be spoken to, and he could speak to people” (: 1076). Among the Agîkûyû, God spoke through the diviners, also known as medicine men (Mûndû Mûgo in singular, Ago in plural). The Gîkûyû diviner revealed to people what God had said. The belief that God speaks and can be spoken to clears the way for the interpretation of Heb.1: 1, where God is presented as a God who spoke through the fathers and the prophets and who speaks through the Son in the present time. The Gîkûyû too have a concept of *Mwana wa Ngai* (The child of God) who is God’s messenger in form of a solitary Columbus monkey (*Nguuyo*)⁶². The concept of God speaking through his Son, or child would thus enable the Gîkûyû people to make sense of the God of the Bible who speaks.

In Heb. 1:1–4, God’s revelation is explicit. That God has spoken is not explained but asserted. The passage therefore suggests that the revelation of a God who speaks can only be comprehended through faith in a God who speaks. As Guthrie observes, the epistle summons the readers to have faith “not only in the existence of God, but also in the communication of God” (Guthrie 1990: 62). God’s revelatory communication includes the past and the present. The past is the ‘*praeparatio evangelica*’, which Guthrie seems to support by arguing that “what was said in the past (*πάλαι*) prepared the way for the most

⁶² The Columbus Monkey as the child of God would appear on the trees surrounding a village. While in normal circumstances a columbus monkey could be killed because of its coveted long black and white fur, this solitary one could not be killed in any way. Whenever a Gîkûyû person saw a solitary Columbus monkey, he/she would know that God is speaking, and would thus seek what God wanted. Leakey reveals, “when such a solitary Columbus appeared as a messenger from God, a ram was at once taken to the nearest tree and sacrificed” (1977, 3: 1077). Besides, “the fact that a solitary Columbus monkey was regarded as a ‘child of God’ and a messenger from God did not, however, mean that god was thought of as a monkey. Such an idea was strongly denied, and it was simply stated that God had put his child temporarily into the form of a Columbus monkey in order to send a special message” (: 1077).

important communication of all (i.e. revelation through the Son)...The past has given way to better things” (Guthrie 1990: 62). The revelation of the past is thus depicted as partial and piecemeal, while that which came through the Son is complete and perfect. Nevertheless, this is not to mean that the revelation of the past has evolved to a better one. The developmental hypothesis does not fit in the epistle as a whole. The epistle favours a progressive revelation, which does not consider its initial stage as invalid, but as a theological category, on which the understanding of God’s revelation must be sensed and perceived. In that case, the revelation through the Son does not invalidate the revelation that came in the past in various ways. The better ideas only expand the horizons of the primal worldview. The primal apprehension of reality, which enables conceptualising the divinity in terms agreeable to people’s conception of reality, is not invalidated or diminished, neither is it threatened with extinction, but it is rather broadened. Indeed God’s revelation apprehended in primal categories is fundamental to the complete and perfect revelation through the Son.

c. Reconciliation and forgiveness through atonement.

The Gikûyû primal worldview elucidates the value placed on proper relationship between human beings and God as that which facilitates and maintains life in society. However, the sad reality is that the so much desired relationship is severed because of human greed and selfishness. This corresponds to the biblical world, where the relationship between God and human beings was/is severed by human sins and disobedience (Cf. Gen.3: 1ff; Isa.59: 1f). Yet the severed relationship must be restored with sacrifice, which the Bible and the primal worldview demand. The sacrifice detailed by the epistle must thus be understood from the background of the primal worldview. The epistle portrays the sacrificial system of primal societies as having culminated in Christ, when he offered himself conclusively on the cross⁶³. These sacrifices were meant to facilitate reconciliation and forgiveness, and as it were, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9: 22).

⁶³ This is clear in William Robertson Smith’s citation in Mary G. Bediako; “that the God-man dies for his people and that his death is their life, is an idea which to some degree foreshadowed by the oldest mythical sacrifice...in a very crude and materialistic form and without any of those ethical ideas which the Christian doctrine of atonement derives from a profound sense of sin and divine justice. And yet the voluntary death of the divine victim, which we have seen to be a conception not foreign to ancient sacrifice ritual, contained the germ of the deepest thought in Christian doctrine...that the Redeemer gives himself for his people that for their sake he consecrates himself that they might be consecrated in truth.” (Bediako 1997: 339).

However, the theme of revelation is not disposed from the theme of reconciliation. Heb. 1:1–4 holds the two important themes of revelation and reconciliation. As observed, “the passage records two movements, one of revelation and one of reconciliation, movements which reach their complete fulfilment together” (Stibbs 1970: 13). This may be clearly understood through the use of a Gîkûyû idiomatic expression, which states that, *mûrimû wa andû erî mendaine ûtemagwo na mîario*, meaning that an illness of two people in love is healed through speaking. The illness in this case is a severed relationship, and reconciliation is possible through speaking. The God who speaks in that case speaks to reconcile people back to himself. The revealed God is thus the same God who moves to reconcile human beings to himself. However, God’s supreme and ultimate revelation is declared by what Christ has done. “God is supremely and finally revealed to men in what Christ has done as man on earth; that is, in his work of redemption by which he made purification for sins. This involved incarnation and sacrifice” (1970: 14). God’s revelation is thus made sure by God’s action: to reconcile human beings unto himself through Christ. Indeed the event through which God is completely revealed provides the reconciliation of human beings to God. In that case, reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins is the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Naturally, we know what God is like because of what he has done for us through Jesus Christ. Consequently, the theme of revelation and reconciliation intersect in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Christ is thus rightly the priest and the sacrifice, the atonement of our sins.

Reconciliation brings together people hitherto separated. When the separation persists, there amounts an ongoing anger. However, reconciliation rituals are conducted without anger. Magesa reveals that “as the performer of the ritual of integration and equilibrium, the human agent must make sure first of all, that his or her own heart is free from anger” (Magesa 1997: 235)⁶⁴. In that case, reconciliation viewed from the perspective of the primal worldview is anger-removal. We are reconciled back to God after having inflicted

⁶⁴ Chasing anger so as to have an effective reconciliation is prevalent amongst several African communities. The Taita’s (from Kenya) ceremony of *kutasa* (reconciliation) includes utterances directed towards turning away anger (Cf. Harris 1978: 46). The Nyakyusa (from Tanzania) believe that anger in the heart makes reconciliation ineffective (Cf. Wilson 1971: 237).

anger on him by and through our disobedience and through the failure to serve God and humanity. However, the anger is perfectly replaced by the love of God, the grace of Christ manifested in the cross and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, reconciliation is a force that enhances the realisation of the abundant life. Previously human beings were severed from the source of life, but now Christ has demolished the dividing walls of hostility and has made us the children of one God, the Father. Reconciliation thus understood from the perspective of the primal worldview is a “symbiotic re-enactment of the primordial relationship between human life and the mystical sources of life” (Magesa 1997: 237).

d. Christ as the High Priest and the Sacrifice.

Christ as the priest as well as the human sacrifice is a central theme of the epistle. As it were, human sin could not and cannot be completely washed out by animal blood. Human beings must find restitution for their sins. However, they are so sinful and hence unacceptable as a sacrificial item before God. So how is human sin to be dealt with given that human beings are not worthy to atone for their sins? It is only God who can therefore deal with human sin. He is the one with the only valid means for atonement. However, God is not a human being, to pay for human sin. In that case, God had to become a human being, and as a perfect human being, he may pay the sins of his fellow human beings. Principally stated, “our saviour has not just become one like us, he has died for us” (Bediako K 1990: 17). God becoming human in aid of the helpless human beings is a concept found in primal societies especially in the Ancient Near East, and the Mediterranean world. This explains why, when Paul had healed a man who was cripple from birth at Lystra (Acts. 14:8–18), the crowds said, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts. 14:11). Therefore, “...the biblical picture of Christ as the ultimate priest, sacrifice, and temple, in whom both the cultic and spiritual facets of the Old Testament teachings in its affinity to primal religions are perfectly fused and find fulfilment” (Bediako G 1997: 372). With Christ’s sacrificial death, “the cross has defeated all elemental spirits and powers that may not wish us good” (Abijole 1988: 127). The primal worldview has a decisive role to play if the Bible is to be properly comprehended.

According to the Gîkûyû primal worldview, the elder brother may offer sacrifice on behalf

of the others. The elder brother is the intercessor/mediator. This epistle reveals this role as fittingly belonging to Christ. “Our saviour is our elder brother who has shared in our African experiences in every respect, except in our sin and alienation from God, an alienation that our myths make us only too familiar” (Bediako 1990: 18). Christ our mediator/intercessor is our elder brother, the first born within a large family (Rom.8: 29), “the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation” (Col.1: 20). His primary role in the epistle is that of the priest, the mediator/intercessor. As an elder brother, Jesus continually intercedes for us before God. Naturally, “... he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able for all the times to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb.7: 24–25). However, though Jesus is our elder brother, we must acknowledge and appreciate his superiority. “Unlike the Africans elder brother who only infrequently made intercession to the ancestors, Jesus is always interceding for human beings” (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 85). However the idea of Christ as an intercessor/mediator can be clearly apprehended from the perspective of the primal worldview. Nevertheless, Jesus does the work of the elder brother in a more superior way than the corporeal elder brother.

Jesus’ self sacrifice in the epistle is exceptionally understood as a human sacrifice needed to sufficiently deal with sin and to restore the damaged relationship with God. The primal worldview is aware that God’s relationship with human beings can only be restored through sacrifice. It is also common knowledge that human beings are not perfect enough to become the sacrificial lamb. Animal sacrifice was therefore a better substitute, but it was not sufficient to get rid of human sin. Nevertheless, the sacrificial victim categorically removed sin from the people and prevented death. Similarly, Christ freely and lovingly bears upon himself the sin of the world, died on our behalf defeating the power of death. His death bears the mark of liberation for all people since Jesus became a human being (Heb.2: 14ff) to offer a human sacrifice. Communities whose primal religion and worldview accepted human sacrifice would easily understand this teaching. However, since Christ offered himself conclusively, they will not need any other human sacrifice. Christ’s sacrifice demands no other human sacrifice. The eschatology based on Christ’s death abrogates any other killing of human beings for any religious reason.

Undoubtedly sacrifices are an integral aspect of worship in primal traditions. Rightly put they are “a means of ensuring harmonious relationship between the human on the one hand, and the realm of divine and the mystical on the other hand” (Bediako 1990: 35). Since they were regular it was therefore fitting to have a complete sacrifice that would not be performed regularly. Christ’s sacrifice was therefore necessary, for it encompassed the ultimate salvation of the whole human race including the ancestor. As it were, “salvation is the concern of both the living and the dead members of the society, for all affect each other and depend on each other” (Bujo 1992:24). Eventually the inadequacy of the animal sacrifice culminates in Christ, who “obtained eternal salvation for us.” Christ having sacrificed himself efficaciously, then there is no need of another sacrifice. The animal sacrifice was surely a preparation for this superior sacrifice. Indeed the animal sacrifice was a shadow of the real sacrifice. The inadequacy of the primal religious sacrifices turns out to be a positive illuminator of the epistle’s teaching concerning the superior nature of Christ’s self sacrifice.

In Chapter 4:14–5:10, 7:1–28 and in Chapters 8 and 9, we find the theme of Christ as our high priest as well as the sacrifice. The idea of priesthood in the Gîkûyû primal worldview is not lacking. The priest who also doubled as the medicine man (*mûndû mûgo*) acted as the mediator between human beings and God. However, the dialectical relationship of the priesthood of Jesus and the priesthood in the primal worldview is very clear. There is the continuity and the discontinuity of the same. The discontinuity endows Christ’s priesthood with uniqueness, given that he belongs to the order of Melchizedek, hence a priest *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* (for ever). In that case, the priesthood of Jesus is prior to the Levitical priesthood, including any other, which is a shadow of the real priesthood belonging to Christ. However, “the shadow-substance formulae...are each brought in their own way to serve the elucidation of the scheme as a whole” (Hughes 1979: 66). The primal orientation of priesthood is therefore the cornerstone on which to establish the understanding of the perfect and complete priesthood of Christ. On the other hand, the priesthood of Christ is complete and perfect since he has attained perfection himself. The epistle seems to be in agreement on the theme of perfection, well known and sought in the Gîkûyû primal worldview. Though not yet achievable, perfection was the ideal in the Gîkûyû primal

worldview. The so much needed perfection in the primal worldview illuminates the fact that perfection is only arrived at through the superior priestly work of Christ.

Hebrews 5: 3 and 9: 6 reveals that the Levitical priests had to offer sacrifices for their own sins and for the sins of the people. This is similar to the Gîkûyû primal worldview where the medicine man who was also the priest, had first to perform cleansing rites for himself⁶⁵ before he could proceed to perform the rites for his client. This is easily understandable by people with such primal attachment. The medicine men were as human as their clients were. The Levitical priests were as human as the other Jews. That is why they too had to purify themselves. This leads to a clear understanding of Jesus as superior high priest, for “he has no need like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself” (Heb.7: 27). Christ is therefore understandably a priest not of the human order and reality, but of the divine order and of the spiritual reality. His sacrifice is easily understood as the reality, while that of the human priests is the copy or the shadow of the reality. He is superior to the one “who stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifice, which can never take away sins.” He is indeed superior because, “When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.... For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” (Heb.10: 11–14).

The priesthood of Jesus is thus unique, because the priest is also the sacrifice. As the culmination of all other sacrifices performed in the primal world, this would be a sign of relief to the Gîkûyû people, who never wanted continuous sacrifices offered to spirits, though they could not help it⁶⁶. In that case, Christ’s once and for all sacrifice has achieved what the Gîkûyû person has been waiting for. Such an interpretation is not

⁶⁵ In reference to this, Gathigira observes, “*agacoka kwamba kwiragûrira we mwene, akainainia mwano wake akawira, ‘Mwano ta njira kana ndi ûhoro.’ Agaita mbûgû kiondo igûrû kîria kiragûragîrûo, agatara, na amenya ûhoro wake agacokia mbûgû mwano.*”-[He (the medicine man) then performs the rite on himself, shaking his ‘mwano’ (a ritual calabash), he tells it, “‘mwano’, inform me whether I have something.” He pours ‘mbûgû’ [ritual seeds from a thorny shrub] on top of the ritual basket, counts them, and when he knows about himself, he returns the seeds in the ‘mwano’ (Gathigira 1933: 60).

⁶⁶ A Gîkûyû proverb says, ‘*ngoma itûrikaga cia thînjîrûo* – Sacrifices make the spirits naughty. The implication of the proverb is that once a person offers sacrifice to spirits, they will continually harass the person so that he/she can offer more sacrifices. The spirits often just become demandingly naughty, hence a Gîkûyû person loathed sacrifices because once offered he/she shall never cease to offer them since spirits will continually demand them.

impermissible given that “by the sacrifice of himself he actually achieved what the Old Testament ritual ceremonies had only figuratively anticipated; that is, the actual cleansing of sin’s defilement...” (Stibbs 1970:16). In view of this, sacrifices in the primal religions proffer a “right understanding of the doctrine of sacrifice in the New Testament” (Bediako G 1997: 362), in which Christ made the purification of sins.

Nevertheless, the priestly and the sacrificial roles of Christ are unclear without faith. The primal apprehension of reality thus enables a concrete understanding of the priesthood of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. This faith does not require any historical or scientific analysis of the priesthood of Jesus. Should we seek a historical understanding of the priesthood of Christ, we would ultimately be at loss. Precisely, Jesus’ historical genealogy had nothing to do with priesthood. “For it is evident that our Lord was descendant from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests” (7: 14). Scientifically and ontologically, Jesus could not have been a priest given that he was of the order of Melchizedek, who was “without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning nor end of life...” (7: 3). In that case, we can only comprehend the priesthood of Jesus through the eyes of faith, and “only when one is already a believer” (Hughes 1979: 93). However, by arguing that the priesthood of Jesus is best comprehended through faith, does not dissociate faith from historical significance. The Christ event transpired at a particular time in history⁶⁷. Faith is thus not eulogised and vindicated as against history and science. There is a relationship between faith and history, which Hughes has clearly elaborated.

It is not...that faith looks to history in an effort to ‘prove’ or vindicate itself. For faith necessarily assumes a point of view from beyond the limits of legitimate...historical inquiry: confidence in Jesus’ priesthood is not established merely by reference to his birth of the tribe of Judah. Yet faith is nevertheless committed to inquiry into its historical origins precisely because the elimination of its historical content threatens, if not eliminates its own possibility. That is the relationship is one-directional; all the historical evidence in the world would still not vindicate faith, but the erosion of its historical

⁶⁷ Galatians 4:4–6 affirms the point we are making by conclusively affirming, “when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as Sons”. The phrase ‘when the time had fully come’ depicts a historical occurrence.

grounds spells the end of its own possibility. In belief, history is the necessary, but not sufficient, basis for Christian faith.

(Hughes 1979: 94).

To all intents and purposes, it must be decisively maintained that the relationship must move from faith to historical inquiry, not from historical inquiry to faith.

e. Perfection and Purification.

The perfect priestly work of Christ moves us to discuss the theme of perfection and purification in the epistle. It does not need much persuasion that the concept of perfection and purification is from the perspective of the primal worldview. The Greek words used in connection with perfection are unintelligible except from the perspective of the primal worldview. Jesus came to the world of human habitation, became human and participated in the human life (Heb.2: 17) and having been perfected (*τελειωθείς* – 5: 9), he became the author of salvation for human beings who believe in him. In that case, the followers of Christ are the ‘enlightened’ (6: 4) and the *τελείων*, i.e. fully grown and mature in faith (5: 14). They must therefore press on to perfection (*τελειότητα* – 6: 1) through taking strong food. Hughes in connection to these Greek words concerned with perfection asserts that they “are all reflections in which one recognises the myth of the primal man, in which the redeemer, as a leader to heaven and home... returns himself and thus becomes the redeemed redeemer” (1979: 32). It is precisely difficult to dissociate or disprove the primal attachment of the usage of the theme of perfection in the epistle.

The Gîkûyû primal worldview knew purification, whose ceremonies were the order of the day. As it were, the Gîkûyû people were very much afraid of defilement, which originated from sins, mistakes and taboos. They thus visited medicine men for purification rites⁶⁸. Where the medicine man managed to purify the defiled person, he was highly exalted⁶⁹. Certainly, “when he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the

⁶⁸ Kîama Gathigira observes that, “*ningî tondû Agîkûyû nimetigagîra mathahu mũno, nîkio maathiaga kuri andû ago nîguo merwo kîria kînginina thahu.*” [Since the Gîkûyû people feared defilement exceedingly, they went to medicine men to inquire what would purify defilement] (Gathigira 1933: 57).

⁶⁹ Once again, Gathigira informs us that, “*maündû macio maarika gwikwo, nake mũndû mũrûarû ahone, mũndû mũgo úcio akagathwo mũno*” – [After these things, and the sick (defiled) person is healed, the medicine man is highly praised [exalted]. (1933: 58).

majesty on high,” [Heb.1: 3], holds the idea of Christ’s exaltation after a successful purification. In this regard, Jesus can be understood as a healer. As Bujo observes, “another Christological model might be derived from the African healing tradition. Jesus might be conceived of as ‘Healer of Healers’” (Bujo 1992: 85). He is a successful medicine man who having purified those defiled by sin and those possessed by demons is highly exalted. Gikûyû cleansing rituals set a strong foundation for understanding Jesus Christ’s once and for all perfect purification.

The theme of perfection then must be received with the seriousness that it procures from the primal worldview. The readers are thus reminded to move towards perfection just as their God is perfect. However, this can only be possible through the unswerving faith in God and in his eternal existence. On the other hand, perfection demands that human beings desist from all social evils that lead to human suffering, consequently denying human beings the chance to realise the abundant life. Perfection thus demands a life that decries evil and anticipates serving God and human beings. Perfection must be holistic, not dichotomising theological and political spheres. Indeed to be a Christian is both a theological and a political choice and perfection must be maintained as Christians confess their faith in God through Jesus Christ amidst political suffering. In that case, perfection is a contextual concern requiring unwavering faith in God, even when suffering threatens. The pioneer of faith, who suffered will help those who are faithful and are suffering (2: 18). This is the faith, which will keep human beings seeking for perfection, even when all things are not yet under the control of human beings who ought to control them, and even when they struggle against sin and sinners (12:3 cf. 10:32–34). So faith must be confessed in a historical and political context, and this is the path to the desired perfection.

f. Human beings in the created order.

Hebrews. 2:5–18 clearly spell the place of human beings in relation to the non-human creation. The epistle takes us back to Psalms.8: 4–8, where we gather that the writer of the psalm was probably a shepherd, who lay outside during the night, gazing at the luminaries. As he scrutinised the celestial body, he was fascinated that God was its creator. There is no doubt that the writer of Ps. 8 conceded to the primal faith that God is the creator of all that is. While having a preference to the primal understanding of the feebleness of human

beings, he could not stop wondering who was man that God is so mindful of him, to have put everything under his dominion. The anonymous writer of the epistle picks up from this point to argue, “we do not yet see all things put under him, but we see Jesus...” (Heb.2: 8f). The writer therefore perceives human beings as disadvantaged without Jesus Christ, the one who restores the dominion originally intended for them over the non-human creation, which they however lost because their sinfulness. Having been made lower than the angels and having come from the realm beyond to become one of us (2:5–18); Jesus guarantees the dominion of human beings over God’s creation. He took the human nature and therefore his humanity is certain. His humanity is our humanity and as such, he can be perceived as our ancestor. Ancestors are part of the human race, and lived with us, and then went to live in the spiritual realm. Human beings are thus identified with Jesus, who took the human nature. Just as the Gîkûyû people identified with their ancestors, the believers have no alternative but to identify with Jesus Christ. However, Jesus is a superior ancestor, for unlike the ancestors who had no choice but to be our ancestors, Jesus had a choice, and so he chose to be one of us.

The Gîkûyû primal worldview considers the yet to be born as human beings, and members belonging to the human community. This seems to have been attested in Heb. 7: 8 by asserting, “one might even say that Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him”. This suggests that even before Levi was born, he was. A person with primal inclinations appreciates this without difficulties. Human beings are also depicted as more secure in the community than as an individual. They are called upon to esteem the collective responsibility for each other. They should consider stirring up one another, not to neglect meeting together and to encourage each other (Heb. 10:24f). This then would enable human beings to enter the sanctuary with faith. Indeed the collective responsibility bestowed on human beings is necessary for it would enable the maintenance of the faith. On the other hand, Heb. 6: 4–8 depict human beings as dependent on God and the creation. Human beings have continually received tremendous blessings from God, just as the farm receives rain from God. In that case, human beings are required to bear the fruits of faith. However, just as the field which after receiving so much rain fails to bear fruits is

burned, human beings who abscond their faith and de-link themselves from God's providence require the same fate. Realistically, human beings are dependent on God for salvation and providence. They should therefore not neglect the great salvation, which was first spoken by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard him (Cf. Heb. 2: 1–4).

Human beings thus receive their liberation from God. However, Heb.3: 1–16, which is reminiscent of God's great liberation act in Egypt and the failure of those who were liberated, has more than the fact human beings are liberated by God. Human beings are not just liberated to attain freedom, but to live in obedience to God. Liberation does not require the loss of faith in God, but the internalising of the same. In that case, liberation calls for inculturation. This leads to an inculturated faith, which is an assurance to a liberating faith. The epistle also reveals that the human life goes beyond the grave. Heb. 12: 1f. is a perfect illustration to this. The crowd of witnesses cannot be anything else apart from the departed heroes of faith in Chapter 11. They are our faithful ancestors, who always keep watch over the living human beings. They actually live within the reach of their progeny, and in walking in their footsteps; we may be able to finish the race looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Perceptibly,

What has given ones ancestors' reason for living and dying cannot simply be illpitted as absurd and senseless by one who finds oneself in human continuity with them. The living person will bring into play all the resources of hermeneutics, that act of demonstrating ones participation in the same moral, intellectual, and aesthetic community with those of the past in spite of distance and difference.

(Boulaga 1984: 4).

According to the primal worldview, every mortal human being shall die; hence nobody shall live forever, since death comes without notice⁷⁰. A time is therefore appointed when everybody shall die and nothing can stop it. Heb.9: 27, "And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgement" corresponds to primal imagination in relation to death. Though the idea of final judgement does not prevail in most African

⁷⁰ The Gikũyũ people say, *ona mũthikani nĩ athikagwo* (even the undertaker is also buried). They also say, *gĩkuũ gitiraragĩrio*, (You cannot make an appointment with death), to show that death comes at its own appointed time.

primal societies, there are some, which illuminate this biblical idea of final judgement. The Yoruba fear most, “the final judgement which awaits every person, first at the end of live on earth, involving the agony of dying, and then in the afterlife when the final verdict of Olodumare (God) will be known” (Adeyemo 1997: 64). After this judgement, an individual is allocated the right place. The good people go to heaven while the wicked suffer wretchedness in the heaven of potsherd. However, death and final judgement do not break the family link. Those who are dead are still around us. Those who are judged as the evil ones loom as the malevolent spirits. Those who are judged as the good ones are the benevolent ancestors, who guard the members of their community. Indeed they are the ‘so great a cloud of witnesses’ surrounding us (Heb.12: 1).

g. Communion of saints/Ancestors.

The appreciation of deceased people as the living-dead ancestors enriches and illuminates the biblical world especially Heb.12: 1f. The crowd of witnesses is definitely the ancestors. As observed, “in the complex African cosmology the living dead are the benevolent ancestral spirits who are the link between the living and the Supreme Being” (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 211). Certainly the primal worldview concerning the living dead (ancestors) offers a deeper and explicit meaning to the biblical idea of the crowd of witnesses. It reveals how the saints, the community of believers include the living and the living-dead. Surely the primal worldview illuminates the fact that, “the saints are special Christian ancestors and that all the deceased people participate in the communion of saints” (1996: 28). We find this valid in the sense that the African primal faith demanded a good relationship with the ancestors. As it were,

When the descendants remained faithful to their inheritance and thus made the experiences of the ancestors their own, they remained in living communion both with their ancestors and their own living kin, continually re-living the history of their people...Finally when the living conducted themselves according to the patterns established by the ancestors, they are strengthening the tribe or clan as whole and contributing to the well being of each individual member. The forebears protected the clan against the forces of disintegration by their careful observance of the law and customs. The living must do the same if their society is not to come to ruins.

(Bujo 1992: 22).

The Gîkûyû primal understanding of how the ancestors functioned enables us to make sense of the fact that Jesus is our ancestor. According to the primal worldview, the ancestors functioned in the invisible spiritual realm. When they are living in the visible world, they cannot be our ancestors. Their death fundamentally translates them into being ancestors. Jesus' ancestral function was only to be realised through his death, resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of God, where he intercedes for us. The manifestation of his ancestral function becomes clear with his death and resurrection. His death, resurrection and exaltation enables the conception of what he had come to do, to be high priest and the sacrifice of our salvation. Like the human beings that had to die in order to become ancestors, so was Jesus. Yet this can only become a mystery, if we seek modern technology to explain it. Thus the primal apprehension of reality enables the understanding of how Jesus functions as our ancestor. The fact that human beings are dependent on their ancestors for physical and spiritual well-being means that they are more and deeply dependent on Jesus Christ the Superior Ancestor. The living members therefore have the responsibility of protecting the community by maintaining an exemplary behaviour and character. In that case, since our ancestors are surrounding and watching us, it behoves us to run the race looking unto Jesus our superior proto-ancestor. "Looking unto" implies a relationship, and so our relationship with Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith must be comely and up-to-date. Just as the people inclined to primal religious faith seek to imitate their ancestors, Christians armed with such a faith will not find it difficult to imitate Jesus, our Proto-ancestor.

4:5 Conclusion.

The anonymous writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was inclined to the primal worldview. He was also in touch with the prevailing situations in which the readers found themselves. He thus reveals a dialectical relationship between the primal worldview and the situations the readers find themselves. The relationship has a mark of both continuity and discontinuity. The continuity is clear since the word that God spoke through the prophets is the same word he has spoken through the Son in the situation where the readers reside. The thoughts and illumination gathered in the primal worldview and their application and interpretation in the context in which the readers experience life forms the basis through

which reality is conceptualised. It is through this that they understand God's revelation and redemption. The activities of God are thus best received and understood in the present through the conceptual framework developed from the primal worldview.

However, the epistle has a point of discontinuity. The word spoken through the forefathers finds perfection in the word spoken through the Son. The activities of the Son are thus superior to those of the former prophets, angels, Moses and the Levitical priesthood. However, it is not necessary to go into raptures over this discontinuity and to idolise its magnitude. Without the primal perception of God (and indeed of the whole reality), the perception in the present would be fatally disfigured. The conceptual framework of faith which is required by the primal worldview and the Bible, and which the present time needs so much demands continuity. Indeed the themes of the epistle are clearly understood and interpreted from the framework of faith. Consequently, faith is the most vital element that enhances the readers to understand the divine self-disclosure that is evident in the Christ event. Nowhere else can we find such a faith apart from the primal worldview, where faith in God is unquestionable and where there is belief in a God who acts to deliver his people through his self-sacrifice. In that case, a hermeneutical method dealing with the epistle from the perspective of the primal worldview is efficacious in aiding the understanding of themes and concepts raised by the epistle. Precisely, "priests, atonement, sacrifice, approach, and so on belongs to one another in the one dispensation as in the other, though in the whole complex of ideas has been thought through and radicalised to quite a remarkable depth" (Hughes 1979: 103).

The old dispensation is not rendered insignificant by the epistle's insistence that they were 'partial and piecemeal' as well as the 'shadow' of the things to come. Indeed without the partial and the piecemeal and without the shadow, we cannot adequately conceive reality since it would be blurred. The components of the old dispensation are therefore not invalid. They are the springboards to the perfection of the new dispensation. The old dispensation contains the milk, which a baby has to feed on while being prepared for solid food. Neglecting primal worldview in the hermeneutical discourse may in fact end up being a theological/hermeneutical suicide. It is like feeding a newborn baby with solid food knowing very well that his/her intestine cannot contend with solid food. The teaching

of God's word must therefore begin with the concepts engraved in the primal worldview, through which human beings conceptualise reality as it unfolds in their contemporary life situations. Indeed, the primal apprehension of reality enhances a grasp and interpretation of the epistle as we have received it. This is because the epistle understands the Gospel of Christ in terms perceptible to the primal apprehension of reality. There is no need in that case to demythologise the epistle so as to grasp its meaning. Themes from the epistles just discussed above shed light to this point. The epistle conceives reality from the perspective of the primal worldview and it ought to be interpreted from the same perspective. Any previous hermeneutical method that may be used to interpret the epistle then must be infused with spirituality and a spiritual view of life that the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview embodies. That means that there ought to be a relationship of the previous hermeneutical method and the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. To this now we turn.

Chapter 5 The Hermeneutical Method Generated by the Primal Worldview Vis-à-vis Other Existing Hermeneutical Methods.

5:1 Introduction.

The majority of African biblical scholars contend that the Bible is central to the lives of African Christians. For that reason, these scholars are in agreement that its impact is beyond doubt for it is the pillar and supreme authority of the Africans Christian life and practices.⁷¹ However, inasmuch as this may be or may be not the case, “a sound grasp of the Bible and its contents by African Christians is essential” (Obeng 1997: 8). Certainly, the Bible ought to be unequivocally understood because it “can be a force of liberation or a force of oppression” (Mesters 1993: 7), and since “it is in principle possible to interpret a given text in different ways with the method of interpretation applied” (Voster 1983: 102). The understanding, interpretation and translation of the Bible are crucial contemporary theological issues; and the key to this is hermeneutics. Thus without a relevant hermeneutical method to enable African Christians to cope with reality as it unfolds within their life situations, the Bible subsequently may have less impact and even fail to be the pillar and supreme authority of African Christianity. Nevertheless, several hermeneutical methods exist in the African Christianity hermeneutical discourse. Until recently, the most dominant hermeneutical method has been the historical-critical method, which emerged from the European enlightenment historical and cultural epoch. However “the interpretation of any text, biblical or otherwise is located in a historical context” (Kiogora 1998: 337) and so the historical-critical method may not appropriately deal with issues arising from different historical contexts. Naturally, “there needs to be a clear correlation between text and context (past and present)” and this “presents us with an alternative hermeneutics” (: 337). The alternative hermeneutics have been the hermeneutics of liberation, which operates on the political-social-economical level, and the hermeneutics of inculturation, which operates on the anthropological-religio-cultural level.

⁷¹ Sibeko & Haddad in *Semeia*, 78, 1997: 85 notes, “the Bible has played and will continue to play a significant role in the life of Christians in South Africa”. Masenya, In *Semeia*, 78, 1997: 55 makes a similar point. Nthamburi and Waruta (Kenyans) notes, “... Christian communities reflect and relate the message of the Bible to their life situations” (In Kinoti and Waliggo: 1997: 51). Obeng (Ghanaian) argues, “the Bible is the scriptural pillar of Christianity ... it is of supreme authority” (1997: 8).

Having interpreted the epistle to the Hebrews using the method generated by the primal worldview, the study now seeks to examine the relationship of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview with the previous hermeneutical methods. This study holds that the former hermeneutical methods have tools, which a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can use, however, not as masters but as servants. In that case, this study calls for working relationship, where the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview works with all the previous hermeneutical methods. This is just like the way the hermeneutics of liberation and of inculturation incorporates historical-critical resources. On the other hand, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can contribute to the previous methods by recovering the spirituality and the spiritual view of life, which the previous hermeneutical methods have apparently jettisoned in favour of ideologies. The hermeneutical method from the primal worldview perspective would thus enable the former hermeneutical methods to avoid the pitfall of co-opting the Bible into an agenda designed to meet the purpose of winning an ideological warfare. The method will thus expound Scriptures as the wisdom of life, having relevance to the spiritual life of human beings. This is demonstrated by discussing the merits and demerits of each hermeneutical method, showing how the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can borrow resources from them, hence imparting its influence on them.

5:2 *Expounding the relationship.*

Expounding the relationship is necessary because “there is no such simple and innocent approach to anything in this world...(be it a written text, an ontological statement, or an entire tradition). And most of all, no hermeneutical model can claim to be innocent either” (Jeanrond 1994: 181). Certainly, the previous hermeneutical methods are useful, but none of them can claim to have engaged the full measure of African reality and indeed the biblical reality. For this reason, tools from the previous methods can be used by a single hermeneutical method, which is agreeable to the way people conceptualise reality. Besides, a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview must be aware of other hermeneutical methods, and to willingly use tools derived from them to widen its horizons. This will enable it to be fully engaged “in a world-wide conversation on all aspects of the human search for meaning of the universe” (1994: 182). This method would thus provide “an

appropriate starting point for any journey towards a more adequate understanding of God, the human self and the mystery of our being in this world” (: 182). We now turn to analyse the historical-critical method, the longest existing hermeneutical method in African Christianity.

a. The historical-critical method.

The historical-critical method is a child of the enlightenment, a cultural epoch in Europe, which advocated the supremacy of reason over faith. There is evidence, which locates the foundation of the historical-critical method in Western philosophy⁷². The works of several philosophers exposes this. Nevertheless, Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza is considered as the forerunner of the historical-critical method. Among the four basic elements of his exegetical method was the claim that only the educated elite could judge what is reasonable and not the masses. The exposition of the Bible was in that case entirely left to the realms of the intellectuals. Spinoza conjectured that they are the only ones who could absorb the knowledge of the Bible, which had to be engendered by the scientific study. The masses cannot undertake such a task given that they are continually driven by their passion. Harrisville & Sundberg thus contends, “in retrospect, Spinoza appears to be the trailblazer of a revolutionary position. In his work the Bible has become the object of historical science. This science is unalterably opposed to the position that the foundation of the biblical study is the revealed religion. The only proper foundation of religion is human reason” (Harrisville & Sundberg 1995: 45). The historical-critical method thus sought to make the Bible relevant to an age where reason had superseded faith. This approach to the Bible was designed “to free society from destructive forces of religious passion” (1995: 45). The historical-critical method thus robbed the Bible from the ordinary readers. Hermeneutics became “the exclusive province of the professorate over the course of the next two centuries” (: 48). However, this was unfortunate because, “the perspicuity of Scripture, that is, the doctrine that the ordinary believer has the ability to discern the Bible’s meaning” (: 48), guarantees the future of hermeneutics⁷³. Secondly, the historical-critical method assumed that it could “go beyond the reach of cultural presuppositions and philosophical commitments to establish the historical meaning of biblical text once and for all” (: 263). Nevertheless, scholars have

⁷² Cf. Harrisville and Sundberg 1995 detailed analysis of several treatises of different philosophers, which may have in one way or the other formed a foundation of the historical-critical method.

⁷³ The future of hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview is discussed in Chapter 6.

questioned this assumption given that, “no method of interpretation can transcend its cultural milieu” (: 263). It is thus unfortunate that the historical-critical method defied the fact that cultural settings influence the hermeneutical discourse and held its pronouncements as the final judgement.

The historical-critical method can only render the Bible an incompetent guide for today. It assumes that “the contents of the Bible are nothing more than a human theological utterance of, in the best case, pious Jews and inspired Christians” (Spange 1998: 200). It thus does not furnish contemporary religious guidance, for it does not allow any conviction in the authority of the Bible. Nevertheless, the historical-critical method is not wholly illegitimate and inauthentic. Harrisville & Sundberg contend that the “historical-critical study of the Bible is a necessary component of responsible theology” (1995: 1). Marshall also argues that the historical-critical method ought to be used,

In order to elucidate the historical statements made in the New Testament. There are problems in the New Testament that cannot be solved apart from the historical study, and it does no good to ignore them and try to move straight to a spiritual or devotional exposition of a passage...The Bible needs interpretation, and historical criticism is part of that process. This is not of course to say that the Bible is hopelessly obscure until the scholars have done their work on it; its broad meaning is clear enough, but the details of interpretation need scholarly skills.

(Marshall 1979: 131f)

Obeng on the other hand contends that the use of the historical-critical method in Africa is of utmost importance, if the Bible is to be rightly interpreted and understood. He asserts that “Scripture can be entrenched firmly in African Christianity...through the use of critical methods to understand the Bible and thus aid (i) interpretation within the African context and (ii) the translation of the Scripture into the mother tongues so that most Africans can have access to and know the contents of the Bible” (Obeng 1997: 8). The historical-critical method is therefore necessary given that it enables the readers of the Bible “to appreciate the ways in which the biblical writers communicated to their original audiences and still communicate to us today” (1997: 8). Besides, the Bible is an ancient document and there is need to understand the cultural milieu of the biblical world, so that its interpretation may suit the African religio-cultural and socio-economical/political context. Nevertheless, Obeng observes that the use of the historical-critical method has not so much permeated biblical

scholarship in Africa, especially with the missionary Christianity, which he refers to as the 'second coming' of Christianity in Africa. He subsequently declares, "the lack of critical study of the Bible which has characterised the 'second coming' of Christianity to Africa, is hampering a clear interpretation of the Bible..." (: 23). Obeng's allegations may be an exaggeration given that the historical-critical method in the African academy is well-known, having been the only method introduced by the missionaries. Yet while Obeng's assertions maybe true among ordinary readers of the Bible, nevertheless, the historical-critical method has taken prominence among trained readers of the Bible for several decades. However, we must ponder whether the historical-critical method is the only method through which we can arrive at a sound grasp of Scriptures. Is it universally acceptable that the historical-critical method "could and should be the means for establishing meanings" (Hughes 1979: 120) of the biblical text?

The historical-critical method lays emphasis on the context and the society that produced the text and what would have been the original meaning of the author. However, Gerald West makes a convincing argument that other contexts including the context of production complete the hermeneutical process. He presents the three contexts as sufficient modes, capable of completing the hermeneutical process, which he explicates with epithets, 'behind the text' 'in the text', and 'in front of the text' (West 1991:131–155; 1993:27–50). West therefore argues elsewhere,

Biblical studies like literary studies have undergone a number of shifts in emphasis over the last centuries. The early and still dominant emphasis is on the origin of the texts, on the world that produced the text. More recently, attention has shifted to the text itself as a locus of meaning. And even more recently, the reader has become the focus of interpretative interest. A reader who is no longer perceived as a passive receiver of authorial (sic) text, but now who is recognised as an active creator of meaning

(West 1995: 446).

Elsewhere, West observes that, the historical critical method does "not complete the whole hermeneutical process" and "that while the questions raised by the historical critical methods are admittedly necessary, they are not the questions which best allow the text to speak to people today" (1991: 61). Justin Ukpong makes a similar observation. He argues that the context of production, the text itself and the interpreter's context are integral to hermeneutics (Ukpong 1995: 5–13). Cognate to West, Ukpong notes that, "the general

experience is that the traditional mode of official reading of the Bible is not capable of responding adequately to the questions that African Christians are asking about their life in Christ and their experiences with the Bible” (1995: 3f).

The historical critical method has been fairly accused of distancing the ordinary reader from the Bible. Ukpong argues, “one outcome of this has been a visible gap between the academic reading of the Bible and the needs of the ordinary African Christians” (1995: 4). Similarly, Dube argues that the historical setting in the academic interpretation divorces people’s experiences and questions from the Bible. “By privileging the ancient history in biblical interpretation, the biblical text is perfectly shielded from its various historical reader-actors” (Dube 1997:13). In that case, the historical-critical method is deleterious to popular hermeneutics. The trained elite have monopolised the hermeneutical discourse at the expense of the ordinary readers. This has consequently distanced the ordinary readers and the trained readers in the hermeneutical discourse. An acute separation between critical biblical scholarship and the life of the church is thus evident. A relevant hermeneutical method must therefore abrogate this unnecessary separation, such that scholarship and the life of the church will be one and the same. The scholar must therefore be a preacher of the word he studies, using a language understandable to him and the ordinary readers. To all intents and purposes, the trained scholar/reader of the Bible must therefore have one foot in the academy while the other foot is in the community of the ordinary readers. Incontestably, there is therefore a challenging need for a hermeneutical method that can minimise the gap between the ordinary readers and the trained readers, hence giving the Bible back to the ordinary readers.

Considering the foregoing discussion, the historical-critical tools are no longer the ultimate solution to hermeneutics. However, the hermeneutical method from the perspective of the primal worldview can use the historical-critical method to enable the interpretation and the application of the text in a particular contemporary context. Biblical interpreters will “find themselves turning...to the present cultural milieu to find a truth to speak” (Harrisville & Sundberg 1995: 11). Ukpong (1996) and Mosala (1989) explicitly demonstrate this in their studies favouring the hermeneutics of inculturation and of liberation respectively. The way in which they use the historical critical tools in these

reader response hermeneutics sounds didactic even to a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. Ukpong's inculturation reading of the shrewd manager in Lk.16: 1–13 and Mosala's materialistic reading of the book of Micah and Luke 1–2 have used the historical-critical tools to understand the situation in the text; the struggle against an oppressive latifundium. This enables them to take the experiences of the ordinary farmers in their context (Nigeria and South Africa) as profound hermeneutical key. The two scholars have used "an interpretative procedure which links the situation of the struggle in the text with their own situation of struggle" (West 1991: 74). However, the struggles behind the text can only be uncovered with the historical-critical tools, which both scholars' uses appropriately.

Precisely, the historical-critical method has valid contributions to the hermeneutical discourse. Nevertheless, it has its limits in so far as a holistic meaning of the biblical text is concerned. The meaning of a text is not always apprehended through the knowledge of the context that produced the text, and through the understanding of the intentions of the original author. The historical-contextual setting where the interpretation is taking place is also very important in appreciating the meaning of a text. Consequently, it is important to make a connection between the text and the prevailing situation if the text is to be understood and applied in the same context. A hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can facilitate such a connection, since it enables human beings to conceive reality as it comes into view. It scarcely needs elaboration that human beings acquire tools for conceptualising reality from the primal worldview, which sanction their perception of the events unfolding in their local settings. Alternatively, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview while using the historical-critical tools, will also infuse spirituality and the spiritual view of life, which the historical-critical method diminishes. The historical-critical tools will thus be used in accordance to Ukpong's observation.

Because the Bible is an ancient document, attention to the historical context of the text being interpreted is demanded of the exegete. This requires the use of the historical critical tools. However, because it is the theological meaning of the text that is sought and not its historical context, historical critical tools are used as servants not as masters.

(Ukpong 1995: 9f).

In that case, the historical-critical method and tools will not be the only alternative to determine the meaning of the biblical text. Rightly observed, “to permit the critical method to operate inside the boundary lines of determination of meaning of biblical text is already to have silenced the text in their intention” (Hughes 1979: 121). Indeed the use of the historical-critical method as the only means to arrive at the meaning of a text is rather a set back, which arouse a systematised scepticism that cannot prepare for faith, an essential component for a hermeneutical and/or theological treatise. Therefore, the historical-critical method must have its own limitation. However, this is not to make it appear an inferior method, but rather to acknowledge that it is not the only method, which can highlight the meaning of a text. As a general rule,

The subject matter of the text is bigger than the method...and because the meaning of a text is not static but keeps finding new points of meaningfulness in various new contexts, in the end we have to say that the critical-historical method cannot do more than draw the boundaries; all the meanings which are not excluded are possible or potential ones.

(Hughes 1979: 123).

The historical-critical method is therefore a liability to a hermeneutics that leaves room for faith. Since it rose from a situation that elevated the supremacy of reason, it is not appropriate for faith-interpretation. As observed,

Historical criticism is able to accomplish many things, but it cannot create the tradition which gives it life. If it is to retain its status as an academic enterprises, biblical criticism must, in some way, serve the religious community...The problem facing the Enlightenment historical criticism...is the inability to explain effectively the religious significance of its work...Historical criticism success at exposing the Bible as a document of the past is indisputable. But what, finally, is the point of it? If it does not find a way to relate itself to the religious community it will become not simply ‘ancillary’ but ‘parasitic’

(Harrisville & Sundberg 1995: 269).

However, the method is not all lost and has value for faith interpretation. This is because “faith itself requires the kind of critical controls which the historical method provides” (Hughes 1979: 123). A hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview, and which relies on faith must have some control. Without such control, such a hermeneutical method can be a self-contained, self-sufficient and self-propagating ideology. Therefore, “faith as faith is committed to a knowledge of scholarly industry. Not to be so committed is already to have passed from faith to ideology” (: 124). Faith in that case needs criticism,

and the historical-critical method provides tools for this. However, the order must begin from faith to criticism, not criticism to faith as it happens with the historical-critical method. The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview must reverse the order and let faith be faith-seeking understanding. Hermeneutics will thus be more than the purveyor of meanings and information derived from the past. However, hermeneutics must constantly be in touch with the past through the use of tools derived from the historical-critical method. Besides, a text must be understood from within its own situation, otherwise hermeneutics will become a thing of antiquity.

The historical-critical method, though useful is not ultimate and absolute. To make it ultimate and absolute is to reduce the Bible as a “purely human element and then elevate one or another aspect of human thought as absolute truth” (Harrisville & Sundberg 1995: 13). Certainly, this is what the historical-critical method has done to hermeneutics. In addition, “the nature and practice of historical criticism has been a serious and recurring problem in theology” (: 13). A relevant hermeneutics must therefore elevate the absolute truth “that permeates every page of the Bible: the reality of God” (: 13). It must also include how God relates to human beings and the non-human creation, and the vice versa. The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview therefore conveys possible means through which the historical-critical method is constructively challenged. This is not unusual for “the historical approach to the Bible is being challenged by alternative approaches from the third world (*for it*) does not meet the actual need of the church today, (*and it also*) fails to apply the biblical message to the relevance of the Christian faith to a Christian’s daily life” (Spange 1998:197). More often than not, hermeneutics requires more than the historical-critical approach can contribute. Indeed the African primal worldview and its kaleidoscopic and dynamic culture should determine our priorities in any attempt to re-read the Bible within the African context, but not neglecting the historical-critical method where necessary. It is therefore necessary for hermeneutics to use tools from the primal worldview and the historical-critical tools to unearth the “intellectual milieu of the biblical world in order to interpret (sic) that to suit the African context” (Obeng 1997: 16).

Consequently, the defence of the historical critical method is necessary only in as far as it

deals with the historical aspects of a passage. Besides, hermeneutics is not entirely interested only in the historical meaning. The historical aspect only helps to advance the understanding of a text in the contemporary situation. In that case, the historical-critical method is indispensable in as far as it “gives us necessary background information in order to gain proper insight into textual meaning” (Spange 1998: 202). Nevertheless it has a weak spot, which Spange rightly divulge.

Although historical study is necessary to find the textual meaning of a text, it has its limitation, because...such a method can by its very nature never consider the Bible as God’s special revelation, and therefore this method can *sui generis* never lead to valid normative conclusions about the significance of the Bible today...This method increases the gap between the past and the present by limiting the meaning and significance of the text to the past.

(1998: 203).

The flaws of the historical-critical method consequently led to the upsurge of the reader response hermeneutics, like the hermeneutics of liberation and inculturation, to which we now turn.

b. *The hermeneutics of liberation.*

The hermeneutics of liberation is one of the new alternative methods of interpreting the Bible. Its mainstay resides on the issues of oppression and domination. Oppression may be in terms of gender, race or class. It can also be in terms of ideological presuppositions, in terms of socio-political/economical and/or religio-cultural and theological manifestations. Liberation hermeneutics thus offers a critical analysis on “the cultural forms of the dominant class on the oppressed” (Mosala 1989: 1f). It is consequently a process of interpreting the Bible in the category of struggle. Operations sanctioned by oppression are an integral aspect for the hermeneutics of liberation. “The experiences of poverty and oppression is for the liberation exegete as important as the text of the Scripture itself” (Rowland & Corner 1990: 40). It is hence a process that endeavours to coalesce the biblical text with the experiences of the poor and the marginalised. It is an indispensable process that aspires to redesign situations that upset the poor and the marginalised. It censures any situation or milieu that endeavours to degrade and dehumanise human beings through injustices, violence, oppression, and racism and/or gender bias. It is an attempt to interpret the Bible from concrete social, political and economical contextual situations.

While it enables the readers to modify situations that distress them, it is potentially capable of having different manifestations depending on the context.

The hermeneutics of liberation is central to biblical theology and enables a clear interpretation and mastery of God's salvation history. It is a process of deepening the Christian faith in God, "who did something for the historical liberation of a people" (Craotto 1981: 27). God's liberating preference is limitless and progresses in all human history. In view of this, the hermeneutics of liberation does not stop at the attained liberty. It is not surprising to find the heretofore-oppressed becoming oppressors once they attain liberty. It thus obligates for ability towards an appraisal and an analysis of the context in the face of the procured emancipation. By virtue of this, the concern of a saviour God, who acts in history to liberate his people, is upheld. Precisely, the hermeneutics of liberation is an acclaimed open-ended biblical innovation, not cramped to secured liberty. It is "at the centre of the biblical Kerygma" (1981: 27).

However, even when the liberation exegetes differ from their methodological point of departure, they all agree on the contingencies of the poor and the marginalised as a central pillar to the methodological framework of the hermeneutics of liberation. They merge at giving prominence to the situation of the poor and the oppressed and at the same time criticising the oppressive systems. Boesak whom Mosala criticises adopts the experiences of the poor and the marginalised as a methodological grid (Cf. Boesak 1976: 10). Both may not agree as to whether the Bible is the word of God or not. But they agree on the experiences of the poor and the marginalised as informative to the methodology adopted by the hermeneutics of liberation. The contribution of both scholars perfectly fit in Ukpong's observation that the hermeneutics of liberation "is identified with the approach that studies the Bible in relation to economic and social-political context with the issue of oppression as the hermeneutical key" (Ukpong 1999: 1).

Biblically, the methodology of the hermeneutics of liberation flows from Jesus Christ's kingdom manifesto found in Lk.4: 18f. In this text, Jesus Christ is the anointed messiah, who sets the captives free and liberates the oppressed. The exodus motif also informs its methodology. Human dignity that oppression and captivity reduces to naught must be

restored. Lk.4: 18f and the Exodus story act as a catalyst of the compelling exigency for the restoration of the dignity lost through oppression and captivity. However, when all things are considered, the words of Gerald West are indeed a plausible summary of its methodology.

In the methodology of liberation hermeneutics experiences of oppression and the struggle for survival, liberation and life are fundamental; furthermore, an option for the poor is more than an ethical choice, solidarity with the poor and the marginalised has consequences for the perception of social reality. Liberation hermeneutic begins with the reality, experiences, needs interest concepts and resources of the poor and the marginalised.

(West 1998(a): 28)

Moreover, Jesus came to set the captive free and to proclaim liberty to the oppressed. God through Moses could tell the oppressive Pharaoh, "Let my people go..." (Ex.5: 1). Therewith it behoves the hermeneutics of liberation to adopt a methodology that is committed to demolishing oppression and the marginalisation of the less privileged.

Is the liberation motif indispensable in the hermeneutical discourse? Does it have any effect in the lives of people or is it just an academic tussle in the minds of the elite? These questions are fundamental in that they provoke a critique of the significance of the liberation motif. It is true that this motif began with elitist Christian scholars. However, they had felt the pains of oppression and would have wished to give an account of what God was doing in the oppressive situations. The Bible had to speak to those who were suffering under oppression. The fact that hermeneutics played a major role to bring down the oppressive apartheid regime in South Africa indicates that we cannot underestimate its significance. In that case, so long as there is oppression and the oppressors justify their actions as biblically sanctioned, liberation remains a significant motif in the hermeneutical discourse. If oppression is not socio-political/economical, then it can be religio-cultural and/or theological. When we read from a newspaper that coffee farmers in Kenya "were underpaid by 56.6million in 1995/96 and 1996/97...Farmers lost 231.4 million between 1992 and 1999 due to inefficiency in milling...Some of the proceeds for last year from unmarked coffee sales amounting to Shs. 49 million have not been accounted for by the board..." (*Sunday Nation* 21st Nov.1999: 1f) we find oppression of the poor farmers escalating. When the same newspaper reveals that there is famine in Northern Kenya and

“in the midst of this abject misery, there are reports of widespread theft of relief food by some administration officials and head teachers. The food is then sold in shops in Lodwar or transported back to Kitale according to the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission” (Sunday 21st Nov. 1999:1), then nobody can deny the significance of the liberation motif. The reading and interpretation of the Bible must be based on the categories of the struggle of the hungry. They should have access to the food they desperately need. Those who are sitting on them and misappropriating their coffee money should pay. They should also stop selling the relief food meant to alleviate their sufferings. We also find oppression of human dignity and identity when the trained readers of the Bible deliberately use the Bible to undermine the aspirations of the poor ordinary readers. We also find oppression when religious readers may move the masses to commit mass suicide and even murder or to move the poor ordinary leaders to dispose of their property using eschatological rhetoric that Jesus is coming at a given date.

The motif is also significant for it seeks to destroy ideologies that find their way into the interpretation of the Bible. It is very easy for ideologies to saturate the hermeneutical discourse. This is because they are socially determined, seeking to justify external established interests of a dominant culture or group. The motif thus “includes a critique of ideology which will expose it as an instrument of social oppression or as a myth which is established by social factors” (Thiselton 1992: 385). The motif is also significant in its irresistible and inexorable onslaught against hermeneutical frameworks, which are adjusted to, or presupposed as dominant traditions. These may include paternalistic, androcentric, ethnocentric, and patriarchal frameworks of the previously dominant Western hermeneutical grid. They can also be bourgeois capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, or any other -ism wrongly advocated to be compatible to biblical prescription, while they are repugnant to the welfare of human beings that leads to the realisation of the abundant life. It is also significant in its attempts to uncover biblical texts, which serves the interest of oppression, domination, and manipulation. It is significant in its endeavour to guarantee the restoration of human dignity, which oppression threatens with extinction. In any case, it will remain significant so long as it “reflects the concerns of its exponent to stress both its theoretical hermeneutical integrity

and the grassroots nature of its commitment to practical action” (1992: 411). At any rate, the significance of the liberation motif should be in the academy where the trained readers are. Yet this significance should be incessantly superlative in the grassroots where the poor and the marginalised readers are.

The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview is designed to be a hermeneutics that enhances life. Then it must be rightly understood as the hermeneutics of life, for it desires human beings have life in abundance. The tools that the hermeneutics of liberation use are thus significant and cannot be avoided. Given that the primal worldview was subjugated through hermeneutics, then the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview must strategically become a hermeneutics of suspicion. The hermeneutics of liberation has used suspicion as tool, not only to validate what the text means but also to reveal what the text may be concealing. It must therefore encourage a subversive reading of the Bible, to expose power relationship that might underlie the text. Surely, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will enable a discovery of texts, which may be used to tame ordinary readers.

c. The hermeneutics of inculturation.

The hermeneutics of inculturation is also another new alternative method of interpreting the Bible in African Christianity. It is “generally identified with the approach that studies the Bible in relation to the indigenous religio-cultural context of Africa, for the purpose of communicating the biblical message in terms of indigenous idioms” (Ukpong 1999: 10). It is thus an ongoing dialogue between the Christian faith, the biblical text and the culture. Elsewhere, Ukpong argues, “an inculturation biblical hermeneutics is an approach that consciously and explicitly seeks to interpret the biblical text from socio-cultural perspective of different people. This includes both their secular and religious culture as well as their social and historical experiences” (Ukpong 1996: 190). The implication underneath is that the hermeneutics of inculturation addresses the experiences and expressions of the people in their socio-religio-cultural context. The light shed by the text mirrors whether they are subservient and pertinent to the survival and existence of human beings. The text is also reflected by the experiences and expressions warranted by the context to consider whether it enhances a holistic view of life.

The hermeneutics of inculturation recognises the reception of the biblical message as integral to peoples' culture, and the perception of culture as integral to biblical interpretation. It is consequently a process that accommodates the biblical message into the culture and the vice-versa. It is thus a rewarding process given that "now culture is no longer seen as hostile to the gospel but as a context in which the gospel offers its challenge" (Keteyi 1998: 37). Arguably, the hermeneutics of inculturation is a process that challenges culture, aiming to transform it. Domineering preferences sanctioned by culture are censured⁷⁴. In that case, it not only interprets the Bible so that many may understand and believe in Jesus Christ. It is also a process that interprets the Bible in order that those who are already in the faith may be maintained. This is to appreciate that culture is dynamic, offering new and manifold challenges that need an alternative methodology for answering new questions arising from a dynamic and kaleidoscopic cultural context. It is thus a relevant method of interpreting the Scriptures, even where Christian faith commands a wide following. It is an advance that challenges Christians to live up to the basic truths concerning human beings in refreshingly creative biblical and authentic cultural approach. In that case, the hermeneutics of inculturation is a process that pursues and strives to contextualise the biblical text. It is a progression concerned with the way people perceives God and fellow human beings. It is concerned with contextual difficulties, sufferings and hardships, which have penetrated a given context, though repudiated by their culture. Since it is grounded on the religio-cultural context, it integrates all aspects surrounding human beings and their way of life into a harmonious unity. The implication here is that if one aspect of human life is chaotic, then the whole person will be affected. In that case, it cannot afford to jettison socio-political/economical and/or religio-cultural and theological issues, which affects human life positively and/or negatively.

As the situation in Kenya cited above, where coffee farmers have had their money

⁷⁴ It is common knowledge that patristic preferences had excessively saturated the society and the church for a long time. However, Okure has vividly demonstrated how domineering preferences sanctioned by culture have been censured through the hermeneutics of inculturation. She reveals how male students, whose orientation is inculturation and contextualisation, "have had to offer a genuine critique of dominating practices against women found in Scripture, the church and culture" (Okure 1993: 79).

misappropriated, and where famine relief food was sold at the expense of the hunger stricken people of Northern Rift Valley in Kenya, the hermeneutics of inculturation is convenient to remedy the situation. It would question the validity of the Christian convictions of Kenyans. It would revisit the cultural trait of hospitality, which is now and then propagated under the auspices of the Nyayo philosophy⁷⁵ of peace, love and unity, and of being concerned with other people's welfare. It would seek to establish what has gone wrong with the culture, which accepts the idea of caring for the less fortunate in the society. It would seek to challenge Christians, who are the majority of the Kenyan population to revisit their Christian conviction that calls for people to be socially concerned, as does their culture. In view of this, the hermeneutics of inculturation is "an attempt to respond to a yearning for a new approach to reading the Bible" (Ukpong 1995: 4). A new approach that challenges the irregularities in a cultural context and encourages cultural manifestations not hostile to human life, those which enable people to enjoy the newness of life in Christ to its fullness. .

The methodological framework of the hermeneutics of inculturation is solidly grounded on the broader inculturation theology, previously referred to as African theology. Its methodological framework incorporates indigenising and contextualising the biblical text in a religio-cultural context in which the reader resides, enabling biblical interpretation that is holistic. On the other hand, its methodological framework entails a course to champion the identity of people. The Bible thus becomes a collective memory giving people an identity. It is interpreted and understood as affirming human identity that proceeds from the only true God. The issue of identity thus becomes a principle that guides the methodological framework of the hermeneutics of inculturation. In view of this, it affirms the Bible story as a narrative of people whose identity was founded on their identification with the creator God, who was before everything else. The implication that follow outlines that, since God created the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in it, and created human beings, then all that is in the universe is linked to him, and in dependency to him. In this regard, the hermeneutics of inculturation does not dichotomise

⁷⁵ Nyayo means footsteps. President Moi coined the Nyayo Philosophy soon after he took over as the president of Kenya promising to follow the footsteps of his predecessor, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and of his government.

matter and spirit, profane and sacred, secular and religious, socio-economical-political and theological. The created order is a unity inhabited by the living and the living-dead and the yet to be born, who form the human community. The malevolent spirits, who disrupt the cosmic order and benevolent spirits, who restore the cosmic order, also inhabit the cosmos. The inter-relationship of God, human beings and the rest of the creation are patently pronounced. In that case, the enlightenment notion of *Deus Absconditus* has no place in the methodological framework of the hermeneutics of inculturation. “The entire universe is seen as participating in the one life of God, and there is supposed to exist a network of relationship between God, human beings and the cosmos with the human being at the centre such that actions of the human beings affect not only their relationship with one another but also with God and nature” (Ukpong 1995: 9)

The African idea of the community is an essential paradigm for its methodological framework. The communal sense is not only extended to the human race, but also to inanimate objects. The relationship is between the human being and fellow human beings, and of the human beings with nature. However, this does not mean that individual concerns are neglected. They are primarily dealt with as structures of relationship within the community. Yet this only comes to pass when the hermeneutics of inculturation reflect on the use of local categories, which aggregate to concepts, symbols, rituals, and languages. The local categories are exceedingly fundamental to biblical hermeneutics and this has been made manifest by the history of the expansion of Christianity. They make hermeneutics intrinsically linked to that “dimension of culture that sustains human dignity and development” (Keteyi 1998: 37). It is of necessity therefore, in its method and principle, to act upon practices, which impede human development and dignity, projecting at getting rid of them. It is thus critical to cultural aspects that have demonic tendencies of oppression and marginalisation. On the other hand, cultural properties that are servile and subservient to human development and dignity are sustained. As a methodological principle, it accordingly challenges unbecoming cultural traits and retains those that are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil.4: 8)⁷⁶. This

⁷⁶ This text is supposedly a Stoic quotation in which Paul is urging the Philippians Christians to maintain all the good qualities of the culture they were living in. This quotation implies that all that which is enshrined in a people’s culture and is compatible with biblical teachings should be preserved in Christianity.

is a significant methodological approach because “when Jesus appeared, he did not only become a Jew who uncritically endorsed the culture of his people, but challenged it and sought to purify it” (Keteyi 1998: 39).

The religio-historical/cultural context is a significant pillar for its methodological framework. The Bible is understood as having interacted and intersected with various cultural contexts, including the context of reception. An evaluative analysis of the context of production, the context of the literary genre and the context of reception are methodologically significant. This advances the apprehension of how the text was relevant to the cultural context that produced it, and its relevance to the cultural context in which it is being received. The text itself is scrutinised to verify whether it has received some interpretative modification in its historical hermeneutical process⁷⁷. This is to appreciate that hermeneutics has always been articulated in cultural grids, “passing from culture to culture and from history to history” (Shorter 1988: 12).

Another very significant principle of its methodological framework is the position of the Bible. The Bible is considered as “a sacred classic, that is a book of devotion, the word of God containing the norms of Christian living, as well as an ancient document worth attention beyond its time” (Ukpong 1995: 9). The Bible, as a sacred classic, an ancient document beyond its time, consequently requires an interface with the contemporary cultural context, in order to derive a contemporary and contextual theological meaning. Attention is thus paid to the historical context of production, transmission and reception. The use of historical-critical tools is thus necessary. But this time, “as servants not as masters” (Ukpong 1995: 10). The historical context of production is thus analysed. This enables a profitable discussion of the text. The situation is revealed as it was, and whether the characters in the text performed as was expected of them. The analysis of the context in which the text is interpreted is also required. The analysis is on five levels, but all the

⁷⁷ A text that comes immediately to our mind to illustrate our point is Gen.9: 20–25. In this passage, we are introduced to Noah who drank wine and became drunk and slept naked. His son Ham saw his nakedness and told his brothers Shem and Japheth. However, his brothers took a garment and covered their father’s nakedness without looking. When he woke up, the curse he pronounced has been used to place Africans under the domination of the Euro-Americans. This is the myth of the cursed descendants of Ham. It is until recently I discovered that, the curse was pronounced to Ham’s son Canaan (v. 25), and Africans are not the descendants of Canaan anyway.

five levels may not be required in all cases. The first is the phenomenological analysis, which clarifies the identity in the text. The second is the socio-anthropological analysis, which seeks to explicate the issue in terms of people's cultural worldview. The third is the historical analysis, which, investigate issues in relation to peoples' history and how these issues came about in society, in spite of being repugnant to people's traditional worldview. The fourth is the social analysis, which probes the interconnectedness of the dynamics of the society in relation to the issues at hand. This connects the issues with other societal aspects, e.g. religion, economics and politics, and with how the dynamics of the society helps to maintain their existence. The fifth is the religious analysis, which shows the religious dimension of the situation to people's life. This summons a religious probe into the religious implications of the situation.⁷⁸

In his study on the parable of the shrewd manager in Lk.16: 1–13, Ukpong has demonstrated the importance of analysing both the contexts of production and the context of reception. He finds the manager as not defrauding his master because “customs permitted him to charge fees from his customers for his services” and “from the background of the text it is clear that the managers had power to liquidate debts and give reduction” (Ukpong 1996: 203). He thus concludes, “the manager of the estate is not the villain he is often thought to be, but the hero of the story, for having acted on behalf of the exploited peasant farmers” (1996: 208). The context that led to this interpretation was of the oppressed farmers in Nigeria, and the oppression parcelled out to African states through foreign debt by the Bretton Wood institutions. The interpretation is relevant in that the oppressed peasant farmers and the African states require such a manager to alleviate their burdens. This is true especially now the campaign is moving towards a debt cancellation jubilee, where developing countries should have their debts written off at the start of the new millennium. Having analysed the contexts of production and of reception, the analysis of the text becomes a valid pillar of its methodological framework. The current and existing interpretations of the text are reviewed and this requires the employment of manifold tools depending on the nature of the text. Social sciences like

⁷⁸ Ukpong in *JTSA*, No. 91, June 1995: 11–12 offers an extensive discussion on the five level analyses.

anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy and other inter-cultural disciplines are necessary in actualising the meaning of a text in a concrete life situation. Ultimately, the identification of the interpreter's context as dynamically corresponding or approximating the historical context of the text is unavoidable. In view of this, "the process of identifying the interpreters specific context and perspective involves a dialogue between the total context of the interpreter and the historical context of the text" (Ukpong 1995: 10). The analysis of the religio-cultural and socio-economical-political situations, which the text reflects, is elucidated in approximation to the interpreter's context, and concerns, which may be reflected therein.

Biblically, the doctrine of incarnation informs its methodological framework. The "word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1: 14) and that he "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men..." (Phil.2: 7) is not taken for granted. It thus endeavours to make the word of God to dwell among the people in their context. The doctrine of incarnation as its point of departure, "suggests that the very reality of the only true God and transcendent God took the risk of contextualisation in a very concrete, a very contextual person" (Costa 1988: 4). Christ as the incarnate word of God lived among the people. The biblical text, which manifests the incarnate Christ likewise, ought to be incarnated into people's life, and live among them. Following the incarnation principle, the hermeneutics of inculturation seeks to incarnate the biblical message to a people's cultural context. Nevertheless, if the inculturation of the biblical text is to be possible, then the people's cultural language must be taken into consideration. The translation of the Scripture into the mother tongue forms an important conceptual framework of its methodology. The translation of the Scriptures into the mother tongue definitely exposes the relevance of the scriptural text in the experience and the life situation of Christian⁷⁹.

The questions asked in connection with the significance of the liberation motif are equally relevant to the inculturation motif. Its significance is clear in that it seeks to renew the biblical Christian faith. This is obvious given that its major purpose is to challenge Christians to internalise the biblical faith, and to live it as integral to their lives. People

⁷⁹ Chapter six (section b) discusses the use of the mother tongue, affirming that it is the use of the mother tongue that guarantees the future of hermeneutics in African Christianity.

with the extrinsic faith are challenged to renew and transform their faith into the intrinsic faith⁸⁰. The motif significantly advocates for an internalised faith, which enables Christians to confidently and to competently live according to the biblical demands. In view of this, the Christians are enabled to conform to the biblical exhortation, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved and gave himself for me”* (Gal.2: 20). Christians are thus challenged not to live to the self, but live for others as if for Christ, serving God and human beings. It is to live the biblical teachings as integral to the human life. Corruption and other evil vices are avoided not just because the Bible condemns them. They are avoided because the biblical teaching has been internalised, and integrated into human life. The motif significantly moves towards the defence of authentic human values, which forms the nub and core of the human life. This enhances the diminishing of forces against the holistic welfare of human beings, leading to the possibility of their extinction.

The motif is significant for it challenges the interpreter to be committed to the Christian faith, as well as to have a deep knowledge on matters related to culture. As it were, “a preliminary condition for inculturation hermeneutics is awareness and commitment to the inculturation movement which seeks strong interaction of Christian faith with all its aspects of African (and for that matter any culture) life and thought” (Ukpong 1995: 10). However, while acknowledging the fact that a text can have diverse meanings in different contexts, any given meaning must not contradict the entire biblical message and theology. As Ukpong observes, “the theology of any text must be judged against the biblical affirmation and principles like the existence of God as creator and sustainer of the universe, the love of God and neighbour etc. Hence the possibility of correct and wrong readings of texts is recognised” (1995: 10)

The inculturation motif is significant in that it challenges both the society and the

⁸⁰ The extrinsic faith is a faith, which embraces Christianity having been motivated by personal feat, for instance like a good reputation or prosperity, and where this lacks faith disintegrates. Intrinsic faith is that faith, which appreciates Christianity not because of any personal fortune, but because that is what one is supposed to be. It is the faith that would appreciate biblical teaching not only in favourable circumstances but also in very hostile circumstances that would even demand the denial of faith in order to survive.

individual. As a determining factor, it unearths the impact, which the life in Jesus Christ has made in the socio-political/economical and religio-cultural context. It is a motif that makes the word of God alive and active in the contemporary society and in the individual's private life. It is useful in countering any attempt that seeks to make another context the subject of interpretation and to apply the results to another context. In this regard, it encounters the inability of the Western ethnocentric and androcentric hermeneutical framework to handle African Christian experiences with the Bible. Unlike the Western hermeneutical framework, which asks and answers question not arising from the African people experiences, and which answers new questions with old and depreciated answers, the inculturation motif offers new answers to the issues arising from people's lives with a refreshingly creative and exceedingly authentic fashion, which is *bona fide* African and biblically Christian. Indeed, the motif is significant for it challenges anything that would encumber the development of the Christian faith. The motif thus encourages Christians in their cultural context to let their Christians faith "mature...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..." (Eph.4: 13f). It is thus emancipatory in case of developments within or without a culture, which supports cultural imperialism. It is a significant motif that challenges social, political and economical issues that are manifest in culture. To this end, the inculturation motif counters issues heretofore delineated to the hermeneutics of liberation.

Consequently the hermeneutics of inculturation is methodologically relevant to the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. In its methodology, it takes the culture seriously. In that case, it is not dissociated from the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview, whose conceptual framework is inculturation and contextualisation. However, it may need the operating principles of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal world in order to have an in-depth engagement with full measure of the African reality. Together with the hermeneutics of liberation, and as reader response hermeneutics, they may fail to engage the full measure of African reality because each method has a different emphasis in approaching the biblical text. This makes each method to be different and in this case, it is important therefore to show why they may not engage the full measure of the African reality.

d. Why the hermeneutics of liberation and of inculturation may not engage the full measure of African reality.

Conspicuously, the hermeneutics of liberation and inculturation are invariably significant. Neither of them can be discarded if hermeneutics is to be of any relevance in African Christianity. However, they have exposed differences, which are stocked by different theologies that furnish their methodology. Naturally, their differences uncover them as methods that need to be complemented with something else in order to engage the full measure of African reality. Each hermeneutical method, as their differences testify, contributes partially in engaging the full measure of African reality. Nevertheless, their differences do not challenge the fact that these motifs arose from pertinent issues and concerns of the African people, though different in terms of their history. Distinctly, Inculturation theology is a product of historical movements like the Negritude movement in Franco-phone Africa, and the African Personality movement in Anglo-phone Africa. These movements were seeking the re-affirmation of the African in the midst of cultural and political domination of the West, hence seeking to preserve the dignity of the Africans. Liberation theology is a product of the historical movement of Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. This movement also sought to indoctrinate the Africans to accept themselves as they are and to refuse subjugation because of who they were. It is therefore clear that the background of these movements is similar the preservation of the African identity and dignity, and to refuse cultural and political domination. Yet in clear and certain terms, different theologies emerged. As Martey observes,

Even though the contexts of these cultural-political movements has been the same-namely, the struggle of the black African for emancipation from forces of domination, oppression and social injustices-the differences in the political and socioeconomic structures, as well as the ideological and cultural diversity has created a theological-hermeneutical tension...

(Martey 1995: 1)

Inculturation theology takes the religio-cultural sphere as the centre of the African dehumanisation. In that case, its scholars perceive it as the most suitable option to purge African culture and religion the domineering encroachment of Western imperialism, eventually transforming the religio-cultural milieu. In order to perform the purging and the

transformation, inculturation theology and hermeneutics for that matter rejects the Western demonisation of the African culture. The subject of the argument is that the cultural values that are not repugnant to the Gospel must be maintained. At the same time, it expunges the Euro-American cultural traits that are confused as essential constituents of the Gospel. On the other hand, liberation theology considers the socio-political and economical structures the seat of oppression. In view of this, its scholars conceive it as the most germane discretion to disinfect these structures and to transform them. Their differences are thus clear. While the hermeneutics of inculturation is in principle interested in inculturating the biblical message through indigenisation, the hermeneutics of liberation is in principle interested in subverting oppression sanctioned by cultural ideologies. Both therefore interpret the Bible to achieve their desired conclusions.

Their differences also emerge from the role each ascribes the Bible in social transformation. The liberation motif considers this as facilitating the plucking of people from unfavourable social situations. The social Gospel thus takes prominence. The argument is that the Bible challenges Christians to become involved in social activities that would alleviate sufferings, if they are to remain the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world' (Mt.5: 13–16). The liberation motif thus demands a social engagement with the context seeking to transform the society with proclamations consistent with actions. On the contrary, the inculturation motif seeks to transform the society by incarnating the biblical message into the African culture. This is to transform the society by first inserting a relevant spirituality, which would be followed by a social action. The emphasis is on the change of attitude in the spheres of human-to-human relationship, and human relationship with God and the rest of the creation.

Their difference consequently resides in their concerns. They respond to the needs of the people differently in different contexts. The historical contexts from which they emerged are explicitly different, and so they needed a different response. The inculturation motif emerged from a context that had just shaken off Western political and cultural domination. The legacy of domination had definitely left behind some social problems. Nevertheless, these were to be countered by integrating the cultural and social values hence inculturation. The liberation motif arose from a context of suffering and oppression whose

cause and effect was colonisation and which is now perpetuated by a racial and political policy sanctioned as biblically and theologically credible. People needed liberation from the oppression and degradation unleashed onto them. They were people created in the image of God and to dehumanise them was both ethically and morally unacceptable. In this regard, the hermeneutics of liberation had to be “more thoroughly and explicitly political” (Tutu 1987: 54) than the hermeneutics of inculturation.

It is safe to accordingly assert that culture and politics have immensely mitigated their differences. Inculturation is a product of independent and neo-colonial Africa. Liberation is the product of colonisation and the oppressive apartheid regime of South Africa. They are not synonymous. They are not the same.

They are different not only in terms of their history, but also in their emphases. Insofar as Africanization or Indigenisation is identified as the theme of the first, with an emphasis on culture, and liberation is identified as with the second, with an emphasis on politics, the two remain dissimilar although not contradictory

(Martey 1995: 27).

They are quite different in terms of their history and emphasis. But they have a common motivating factor, the struggle against cultural and political domination. This suggests that they are two sides of the same coins. The difference between one side (the head) and the difference of the other side (the tail) do not make the coin dialectical in any way. However, the liberation and inculturation motifs can benefit the attempts of human beings to realise the abundant life. In that case, both can become components of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview, which seeks to empower human beings to realise the abundant life.

Regrettably, the differences are inflated out of proportions when scholars consider the hermeneutical trajectories they adhere to as the most effective weapon of social transformation. Scholars for inculturation theology accused those for Black theology of liberation as unbiblical and overly involved with politics. Scholars for Black liberation theology inculcated the scholars inclined to inculturation of being enslaved to past cultural heritage, which the Euro-Americans had used to oppress the Africans. However, scholars have now realised that the fight is over an illusive and false dilemma. They may be different but they have a common commitment. They have a mutual obligation, which

they must enter upon as allies. They need not be inflated to appear as antagonists. It ought to be noted that they emerged as a reaction to European domination, which was both cultural and political. A swelling acceptance of their mutual obligation has precisely emerged. They can transcend their differences by making the religio-cultural and socio-economical-political context the subject informing the interpretation of the Bible. They have points at which they intersect and interact. They have a mutual obligation to champion a clear biblical understanding in the African context, in order that life in Christ may be lived in its fullness. However, the escalation of their differences marks them as vulnerable, hence unable to engage the African reality in total. Yet their mutual obligation can be realised when they are blended together to become constituents of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. The rationale here is that the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview is able to make the religio-cultural and the socio-economical/political contexts of the reader a significant informer of the hermeneutical discourse. Issues of religio-cultural and socio-economical/political transpire in human habitation.

At all events, the hermeneutics of liberation and of inculturation are reader response hermeneutics, which deals with contemporary issues that arise in the context in which people live. A hermeneutics generated by the primal worldview, which seeks to enhance human life to its fullness cannot neglect the issues dealt with by the hermeneutics of liberation and of inculturation, if it has to address adequately the issues of human survival. Social-political/economical and religio-cultural issues must be addressed hermeneutically as one entity. As it were, human beings require more than political and economical liberation. They “are truly free when they control all the tools, all the instruments, all the means of their physical, economical, political cultural and psychological survival... When they control the means and context of their integrated survival and development” (wa Thiong’o 1993: 78). The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can thus use the tools that inform the hermeneutics of liberation and inculturation to contend with the forces that are contradictory to the holistic survival of human beings. This hermeneutical method can also use the tools belonging to liberation and inculturation to enhance the forces at work for the survivor of human beings. By using these tools, the

hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will become a formidable force agitating for human existence and fighting against the demise of human beings. It will thus be translated to a hermeneutical method, which encounters the forces seeking human destruction with resistance and survival.

e. Contributions of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview to the former hermeneutical methods.

However, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will not only use tools of the former hermeneutical methods, but will also have a contribution to the former methods. Since the former methods can be used in the hermeneutical discourse in African Christianity, it means that the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can have contributory factors to them. It will definitely infuse “thought patterns, perception of reality and the concept of identity and community, which prevail within the primal world-view of African societies” (Bediako 1995: 93). The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will thus re-direct the former hermeneutical methods to consider the spirituality and the spiritual view of life enshrined in the primal worldview. It will thus “offer valid perspectives of articulating Christian theological commitments” (1995:95) as well as enabling a hermeneutical commitment to the realisation of the abundant life. Given that the primal worldview conception of the universe is essentially spiritual, the former methods will be enriched and as it were, compelled not to neglect the primal apprehension of reality. The mastery of Scripture with the primal worldview categories will provide a rewarding hermeneutical continuity “from the spiritual universe of the primal religions into the spiritual environment of the Christian faith” (: 96). This means that the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will provide the real hermeneutical key to the former methods, because it will “bring its own peculiar gifts” (: 98), which will shape the former hermeneutical methods, so that the biblical aspirations can conform to the way Africans perceive reality. This is necessary given that, “Christian thoughts have hitherto been moulded by a world-view which the living forces of primal imaginations seem to have been expelled” (: 96)⁸¹.

⁸¹ See the argument in chapter two that the expansion of Christianity was made possible by incorporating terms agreeable to peoples’ conception of reality. However, this was delayed in Africa even when the African primal worldview had all the necessary ingredients that qualified it to be *praeparatio evangelica*.

Whereas the former hermeneutical methods lacked proper tools to “engage with the dimension of multiplicity” (: 99) in the African primal worldview, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will offer these tools to them. The spiritual reality of the African worldview will find its way to hermeneutics; hence the biblical multiplicity of angels, archangels and faithful ancestors will be understood in terms agreeable to peoples’ conception of reality. The spirit and the spirit world will be dealt with adequately, enabling the former hermeneutical methods to move “towards a fresh account of the Transcendent, drawing on its background in the primal imaginations of the African primal religions” (: 99). This will direct the former methods to have “a positive element in a creative Christian engagement with the primal world-view” (: 99). The historical-critical method will thus incorporate the vital power, which the destructive dichotomy championed by the European enlightenment cultural epoch denied. The liberation and inculturation motifs cannot also escape this because each has a tendency to dichotomise the religio-cultural context and the socio-economical/political context. Any critical analysis of the biblical text, whether from the historical-critical, liberation and/or inculturation perspectives, will therefore not neglect the spiritual dimension. The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will consequently use primal imaginations, which will help hermeneutics to “restore the ancient unity of theology and spirituality” (: 105).

5:3. Conclusion.

It is now commonplace to assert that the historical-critical method, the hermeneutics of liberation and inculturation are relevant to the hermeneutical discourse in African Christianity. They have served a good purpose in the interpretation and the understanding of the Scriptures. Taken as one hermeneutical package, they can and will “offer a holistic approach to religion, religious understanding, interpretation and communication” (Toit 1998: 345). When they are all used by a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview, then hermeneutics in African Christianity will not “separate interpretation and understanding from all other aspects of life...perception of God, religious experiences, self esteem, world-view and the like are vitally determined by one’s basic living condition” (1998: 373). Essentially, the incorporation of the three methods into one

method generated by the primal worldview will offer a paradigm shift from the former techniques of doing hermeneutics. Emphasis now will not just simply lie on the origin of the text, the intention of the author, the historical and sociological context of the society that produced the text. There will be a triple emphasis on the context of production, context of the literary genre and the context of reception. The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will perceive the historical-critical tools, the liberation and the inculturation motifs as valid hermeneutical keys to open up the meaning of the text. Indeed, this method will uncover a valid fact that all the contexts cited above do not complete the whole hermeneutical process when taken individually. The previous methods are essential partners in engaging the African reality in total. However, taken individually, none of them can extensively engage the full measure of African reality. Even the hermeneutics of inculturation, which is so close to the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview, is not totally inclusive. Indeed the different approaches adopted by each hermeneutical method communicate their inability to deal fully with the African reality. Amalgamated together as one hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview, they can make this method adaptive and experimentative. All that the previous hermeneutical methods embraced is not useless and irrelevant. They are all contributory to the hermeneutical discourse in African Christianity. However, when a particular method is exalted as the only one, the future and significance of hermeneutics in African Christianity, to which we now turn to assess, would be at stake. All the hermeneutical methods should be used together as an enabling factor to a profitable engagement with readers in their context and in the use of the mother tongue.

Chapter 6 The Future and the Significance of a Hermeneutical Method Generated by the Primal Worldview.

6:1. Introduction.

The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview ought to have a future and significance. It behoves us to ask, what is the future and significance of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview? This chapter stands on the premises that the ability to make hermeneutics popular and contextual guarantees the future of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. This entails the use of the mother tongue so that the method may be appreciable both to the trained and the ordinary interlocutors. In other words, its future and significance depend on its ability to engage with people in their context and in the use of the mother tongue. ‘Engagement with ordinary readers in their context’ definitely can make hermeneutics popular and contextual. This means that every person will have a right to be involved in the hermeneutical discourse. However, ‘every person’ includes the trained readers, who read the Bible critically, and the ordinary readers, who may have an ability to read the Bible in their mother tongue, and others who are illiterate and can only listen to the Bible being read and then retell the story. Mostly, they are the poor and the marginalised (Cf. West 1999(c): 10).

The inclusion of all the readers of the Bible in the hermeneutical discourse means that hermeneutics will henceforth belong to the community of faith. Indeed the involvement of every person means working ‘with’ and not ‘for’ any reader of the Bible. The use of the mother tongue is undeniably contributory to the endeavour to work ‘with’ and not ‘for’ and complementary to the attempt to be engaged with readers in their context. This is simply because the mother tongue language is the language of the ordinary people. If the engagement with readers in their context is to be possible, then both the trained and ordinary readers must be able to hermeneutically communicate in their mother tongue, the language of the grassroots. In that case, the use of the mother tongue in the hermeneutical discourse is indispensable. Consequently, engagement with people in their context and the use of the mother tongue contributes to the future and significance of a hermeneutical

method generated by the primal worldview. The study thus embarks on discussing each of these complementary aspects separately.

6:2 *Engagement with ordinary readers in their context.*

Hitherto, biblical hermeneutics has existed as a preserve for a few trained elite. As Magesa observes,

If one considers the history of biblical interpretation down through many centuries, it becomes evident that it has officially always been a preserve of a small group of people in any given country. The majority of the faithful...often tried to make sense of it...but their (popular) interpretation was, as a rule ignored by the official church and even positively discouraged and punished in favour of minority perception...the majority of the followers of the word have been deprived of their privilege to listen to it within the context of their own situation.

(Magesa 1997: 30).

There is therefore no doubt that hermeneutics has been a privatised undertaking. Indeed, it has “not been popular but a private process” (1997: 30). This has dwarfed hermeneutics in Africa, denying it a future and significance.

However, it is necessary for hermeneutics and theology in Africa to have a future and significance. This is possible only when hermeneutics engages with the ordinary readers in their context, giving the Bible back to them. Since “ordinary readers are by far the majority of readers of the Bible on the African continent; therefore, they, and not other scholars, must be our primary interlocutors” (West 1999(a): 105). However, it is rather unfortunate to note that “ordinary readers of the Bible are usually not welcome within Biblical studies, and if they are invited in, they must ‘know their place’” (West 1998(b): 633), the place of the dominated. The trained readers are thus called upon to develop the ability to work ‘with’ the ordinary readers. They can facilitate hermeneutics to have an engagement with the ordinary readers in their context, consequently developing a popular and contextual reading of the Bible that pursues the realisation of the abundant life guaranteed to the followers of Jesus Christ. Both the trained and the ordinary readers have a mutual obligation of creating an appropriate meaning of the text in their context. In that case, it is significant to transform both the trained and ordinary readers as equal interlocutors in the hermeneutical process. This means bridging the gap between the

trained and the ordinary readers, making “the biblical text relevant in a new setting” (Vestraelen 1993: 272).

When hermeneutics engages with ordinary readers in their context, it will enable them to be aware of their inalienable and inviolable right to interpret the text and to provide for its meaning. On the other hand, this will enable the ordinary readers to avoid their hermeneutical presupposition, which has hitherto operated in what Scott calls ‘the hidden transcript’, and which at most is not exposed to the trained readers⁸². Scott opens his study with the Ethiopian proverb, ‘when the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts’ to show the relationship between domination and resistance. It is therefore in the attempt to resist the domination of the trained readers in the hermeneutical discourse, that the Bible reading of the ordinary readers has been consciously unofficial, operating in the hidden transcript. West consequently avers, “any analysis of the relationship between the socially engaged biblical scholar and the ordinary poor and marginalized ‘reader’ of the Bible is incomplete that does not take into account a more nuanced understanding of dominance and resistance” (West 1999(c): 49). In view of this, the trained readers should have awareness that what the ordinary readers hold and express in the hidden transcript is a valuable contribution to the hermeneutical communication. The ordinary readers too ought to be aware that they can negotiate and challenge the imperious hermeneutical hegemony of the trained readers.

Ordinary readers must urgently be made aware of the power they hold and the contributions they can make to the hermeneutical discourse. As Draper observes “the actors know that they have their fingers on something, but are only dimly aware of what it is” (Draper 1998: 3). The ordinary readers are thus summoned to realise that they “have resources which tame and subvert what may have been originally oppressive texts” (West 1999(c): 93).

⁸². The ‘hidden transcript’ according to Scott, “represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant” (Scott 1990:xii) and is the discourse including speech, act and a whole range of other practices that subordinate groups create in response to their ordeal of domination. Scott therefore reveals, “the hidden transcript is a self-disclosure that power relations normally exclude from the official transcript”. The ‘public transcript’ is the opposite of ‘hidden transcript’ and refers to actions that are openly avowed to the other party in the power relations. It is a “way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate” (Scott 1990:2. Cf. his footnote 1 on the same page).

The ordinary readers have something to contribute to cultural exegesis. The ordinary readers can enable the Biblical scholar to see something they might have missed concerning what the text historically meant...If ordinary readers are able to enable us to see things differently, ought they not to be constitutive of the very discipline of Biblical studies? In other words, ought they not occupy at the centre rather than the periphery?"

(West 1998(b): 635)

Answering the questions posed by West affirmatively would uncover the importance of the ordinary and the trained readers working together. This will certainly furnish the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview with a commitment to break down the existing hermeneutical hegemony, bringing down the trained readers from their ideological interpretations, which only sanction their survival. The trained readers will thus be able to 'work' with the ordinary readers, an enterprise which West has successfully elaborated in almost all his readings cited in this study. At all events, engagement with ordinary readers in their context will maintain "the relationship between the biblical school (or theologian) and the ordinary Christian 'reader' (whether actual or illiterate 'reader')" (West 1998(a): 29).

Engagement with ordinary readers in their context will empower and consolidate them to have a voice of their own so that they can speak for themselves. They will therefore develop a language, which the trained readers will understand only when they are converted to seeing reality and hearing the word of God from the perspective of the primal worldview. This will diminish the hidden transcript of both the trained and the ordinary readers and build trust such that they can work with each other. This will unmask falsehood and reveal reality as it is apprehended in primal categories. Readers will accordingly integrate their lives and the biblical demands, eventually enabling a mutual co-existence of the biblical demands and their contextual cultural demands.

With the biblical data, they begin to reflect on their real life situation. The process gradually prompts them to seek a more objective knowledge of reality and to look for a more suitable tool of analysis elsewhere (*and the Bible will then*) express itself and mature only by inserting itself in the whole life of human being from the social realm to the political and to the spiritual.

(Croatto 1981: 12,39)

This will enable them to modify situations that upset them, fostering the growth of the church because engagement with ordinary readers in their context will facilitate the

safeguarding of their identity and dignity. Indeed the church will ably restore human dignity and identity in Jesus Christ, hence becoming a place to feel at home. The readers will then realise that “God entrusted the Holy Scriptures to his church and not to the private judgement of the specialist” (Crollius 1983: xiii). The ordinary readers, who belong to the church, will now be as equally important as the specialists. The Bible will now speak to them in their predicaments, affirming to them that God is on their side and acts for them. They will thus possess the Bible and as Croatto, citing Fiorenza reveals, “develop a hermeneutic from below” (1981: 100).

The cultural context in which people reside is dynamic and kaleidoscopic (showing constant change). Thus while the context is found shifting, engagement with ordinary readers in their context enables the hermeneutical method to form and to maintain a relevant and contextual community of faith, which must be given the hope that God is on their side. This community will suppress any force and falsehood, ideology or philosophy of life that denies human beings the joy of life. Indeed, a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will thus be relevant to the context, for it will be concerned with the daily lives of the people. This means that it will be a contextual hermeneutics, and being contextual implies it will be culturally bound. This is in order because hermeneutics has been and should be biblically and as well as culturally sensitive, and this leads to contextualisation and inculturation. In that case, hermeneutics will be entwined with the religio-cultural and the socio-economical/political contexts, which are inseparable. The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview thus proffers a hermeneutics of engagement, not of detachment, which will be constantly engaged with the text in its context in relation to the readers in their context. The interpretation of the biblical text ultimately is coalesced with the interpretation of the receiver’s context. To be more precise, “the task of interpretation is never complete until one has wedded the exegesis of the word to the exegesis of the world” (Hagen 1985: 95). Consequently, this will involve the reading of another text, the real life experiences and expressions. In that case, engagement with ordinary readers in their context can only begin with their real life experiences and real life situations. This is therefore a hermeneutics of engagement, which

has an obligation to transform the context, if it is lacking a strong foundation to acknowledge the activities of a liberating and saving God.

Transformation of a context lacking a strong foundation is necessary so as to affirm that the “divine revelation happens within specific social context” (Kiogora 1998: 345). Transformation will thus enhance the uprooting of oppressive structures. This will deepen the Christian faith, “the victory that overcomes the world” (1Jn 5: 4). Faith will thus be gained in the contextualisation and the inculturation process, which of course calls for a liberation that transforms the context and leads human beings to the fullness of life in Jesus Christ. In that case, developing a faith that transforms the context constitutes an area that demands an engagement with the ordinary readers in their context. This will unravel the fact that God communicates to people in their historical context using language and people’s experiences. To all intents and purposes, transforming the context is to seek the improvement of human life in the light of God’s self-revelation in and through Jesus Christ. This involves creating a new ethos in a transformed community. Such a community is hoped to value human identity and dignity. Such a community is expected to shudder at corruption and all evil vices that degrade and dehumanise human beings. Such a community is prospected to adhere to the best values and ethics vis-à-vis human life. Engagement with people in their context will intentionally usher an emancipating orthodoxy and orthopraxis in the Christian community. This will project at destroying the roots of oppression and internalising the emancipating biblical faith. This will enable hermeneutics to nourish the development of the intrinsic faith.

Engagement with ordinary readers in their context is the most privileged moment hermeneutics can share. This offers a paradigm shift in biblical translation and especially interpretation. As observed,

Interpretation takes place from an upper class towards a lower class perspective, from text to real life, from a text enclosed in itself to a text with meaning for us, from an individualistic understanding to community sense, from neutrality to taking sides in society and from overly spiritualised concept to concrete meanings and demand in faith in a present lived situation.

(Mester 1993: 3)

Indeed, the ordinary readers therefore cannot be ignored or taken for granted. Imperfect as their interpretation may be, it is part of human fallibility, which the trained readers are partakers as well. Yet the hermeneutical discourse of the ordinary readers is necessary for the “growth in knowledge of God and ultimately for salvation, the perfection of the fullness of life” (Magesa 1997: 31). The future and significance of hermeneutics is incontrovertibly guaranteed by the realisation that hermeneutics belongs to the community of faith, and not only to the trained exegete. The hermeneutics discourse therefore “is a community activity in which all take part, including the exegete who has a special role” (1997: 32). Nevertheless, the special role is not of leadership, but of guiding and working ‘with’ the community for a rewarding life that would certainly enhance the hermeneutical discourse. Certainly, to release hermeneutics from its privatised captivity, the ordinary reader must be involved. The trained reader must be converted from below, a process, which Gerald West rightly calls, “being partially constituted by work with others” (West 1999(b): 44–53). However, this does not mean that the trained readers will cease to be what they are. It means that they will have the ability to participate and share in the real life experiences and expressions of the ordinary readers. Hermeneutics will thus have a guaranteed future because as a reader-response hermeneutics, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will invite all people, and more so the ordinary readers to participate in the hermeneutical discourse. Concurring with West, “it is only with the advent of reader-response criticism that ordinary readers appear to receive an invitation to participate in some substantial way in the work of Biblical studies” (West 1998(b): 635). Certainly, engagement with people in their context guarantees the future and significance of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview.

6:3. *The use of the mother tongue.*

Engagement with ordinary readers in their context would only be partially meaningful, if the use of the mother tongue is not employed. The use of the mother tongue is inescapable, given that “God, who has no linguistic favourites, has determined that we should all hear the Good News in our native tongue” (Sanneh 1989:174). It then behoves us to conclude that the best language to interpret the Bible is the mother tongue. This gains

vitality from Malina's observation, "texts are the products of languaging⁸³, and languaging is a form of social interaction. People "language" each other to have some effect. Conversation partners expect each other to refer to some common situation and to talk about the same thing" (Malina 1986: 4). The use of the mother tongue in the hermeneutical discourse is thus considered as indeed revolutionary. This revolutionary aspect is evident in the history of the church. Sanneh thoughtfully informs that Tyndale's translation of the Bible into English "established an independent standard for English as a vernacular medium...Tyndale's translation had an enormous impact on the development of English national consciousness..." (Sanneh 1989: 135). It is also on record that the missionaries' translation of the Bible in the African mother tongues has had an authentic revolutionary character.

Africans began earnestly to inquire into the Christian Scriptures, which missionaries had placed in their hands to see where they had misunderstood the Gospel. What they learned convinced them that the mission as European cultural hegemony was a catastrophic departure from the Bible. They met the original irony with one of their own: they went in to proclaim the gospel as the missionaries wished them to, but in turn insisted that missionary attitudes should continue to be scrutinized in its (*the Gospel's*) revealing light.

(1989: 163).

As it were, the translation of the Scriptures in the mother tongue exposed the missionaries' failure to live according to what they taught. A good example to this is Matthew Ajuoga, the founder of the Church of Christ in Africa. Ajuoga, a Kenyan Luo was struck by the word love, which the missionaries had translated as 'hera'. This word in Luo simply connotes the brotherly love, which he found lacking among the missionaries because of the way they treated the African converts. He concluded that, "such a treatment represented a scandalous failure of love" (Sanneh 1989: 168). The mother tongue word 'hera' enabled Ajuoga to interpret the biblical notion of love according to his worldview. Through the translation of the Bible in the mother tongue, the Western cultural impositions in the name of Christianity were rejected. As Sanneh observes, "through the elevation of the vernacular in translation, missions furnished the critical languages for

⁸³ Languaging/to language is a sociolinguistic viewpoint that has recourse to what a speaker or writer or hearer/reader does. Thus to language/languaging is a social pursuit, an outline of social communication between human beings in their day-to-day life. To language is to network socially according to cultural rules and meaning (Cf. Malina 1986: 9).

evaluating the West in its secular and religious impact” (Sanneh 1989: 203). Indeed the use of the mother tongue provoked a revolutionary reading of the Bible. This also happened among the Gîkûyû people. The availability of Scripture in the Gîkûyû mother tongue irrefutably ushered a rewarding interpretation of the same. Karanja’s observation is appropriate.

Kikuyu Christians showed a considerable latitude in interpreting and applying the Bible from the time the Scripture was available in their vernacular. Although the text of the Bible was fixed, its interpretation was not. The *athomi* (readers) used the Bible creatively to serve their pastoral, political and cultural needs. Pastors used it to promote morality and giving in the church. Politicians used it to create tribal consciousness; apologist for Kikuyu culture used it to affirm their own religion and culture⁸⁴. Indeed, Kikuyu creative use of the Scripture demonstrates their ability to adopt and exploit Western innovations.

(Karanja 1999: 129).

Altogether, the use of the mother tongue made the Scripture very popular to the Agîkûyû. The availability of the Bible in the Gîkûyû language provided the community with the first reading materials in their own language. The popularity of the Scripture was thus certain, for the mother tongue Scripture “seemed to assure them (the Gîkûyû Christians) that God spoke their language” (1999: 141). On the other hand, the Gîkûyû Christians could now have access to the Bible without intermediary. Hitherto, the knowledge of the Scripture for the Agîkûyû “was mainly derived from the missionaries, who imparted it rather selectively” (: 141). It is indeed through the use of the mother tongue that the Gîkûyû Christians discovered that their culture had much in common with the biblical culture. Through reading the mother tongue Scriptures, the Gîkûyû people “encountered people whose culture and life experiences were markedly similar to their own. This discovery encouraged them to explore the Scripture further (: 141). It scarcely needs elaboration therefore, that the use of mother tongue enabled the absorption of the biblical message to the Gîkûyû primal worldview. Indeed Mbiti is right to have observed that none of the

⁸⁴ Political activists appealed to Heb.9: 15 and 12: 24 to portray Jesus as their Mûigwithania (unifier) in their political endeavours. In that case, the Bible was used as a tool of liberation. The Gîkûyû people were reminded that they would remain Gîkûyû people; hence they should not compromise their identity. Appealing to Heb. 11: 24f, Kenyatta would then argue, that as Moses refused to be called the son of the Pharaoh’s daughter in order to serve his nation, the Gîkûyû working away from their home ought to emulate Moses and uplift their tribe among other nations. (Cf. *Mûigwithania*, a Gîkûyû newspaper, in the Kenya National Archives file, No. DC/MKS.10B/13/1).

Christian agents, missionaries or even the African catechists, who “can exert or has exerted as great impact upon the church as the Bible in the local language” (Mbiti 1986: 128).

The use of the mother tongue is thus significant because it promotes religious independence. What has been said above in relation to the Gĩkũyũ people is relevant to the point we are making. It is not an exaggeration to assert that the missionaries “exercised exclusive authority on matters of faith. They alone had the full access to the word of God, and their interpretation was final” (Karanja 1999: 153). Nevertheless, this received a momentous change when the Bible was available in the mother tongue. A standard of reference had at that moment emerged, and which was outside the missionary control. While the missionary control over the Bible was predominantly loosened, the Gĩkũyũ Christians adopted new hermeneutical strategies to appropriate the biblical texts in consonance with their conception of reality. The missionary teachings, which were not compatible with the biblical teachings, could now be distinguished. The missionaries’ condemnation of polygamy and female circumcision as unbiblical could now be tested against the biblical teachings.

Kikuyu Christians found little biblical basis for the sacredness of monogamy and no condemnation of clitoridectomy. In fact, they noted with interest that nearly all the patriarchs practised polygamy. They also noted that the term used in the Gospels to describe Mary’s condition before her marriage to Joseph was ‘muiritu’. Among the Kikuyu, a ‘muiritu’, was a girl who had undergone clitoridectomy.

(Karanja 1999: 153).

Though both polygamy and female circumcision are no longer popular among the Gĩkũyũ Christians, the use of the mother tongue enabled them to develop their own interpretation that addressed issues of life, emanating from their own context. This is a clear indication of “how powerfully Kikuyu could claim to interpret the Bible on their own without missionary authority” (1999: 156). Indeed the translation of the Bible in the mother tongue precisely handed “over the Bible...to the ordinary African ‘reader’” (West 1999(c): 98).

However, this was only on the popular level, but not on the academic level. The Academic interpretation of the Scriptures followed the Euro-American interpretative grid. Indeed, this is because the theological education to which African scholars are put through is of

Euro-American orientation. Nevertheless, the use of the Scriptures during the early days of its availability in the mother tongue proves that the future and significance of hermeneutics largely depends on the use of the mother tongue. By the use of the mother tongue, the interpretation of the Scriptures will cease to be a reserve of the trained readers only. It will also become a reserve and a domain of the ordinary readers. If through the use of the mother tongue the Scriptures were adapted to the Gikúyú primal worldview in the early days, there is no reason why the same cannot happen today. This is the surest way of inculturating and contextualising the biblical message.

Consequently, it is in this connection Lamin Sanneh reveals that the success of the transmission of the biblical message is grounded on the ability to translate the same message into the culture and language of people receiving it. The central thesis of his study as he states, is that

Christianity, from its origins, identified itself with the need to translate out of Aramaic and Hebrew and from that position came to exert a dual force in its historical development. One was the resolve to relativize its Judaic roots, with the consequence that it promoted significant aspects of these roots. The other was to distigmatize (sic) Gentile culture and adopt that culture as a natural extension of the life of the new religion.

(Sanneh 1989: 1)

He then proceeds to point to the consequences of the scriptural translatability in African languages. In a candid and expressive language, Sanneh shows unfathomable interactions “between the Bible translatability and related issues such as cultural self-understanding, vernacular pride, social awakening, religious renewal, cross-cultural dialogue, transmission and reciprocity, reciprocity in mission...” (1989: 2). In view of this, hermeneutics must take the mother tongue seriously. This is because language “is the intimate, articulate expression of culture, and so close are the two that language can be said to be synonymous with culture, which it suffuses and embodies” (: 3). He further observes that “societies that have been less broken up by technological change have a more integrated, holistic new life, and language as complete cultural experience fits naturally into this worldview” (: 3). Indeed Sanneh’s study validly justifies our thesis that the future of hermeneutics in Africa rests in the use of the mother tongue. This thesis is much more validated by the observation that “the flowering of Christian activity in

modern Africa has taken place in ground suitably worked by vernacular translation” (: 4). We cannot therefore underrate the use of the mother tongue in the hermeneutical discourse of African Christianity.

The future and the significance of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview in that case rests on its ability to promote the use of the mother tongue. The use of the mother tongue is a factor that cannot be denied by a hermeneutical method that seeks an engagement with the ordinary readers in their context. As we have noted above, Gerald West can be counted as a scholar, who makes a successful argument why the trained readers must read ‘with’ the ordinary readers rather than reading ‘for’ them. However, the most convenient way to read ‘with’ them and not ‘for’ them is only through the use of the mother tongue, which they very well understand. Precisely, when the biblical message is received in a people’s language and culture, it enables them to make sense of the conditions they live in, and they will find a hermeneutics that uses the mother tongue a place to feel at home. Indeed the future and significance of hermeneutics in African Christianity lies in a dialectical relationship between the ordinary and the trained readers. Besides, the majority of the ordinary readers use mother tongue in their day-to-day communications.

It is certain that most of the ordinary readers are not literate in English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and even the classical languages, such as the biblical Greek, Hebrew and Latin. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o rightly notes that in the last 400 years or so, “African languages were suppressed and European languages were deliberately given a status that made them the inevitable vehicle of African people’s self-definition” (wa Thiong’o 1993: 84). This means that African languages have been suppressed and humiliated for a long time, contrary to the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights. Article 9 suggests that, “all language communities have the right to codify, standardize, preserve, develop and promote their linguistic system, without induced or forced interference”⁸⁵. Nevertheless, the African mother tongues are legitimate tools to foster the unity of the people and to preserve their culture. Kassahum Checole’s observation is thus valid. “If you take away

⁸⁵ The article has been retrieved from the World Association for Christian Communicators: People’s Communication Charter; The death of a language; Linguicide: May 1–3 1999: Inside Cover Page.

my right to speak my own language by mandating another language as the official language, you will put me out of circulation” (Life Style, *Sunday Nation*, 30th April 2000: 13). These words were spoken at the historical conference in Asmara, Eritrea, where African linguists had met to deliberate on the future of the African languages. This conference was necessary given that the continued use of the European languages threatens the African mother tongues with extinction. Kassahum’s observation thus explains the danger of neglecting the mother tongue in all human endeavours, be they religio-cultural, social, economical, political and/or theological.

It is indeed a hermeneutical/theological suicide to read the Bible and to do hermeneutics in a foreign language. It is consequently necessary to use a language that both the ordinary and trained readers of the Bible can understand. Malina in connection with this makes a valid observation.

Language and reading point to the fact that language is a representational medium of communication. Language produces a mediated picture of reality as human beings experience it. As one listens to or reads a piece of language, one must not only assign meanings and interpretation to what is being said or read but also supply a great deal of those meanings and interpretation even though one is not the speaker or the writer.

(Malina 1986: 5).

It thus behoves the trained reader to read the Bible with the ordinary reader through the mother tongue. At the moment, the fervour to decolonise the mind of the Africans must begin with the use of the mother tongue in the hermeneutical discourse. This is because though the European languages are the official languages in most African countries, they are not the popular languages. They are not the spontaneous languages of the majority of African people at the local level and at the grassroots. In that case, both the trained and the ordinary readers need the abilities to articulate hermeneutics, and theology for that matter, in their mother tongue. However, as we have observed above, real advance to this will be made only when the trained readers will realise the need to see reality and hear the word of God from the perspective of the primal worldview. Needless to say, the suppression of the mother tongue is a threat to the hermeneutical discourse particularly in Africa and generally in the whole world. The continued use of European languages denies hermeneutics a future and any significance in African Christianity. Indeed hermeneutics

and theology lack the necessary ingredients in that they deny the ordinary readers a chance to communicate their thoughts through the language they very well understand. It goes without saying that the ordinary readers will participate in a less meaningful way in the development of biblical interpretation if they cannot interpret and translate Scriptures in their mother tongue.

To suppress the mother tongue and mandate another language as the supreme hermeneutical/theological language is to pull a vast number of Christians out of circulation. It is to disqualify them from the hermeneutical/theological discourse. In that case, the Asmara second declaration is relevant to the formation of an authentic hermeneutical/theological discourse in African Christianity. As the declaration states, “the vitality and equality of African languages must be recognised as the basis for the future empowerment of the African people” (Life Style, *Sunday Nation*, 30th April 2000: 13). This is indeed valid to hermeneutics and theology, which also seeks to empower both the trained and ordinary readers of the Bible. The use of the mother tongue will definitely constitute both the ordinary and trained readers as equal interlocutors in the hermeneutical/theological discourse in African Christianity.

The ability to articulate hermeneutics and theology in mother tongue is an obvious and fundamental hermeneutical/theological right. However, this has been unnecessarily suppressed by European mother tongues, such as English, French, German and others. These languages have been considered as universal, and therefore they have continued to be used in the educational system of almost every African state. It is not an exaggeration that almost all African countries use the languages of their colonial master in their educational system. It is unthinkable to conclude that education (including theological education) can only move forward with the languages of our colonial masters. If this continues, it would then be right to contend that Africa remains colonised given that the use of mother tongue is undervalued. The African mother tongues therefore must not be neglected as we disseminate education. Indeed, hermeneutics and theology can be a pace setter for this rewarding endeavour. In that case, the future and the significance of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview lies in its advocacy for the use of the mother tongue. However, we may add that not only in the use of mother tongue

alone, but also in developing critical tools in mother tongue in the hermeneutical and theological discourse of African Christianity. Indeed the twenty first century must begin by upholding and maintaining the use of the mother tongue and developing critical tools that would bring hermeneutics and theology closer to the ordinary people. This will give hermeneutics a long-lasting effect for every reader of the Bible will be hermeneutically literate. In view of this, the use of the mother tongue and the development of critical tools is not a soft or less vigorous option.

The continued use of foreign languages has in the past hampered the communication between the trained and the ordinary reader. Shorter rightly observes that the failure to communicate makes theology/hermeneutics appear irrelevant. Using second order languages, that is, foreign languages, occasions the failure. He consequently contends,

In many ways theologians have themselves to blame for their failure to communicate. This failure is primarily due to their preference for what Newman called 'second order language', and their incapacity to translate their notions into the 'first order language of ordinary man in the street.

(Shorter 1988: 243).

Shorter's remarks imply that communicating in the mother tongue, and having the capacity to translate the biblical language into the same will not tie hermeneutics and theology to foreign cultural traditions. In that case, both hermeneutics and theology will become functional, for they will be using a language that enriches people's imaginative and creative ability. It will then be possible for the ordinary and the trained interlocutors to have dialogue with the biblical text, anticipating its engagement with their life situations and their cosmological ideas of their worldview.

The use of mother tongue is by all means significant and valid for it gives the ordinary reader freedom to peruse the Scriptures without relying on a foreign language. As it were, linguistic freedom gives people the option to be empowered, and enables them to participate in any religio-cultural and/or social-political-economical discourse without turbulent anxieties. This is because the use of the mother tongue will ground people in their cultural life, hence giving them courage to assert their dignity and identity. They now can publicise the teachings of the Bible using tools of the primal worldview well-known to them in a language they think through with and express themselves with in their day-to-

day life. Indeed the use of the mother tongue in the hermeneutical discourse, when allowed to take precedence, will revitalise the well-known African tradition of disseminating vital information through stories, proverbs, poems and songs, which are a wealth of information on how people conceptualise reality. The information disseminated through the stories, proverbs, songs and other form of oral tradition are in the peoples' mother tongue. However, failure to use the mother tongue endangers the information found in the oral tradition, which may become extinct, because the sages who really know them are the ordinary readers, and most of them are not familiar with the European languages. This will also incapacitate the development of critical tools in the mother tongue, which we have argued in chapter three resides in the oral tradition. It is thus necessary to use the mother tongue because the stories, proverbs, myths, poems, songs and other tools for the oral tradition are articulated in the mother tongue. And as we have argued above, these hold essential richness and resources for hermeneutics and theology. The use of the mother tongue would definitely enhance hermeneutics and theology in African Christianity. African theologians are therefore called upon to effect change in the hermeneutical discourse through using indigenous languages and tools, hence giving theology and hermeneutics a promising future and an incontrovertible significance.

Specifically, empowering the mother tongue for use by the trained and the ordinary readers is the sure way of giving hermeneutics a future and significance. A language that all people understand is vital in sustaining hermeneutics and theology. The use of the mother tongue is indeed indispensable since it is through its use that people can conceive reality in totality and in terms well known to them. Nevertheless, if we cannot speak or listen through a language understandable to both the ordinary and the trained readers, we can only be silent in the hermeneutical discourse. This silence would only mean the elimination of our conception of reality; for it is only in a language that reality is manifested and expressed with certainty. As it were, it is in the "coming of Reality into language that a man discovers his own existence" (Hughes 1979: 116). In that case, the mother tongue is a powerful tool, through which biblical interpretation can reach the people of each community. However, the mother tongue, like any other language, is dynamic hence words that are now intelligible may be unintelligible in the future. This

then suggests that both interpretation and translation of the Bible must be an ongoing process. This calls for a constant interpretation and re-interpretation; translation and re-translation of the Bible in the mother tongue as well as in any other language spoken in the world. Yet this is question begging, given that there are biblical words, which do not have a corresponding equivalent in the mother tongue. How then would the translation and retranslation become possible? The Willowbank Report on Gospel and Culture propose the principle of dynamic equivalence⁸⁶ in this endeavour. Precisely, the principle of dynamic equivalence must not be neglected in the hermeneutical discourse that uses the mother tongue. Biblical words that are not in a people's mother tongue should be re-translated following the principle of dynamic equivalent. For example, the 1950 Gîkûyû Bible translation used the word *mûraika* derived from the Hebrew word מַלְאֲכִים (*mal'ak*) and also from the Kiswahili word *malaika* to translate the word angel. The continued use of the word *mûraika* facilitates the loss of the concept of messenger. In that case, a dynamic equivalent word is necessary, which sustains the meaning of messenger. The word *ndungata*, which means servant, or *njaama*, a name used for chief's messengers, or *mûtûmwo*, which means messenger would be the most appropriate, for they retain the concept of an angel as a messenger.

The principle of dynamic equivalence is also necessary, given that there are some biblical words or concepts, which may not make sense in the mother tongue.⁸⁷ Taking the principle of dynamic equivalence for granted is disastrous. It is certain that "a translation involves interpretation" (Sanneh 1989: 195), hence the way we translate Scripture presupposes a new interpretation. However, some biblical words may not have a word to fit them, and translating them literally may proffer an interpretation different from that offered by the language from which the translation is made. Sanneh makes this very clear

⁸⁶ The Willowbank report asserts that the principal of the dynamic equivalence involves changing the form in order to preserve the meaning. The report further notes that form and meaning go together in every communication. The meaning encompasses what we say and the form comprises of how we say it. The report thus observed "the attempt to produce...a 'dynamic equivalence' translation may well bring the translator to a deeper understanding of Scripture, as well as make the text more meaningful to people of another language" (The Willowbank report 1978: 8). The study uses the principle of the dynamic equivalence following the understanding of the Willowbank report.

⁸⁷ Sanneh 1989: 192–197 explains several words of certain West African communities (and indeed there are many other words from other different communities all over the world), which need to be translated using the principle of the dynamic equivalence.

when he reveals that the word to ‘save’ in a part of West Africa means to ‘free’, which “had a sense of relief from physical labour” (: 194). Understanding the word ‘save’ in that light, “the children who attended missionary schools decided that their being ‘saved’ meant the right not to do any work on the roads or pay government taxes”. Citing Nida, he adds, “Hence, for most people, becoming a Christian and being ‘freed’ had no spiritual significance. They thought only of political and economical freedom...” (: 195; Cf. Nida 1952: 47f). Indeed, this was a new hermeneutics, emerging from the use of the mother tongue. However, if the principle of dynamic equivalence was put into practice, the spiritual salvation may have been incorporated into the people’s concept of political and economical liberation. In that case, the dynamic equivalence will enable the use of the mother tongue to correspondingly bring the Bible closer to the speech of the ordinary people, and to develop appropriate tools from the mother tongue.

The implication for doing hermeneutics and theology in the mother tongue is thus clear. All hermeneutical and theological literature ought to be written in the language of the people. It does not make sense to write something that should be read by the ordinary people in a language that clogs their conception of reality. This is indeed to “carefully seal their lives (*ordinary readers*) in a linguistic case” (wa Thiong’o 1993: 107). This in other words is to put the ordinary readers in a state of exile concerning their conception of reality in all ways, that is, socially, economically, politically and theologically. However, it must not appear that “writing in an African language ... is departing from what is normal and behaving in a manner that is abnormal”. (1993: 84). Moreover, writing to the ordinary readers in any other language apart from their mother tongue is an abnormality, which has been turned into normality. As observed, “that which is normal in all other civilisation, in all other societies, in all other phase of history is transformed into abnormality. Once reality is perverted so totally, everyone begins to see things upside-down” (wa Thiong’o 1993: 84). Indeed it is abnormal to write what is meant for the consumption of African ordinary readers in a European mother tongue, while it is only normal to write to them in their mother tongue. Writing in a European language to the ordinary African readers makes an African scholar “a writer in exile...already set aside from his people by his education and language choice” (1993: 107). Naturally, writing in the mother tongue

would be an exceedingly rewarding exercise of decolonising the African mind. This calls for the dismantling of the continued use of European languages to communicate to the ordinary readers, who do not need such languages because they do not understand them. In a manner of speaking, the continued writing of hermeneutical literature in foreign languages is in fact to create a hermeneutical wasteland, which must be reclaimed if hermeneutics is to have a future and significance in African Christianity.

It is significant to note that the use of the mother tongue in the hermeneutical discourse is necessary. Evidence points to the fact that in using the mother tongue, especially in the translation of the Bible, gave the Gikûyû Christians a new interpretative method. Their interpretation was both pastoral and political. In either way, the interpretation was directed to serve cultural and contextual needs. This shows how the Bible had penetrated into the Gikûyû existential aspirations⁸⁸. As observed, “Kikuyu Christians showed considerable latitude in interpreting and applying the Bible from the time Scriptures were available in their vernacular” (Karanja 1999: 129). This agrees with Ukpong’s observation that, having read the Bible in their language and with their eyes, the Africans discovered a Jesus whom their churches had not uncovered to them. They thus developed new questions, which have been, in most cases answered with “old worn out answers” (Ukpong 1995: 3). In that case, the use of the mother tongue opens new avenues of interpreting and translating the Scriptures. To be precise, the use of the mother tongue in translating and interpreting the Bible, and the ability of people to read the translations and interpretations in their mother tongue can enhance exciting and far-reaching discoveries. Indeed biblical translation provides the readers with basic interpretative tools. In view of this, a mother tongue translation must be very accurate, for an inaccurate translation may undervalue the meaning of the text. The very clear implication here is that it is imperative to have a clear understanding of the mother tongue, the language of the reader, and where possible, to have an understanding of the language of the context of the text. This is precisely so

⁸⁸ Jomo Kenyatta is on record to have used Hebrews 11:24f to call for unity among the Gikûyû people. This unity was to be preserved when they accepted that they were Gikûyû people. He thus appealed, “Thomai Wahibirania 11:24–25 mwone ûria Musa aregire gwitwo mwana wa mwarî wa Farao nî ûndû wa kwenda kûhonokia rurîrî rwake”- Read Hebrews 11: 24–25 and see how Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter so that he can save his people. (Cited from the *Mûigwithania*, a Gikûyû newspaper, located in the Kenya National Archives file, No. DC/MKS/10B/13/1).

because every “hermeneutic to a larger extent is bound to linguistics and therefore contextual” (Onwu 1985: 147)

The language factor in that case makes hermeneutics dynamic. Rightly observed,

Language is the soul of people, the secret into culture, philosophy of life and thought meaning patterns. It is through language that reality is distorted. It is important therefore to reinterpret the old language into contemporary language to enable converts to penetrate into the real meaning of the word of God.

(1985: 147).

It is therefore an authentic argument and a valid point to assert the significance of translating the Bible into the African languages, and the ability to read the same in the African languages. This has had a great influence to the African people for it facilitated “integrating the Biblical world view with that of the traditional African world view at all levels” (Parratt 1984:88). Croatto validates this position by concretely asserting, “in order to understand hermeneutics in all its wealth and methodological value, then it will behave us to approach it by way of the science of language” (Croatto 1987: 10). Similarly, Uduakobong asserts, “the starting point of the project of inculturation should be the language of the African people” (Uduakobong 1995: 6). This is indeed the ordinary language, the mother tongue, which enables human solidarity and communal living. By common consent,

The ordinariness of religious language and the common purpose around which believers gather are significant for what promotes and defines the worthwhileness and wholesome of human solidarity. That we understand what Scripture say, and in a language common to all, is a principle also for authentic human community.

(Sanneh 1989: 202).

The use of the mother tongue thus equips the Scripture with terms of familiarity. Indeed the principle of dynamic equivalence will enhance hermeneutics even to handle words and concepts in the mother tongue, which do not have a direct equivalent with the biblical words and concepts. This implies that both the trained and ordinary readers ought to have an intimate grasp of the concepts, words and their usage in the mother tongue. This will indeed make hermeneutics alive, hence guaranteeing its future and significance.

6:4 Conclusion.

There can be no gainsaying that the future and significance of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview depends on its engagement with the ordinary readers in their context and in the use of the mother tongue. This is principally placing the biblical message in the context where people live. It is also a process of bringing the Bible closer to the speech of the ordinary readers. The use of the mother tongue provides an opportunity for engaging with the ordinary readers in their context. Moreover, the engagement with readers in their context and the use of the mother tongue are indispensably intertwined. Without one, you do not have the other, hence killing hermeneutics. However, engagement with the readers in their context and the use of mother tongue will thus ensure to hermeneutics the inculturation and contextualisation that it seeks. The engagement with readers in their context and the use of mother tongue understandably promotes “the solidarity of biblical scholars and theologians with the poor and the marginalized” (West 1999(c): 38). In that case, the role played by the ordinary reader and by the trained readers is of equal importance. It would be self-defeating to belittle or to amplify the role of either the trained or the ordinary reader. None is superior or inferior to the other. However, what the trained reader knows must not be used as a weapon against the ordinary reader. Neither should the ordinary reader consider what the trained reader has, as irrelevant to his/her context. The trained readers must observe the same. The trained readers must learn how the ordinary people articulate and live their faith. Indeed the ordinary and trained readers need to be interdependent on each other. This is possible when they are socially engaged with the ordinary readers in their context and can communicate in the mother tongue, the language of the ordinary readers.

However, the interdependency between the trained and ordinary readers is not as simple as put. West rightly observes that, “such a talk of an interdependency between biblical scholars and ordinary readers of the Bible from the poor and marginalized communities can be threatening and unsettling in the corridors of the academy, and it certainly involves risk” (West 1999(c): 55). However, this is a necessary risk to be taken for it offers a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview a future and significance. A hermeneutical method that eschews human suffering and oppression and demands for the

attainment of the abundant life must definitely take the risk. It is indeed a significant undertaking to seek “to recognize the necessity of interdependence and a need for ‘an ethic of risk’” (1999(c): 55) as the struggle for the realisation of the abundant life continues. Engagement with people in their context and the use of the mother tongue instantaneously and perfectly guarantees the future of hermeneutics. They make hermeneutics to be substantially committed to an approach, “which vigilantly foregrounds both the readings and resources of socially engaged biblical scholars and the readings and the resources of the poor and the marginalized” (West 1999:55). The resources at the disposal of the poor and the marginalised ordinary readers are precisely more valuable than ever before. Engagement with people in their context and the use of the mother tongue will indeed bring the resources of the ordinary readers to the forefront. This is pressing given that God’s word is intended “for ordinary people; it is not to be regarded as the preserve of the scholars; the central truths of salvation are plain for all to see...The task of understanding Scriptures belongs not just to individuals but to the whole Christian community” (*The Willowbank Report* 1978:10f). This is exactly what the engagement with people in their context and the use of mother tongue pursues: to make hermeneutics the affair of the community of faith, a community whose constituents are the trained and the ordinary readers.

Chapter 7 Conclusion.

The antecedent chapters have answered the formulated problem; could it be that the previous hermeneutical methods have failed to make the Gospel adequately communicable to the African Christians so that there is need for a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview? The background and motivation of this study offered in the introductory chapter set the pace of the inquiry by an assertive observation that the historical critical method and the reactionary methods towards it have not engaged the full measure of the African reality. In view of this, a need for another hermeneutical method that would engage the full measure of African reality has been established. Such a hermeneutical method should be generated and shaped by the primal worldview, which is basic and foundation to a people's conception of reality. This therefore led to the identification of the evidence, which leads to the quest that would empower the primal worldview to shape hermeneutics. The history of the expansion of Christianity and the phenomenology of religion have been identified as providing evidence that biblical hermeneutics has succeeded in places where the primal worldview has not been dilapidated. The history of Christianity points out that the Gospel was communicated with terms agreeable to the receiving peoples' primal worldview. However, the missionary Christianity neglected this phenomenon in Africa through a systematic demonisation of the African primal worldview. Yet this was in the complete opposite of the phenomenology of religion, which the Christian faith does not overrule. On the whole, Christianity has certainly grown in places where primal religion and worldview have enable people to come to terms with the Christian faith. Harold Turner's six feature analysis of the primal religions clearly indicates how the same can be used to explicate not only Christianity, but also what the Bible has to say to peoples' conception of reality. The history of the expansion of Christianity and the phenomenology of religion offers evidence that the primal worldview has aided hermeneutics to correspond with the peoples' conception of reality.

The study went further, seeking to establish the operating principles of a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. The operating principles have been disclosed as two-fold. The first operating principle is the significance of the postulate of affinity

between the Bible and the primal worldview. This is the affinity between God, human beings, non-human creation, spirit and the spirit world. Nevertheless, the Bible and the primal worldview accept that a relationship between the above is vital for the realisation of the abundant life. In that case, hermeneutics must cultivate this relationship. This is possible by maintaining the hermeneutical circle, whose point of entry is from the perspective of the primal worldview. The second is the use of tools from the primal worldview. These tools form the oral tradition hence manifold, but the study has only considered proverbs and stories. The proverbs and the stories show how the Gîkûyû, and indeed other African people conceive reality. The proverbs embody the wisdom of life, which is essential in interpreting the real life experiences that the stories portray. These therefore can provide windows into the world of meaning of the Scriptures. Proverbs and stories would thus expose the scripture as the deposit of wisdom for life, hence reliable in addressing challenges unfolding in the real life experiences and situations. The Bible as the divine book of life can therefore be read and interpreted in accordance to peoples' conception of reality. The reading and interpretation of the Bible will henceforth become the imparting of the wisdom-of-life and a story-telling exercise. The study therefore holds that tools from the primal worldview, which have always aided hermeneutics to correspond with people's conception of reality, enhances the mastering of the Bible. This can have far reaching effects in Africa because of the affinity between the Bible and the African primal worldview.

The analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews has demonstrated a congenial scriptural interpretation from the perspective of the primal worldview. The writer of the epistle interprets the Gospel of Christ from the perspective of the primal worldview, which is both Jewish and Hellenistic. The study has shown that themes of the epistle are only intelligible from the perspective of the primal worldview. This is because the epistle's conception of reality is essentially primal. The primal apprehension of reality enables the apprehension of the epistle; hence there is no need of demythologising it in order to understand it. The primal apprehension of reality enhances the grasp of the epistle as we have received it.

The missionaries operating from a framework designed by the Enlightenment have been

blamed for making hermeneutics in African Christianity deviate from the conventional mode of reading the Scriptures according to the way a people conceive reality. As a result, the African Christians have *ad infinitum* engaged the Scriptures with different hermeneutical methods, which do not engage the full measure of the African reality. There is consequently no controversy that there is need for a hermeneutical method that would engage the African reality in totality. This method must approach the Bible from the perspective of the primal worldview. However, the study could not escape examining the relationship of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview and the previous hermeneutical methods. The evidence of majority scholars suggests that the historical-critical method cannot “deal with the kind of questions that are relevant to the African context, and also because they lack even the means to enter into those problems” (Parratt 1995: 194). The method does not have adequate tools, which can engage the full measure of the African reality. It is only famous for its inability “to deal from the inside with the problem of the oppressed and the poor” (1995: 196). The study has revealed the hermeneutics of liberation as striking a sympathetic note with the poor and the oppressed. Yet poverty and oppression are not the only calamity facing the Africans. There is also cultural erosion, which the hermeneutics of inculturation gives a strident appeal. The hermeneutics of liberation and of inculturation have significance in the hermeneutical discourse and they cannot be jettisoned. The same applies to the historical-critical method.

Parratt has unmistakably unearthed their significance. On the historical-critical method, which seeks too understand the original meaning of the text, he reveals,

The basic task of hermeneutics has traditionally been understood to tackle the questions of what the text meant to its original readers. Only when this question has been answered can existential questions of ‘what does it mean to me here and now’ be attempted. To by pass the stage of original meaning, in so far as it is recoverable, is to cut the biblical teaching loose from its roots, and may lead to some quaint and even perverse interpretations, and such a method may be used to justify things that are fundamentally a-Christian.

(Parratt 1995: 204).

It is therefore certain that if a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview avoids the historical-critical method, it may fit the readers into an ideological straightjacket and fail to do justice to the Bible as well as to the African reality. In that case, the historical-critical method cannot be avoided. On the other hand, Parratt notes the

importance of the reader response hermeneutics. Concerning liberation and inculturation, he observes

Categories such as these are theological in the truest sense, and provide a link point between the Bible and some central concerns of Christian theology in Africa. Exegesis along these lines do not merely isolate proof texts, nor does it proceed along debatable hermeneutical method; it seeks rather, an in-depth examination of biblical teaching within certain central areas of theological concerns that are of immediate relevance to Christianity in Africa.

(Parratt 1995: 206).

It is therefore clear that the previous hermeneutical methods can allow an in-depth examination of biblical teachings in African Christianity. Nevertheless, since the three hermeneutical methods operate on three different levels, using different approaches to the text and context, neither of them can engage the African reality in totality. While the historical-critical method distances the reader from the Bible, the reader response hermeneutics may read into the text the interpreters' insinuations, which are unduly influenced by the context of reception.

Nonetheless, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can use the erstwhile hermeneutical methods, but now as servants and not as masters. This means that by using them, each method will be contributory to the hermeneutical discourse. On the other hand the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview will enable the recovery of spirituality and the spiritual view of life, which the former hermeneutical methods do not consider seriously. Also by using the former methods as tools, the method generated by the primal worldview will address the religio-cultural and the socio-economical/political context of the African people as a united whole. The method will avoid dichotomising the African reality from the sacred and the secular. It will exemplify an approach to the Bible that is holistic. The method will therefore not neglect any aspect of life, for it pursues the realisation of the abundant life. West observation concerning his re-membering concept is relevant to a hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. As a matter of principle, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview must take

Whatever tools and resources ...at hand, wherever they come from, whether indigenous or imported, and use them to sabotage and subvert dominant readings, to make new things

out of old things, to find new truths in unexpected and familiar places, to redefine reality, to empower, to inspire.

(West 1999(c): 99).

It is therefore clear that the former hermeneutical methods' failure to engage the full measure of the African reality paved way for another hermeneutical method. This method generated by the primal worldview, considering the evidence so far adduced, can communicate the Gospel of Christ adequately, and hence is needed.

The hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview can thus perfectly engage the full measure of African reality. However, the study has taken time to assess the future and the significance of the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview. The findings suggest that this method will only have a future and significance if and when it engages the ordinary readers in their context. Its future and significance also depends on its ability to use the mother tongue. The use of the mother tongue has indeed enabled the Gîkûyû Christians to have a deeper grasp of the Scriptures. With the translation of the Bible into the Gîkûyû mother tongue, the Agîkûyû used the same to boost their religious, social, political and economical aspirations. In that case, the trained readers must be converted into using mother tongue, and conceiving reality in primal categories. The trained readers can foster the growth of African Christianity if they now begin writing their theological and hermeneutical discourse in their mother tongue in order that the ordinary readers can read and understand the same. This will indeed give to hermeneutics all the possibilities of engaging the full measure of African reality, conceived in the context the ordinary readers reside, using their mother tongue. Hermeneutics will be henceforth appreciable to both the ordinary readers and the trained readers, who can communicate with each other in mother tongue.

From the foregoing, the study concludes that the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview stands at a privileged position more than any other previous hermeneutical method in African Christianity. Considering the facts so far adduced, the method could engage the full measure of the African reality. This is because it will look into all that intersect and interact with the human life, using all tools at its disposal. On the other hand, it will not appear into peoples' context with a pre-packaged interpretation. At

any rate, any hermeneutical endeavour that appears to a peoples' context with a pre-packaged interpretation cannot deliver. In a manner of speaking, "it is only by active, loving engagement with the local people, thinking in their thought patterns, understanding their worldview, listening to their questions and feeling their burdens..." (*The Willowbank Report* 1978:14), that hermeneutics can respond to their needs and aspirations. This means hermeneutics will indeed sustain and maintain the Bible as a "significant text that has shaped and will continue to shape our social reality" (West 1998(b): 629) and indeed the totality of African reality. While engaging the full measure of the African reality, the hermeneutical method generated by the primal worldview "will also generate new knowledge of the Bible" (1998(b): 630). Even so, this method can transform biblical studies so as to be fully and directly engaged with the full measure of the African reality. It is certainly a necessary hermeneutical method in African Christianity, a fact that the antecedent chapters bear witness to and demonstrate.

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