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This is part of my Master's thesis that deals with the Rise of African Biblical

Scholarship

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

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

Phase 3:1990's

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

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process of academic interpretation of the Bible. This orientation finds support in Mugambi's assertion that Africans have responded to the gospel in their own way "and only God is justified to pass judgement on the appropriation of the gospel by Africans" (MUGAMBI 1995:xiii).

Ukpong refers to Gerald West's *Contextual Bible Study* method as an example of this orientation. The other orientation seeks both to recognize the role of the ordinary reader as well as to make the African context the subject of Biblical interpretation, and is exemplified by *Inculturation Hermeneutics*. In this phase, therefore, the African context is seen as both "providing the critical resources for Biblical interpretation and as being the subject of interpretation" (UKPONG 1999:324).

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

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

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

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reality from the perspective of the poor and marginalized, we shall have begun to take part in the process of contextual Bible study, and we should be ready to take the second commitment of that process.

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

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

Through the contextual Bible study process, West attempts to deal with the above temptations by reading the Bible *with* ordinary readers. This means that we as trained readers should acknowledge and recognize the privilege and power that our training give us over the group. We must strive to “empower ordinary readers in the group to discover and then to acknowledge and recognize their own identity and the value and significance of their own contributions and experiences” (WEST 1993:16). He notes, very importantly, that readers of the Bible from the poor communities have usually had their interpretations silenced and ignored by the dominant interpretations as their own. So when we read the Bible with ordinary readers we must work together to break the “culture of silence” and to recover the identity and experiences of the poor and oppressed (ibid). When we talk to each other, recognizing the unequal power relations between us, we become able to construct transforming discourse. The process of *reading with* can only prevail if both trained and ordinary readers become active “subjects” in the reading process. West asserts that in the contextual Bible study process the trained readers need not feel

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guilty about their theological and Biblical training, while the ordinary readers must be able to speak with their own voice irrespective of how different this voice is from the dominant voices.

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

West suggests that whereas "community consciousness" is crucial to the process of contextual Bible study, equally important is "critical consciousness" (WEST 1993:18). He explains that a "critical consciousness" enables us to probe beneath the surface, to become suspicious of the status quo, and ask (especially) the question "Why?" This probing includes "systematic and structured analysis" (ibid). A famous statement by Don Helder Camara provides West with an example of critical consciousness "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint; when I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist" (op.cit.:19). It is thus not good enough to accept that the poor have no food; rather, this reality must be probed. While many South Africans from poor and marginalized communities are critically conscious in socio-political matters, not many of the same people have a critical consciousness in the area of their faith. West points out that very few Christians in Africa ask questions about their theologies and their

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readings of the Bible. He concedes that we do not analyse systematically the way Christian tradition has affected our context, yet “the Christian faith has had both a profound oppressive and liberatory effect on our context” (ibid). Critical consciousness, therefore, is a commitment to the contextual Bible study process that could be developed by beginning to read the Bible critically thus help to build a critical church and community that can play a vital role in analysing the past and present and shaping the future. This would be a small, but significant contribution towards constructing a more critical society.

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

The need for this investigation is borne by the fact that throughout history the Bible and its interpretations have been used to oppress and exploit ordinary people. The apartheid theology in South Africa is an example of such abuse of the Bible. West laments the fact that some trained readers, on realizing that the Bible was being used to oppress African people ended up rejecting or abandoning the Bible. He advocates that trained readers continue to read and appropriate the Bible since the Bible is a significant resource for ordinary people “in their struggle of survival, liberation and life,” and it is “a symbol of the presence of the God of life” (WEST 1999:9). He asserts that it is important “to stand in continuity with and to bear witness to the suppressed

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voices within the Bible and the neglected interpretations of the Bible” (WEST 1993:20-21).

West warns that if we do not explore liberating and transformative ways of reading the Bible in our context we will be abandoning the Bible to those who use it to legitimate oppression, exploitation and domination. He adds that we need to honour the memory of our forebears in the Bible who have struggled for the values of the community of God. West contends that the faithfulness of our forebears to God’s calling provides us with a “dangerous memory” which reminds, challenges and empowers us to continue to find critical and creative methods of reading the Bible in and for our context (ibid).

The ideological nature of the Bible brings out an interestingly conflicting set of viewpoints from Gerald West and Takatso Mofokeng: West argues that it is dangerous to become selective in our reading by picking and choosing what fits our perspective and ignoring what does not; while Mofokeng argues that there are texts that have long disqualified themselves in the eyes of the oppressed people (MOFOKENG 1988:37). Mofokeng rejects the notion of the unity of the Bible, arguing that some texts lend themselves to only oppressive tendencies, because of “their inherent oppressive nature” (ibid). West counters by saying that selective reading is not a critical reading of the Bible. He contends that if we read the Bible critically, “we can and should read any and every part of the Bible” (WEST 1993:21).

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

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

West asserts that the commitment to personal and social transformation through contextual Bible study is usually an integral part of Bible study (op.cit:23). He notes that the Bible is already a resource for transformation for many ordinary readers since they have shown a remarkable willingness and ability to appropriate and apply the Bible to reality. West, however, is quick to point out two areas of concern within this willingness to read the Bible for transformation: One is the tendency to appropriate and apply the Bible uncritically as has been the case in South Africa and elsewhere, which can be both “dishonest and dangerous” (ibid). He cites apartheid theology as an example of a process of Biblical appropriation and application which is both dishonest and dangerous. It is dangerous, because it has led to brutal oppression, callous exploitation, untold suffering and death; and it is dishonest in that it (ab)uses the Bible selectively for narrow, selfish interests. It is in this light that West cautions that while embracing the readiness of ordinary readers to appropriate and apply the Bible to the South African context, the process of contextual Bible study emphasizes the need for it to be done critically. “Reading the Bible critically is the first step in a critical appropriation and ‘reading’ our context critically is the second step” (ibid). We are able to appropriate the Bible more carefully only when we study the Bible systematically and analyse our context systematically, because then we can identify both the similarities and differences between the Bible and its context on the one hand, and ourselves and our context on the other. West reckons that appropriation is the most important part of the process of contextual Bible study (ibid). The other concern that West points out is that our willingness to read the

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Bible for transformation should include both the personal and the social. He refers to some contexts in South Africa, for example in white churches and communities, where Christians have concentrated on individual transformation, and in other contexts, for example in black trade union movement, where Christians have concentrated on socio-politico-economic transformation (op.cit:24). He is supported by Villa-Vicencio, who argues that “sin is not to be confined to people’s relationship with God or even relationships with their neighbours. It is seen also to be embedded in the structures of society itself” (DE GRUCHY & VILLA-VICENCIO[eds] 1994:190-191). Consequently, salvation includes liberation from oppressive and unjust social, economic and political structures, which are a manifestation of social or structural sin (ibid). Hence, the engagement of the church in socio-politico-economic matters “lies at the heart of its evangelical and salvific mission” (ibid). The process of contextual Bible study, as West contends, is committed to both personal and social transformation that “includes the existential, the political, the economic, the cultural, and the religious spheres of life” (WEST 1993:24).

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

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

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

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Inculturation Hermeneutics has become a very popular hermeneutic, and Mugambi points out that the term *inculturation* was coined recently by Catholic theologians “to explain the process by which the Catholic Church becomes rooted in every culture, without destroying Catholic ecclesiastical identity, tradition and history” (MUGAMBI 1995:8). He adds that the semantic inspiration of *inculturation* is incarnation (ibid). The latter, in theological terms, is the manifestation of the divine in human corporeality – God becoming manifest in Jesus of Nazareth. Similarly, “inculturation is the manifestation of the Church in the various cultures where it has been introduced and established” (ibid). Tracing the history of inculturation to Jesuit theologians in the early 1960’s, Mugambi quotes Aylward Shorter’s definition of inculturation as “the on-going dialogue between faith or cultures” (op.cit:9). The inculturation hermeneutic, notes Ukpong, refers to Biblical interpretation which seeks to make the African context, and any socio-cultural context fort that matter, the subject on interpretation (UKPONG 1995:5). This hermeneutic is different from those which makes another context the subject of interpretation and then apply the result in the African context. It is also different from that which reads the context into the Biblical text. Ukpong points out that the central concern of the inculturation hermeneutic is to make Jesus and his message challenge contemporary society and the life of individuals. It seeks to find the meaning of Christian life in the African socio-cultural context in the light of the gospel message. Ukpong sums up the many questions raised by this hermeneutic thus: “how to make the word of God alive and active in contemporary African societies and in the lives of individual Christians within their socio-cultural contexts” (op.cit:4). He cites the five components of the interpretation process: interpreter, context, text, conceptual framework and procedure, which he asserts, “are consciously informed by the world-view of, and the life experience within”, a particular socio-cultural context that has been made the subject of interpretation (ibid).

Ukpong points out that the inculturation hermeneutic focuses on “the reader/interpreter and his/her context in relation to the text and its context” (op.cit:5). He cites Barton’s classification of modern Biblical criticism into those that focus on the text, those that focus on the historical events narrated in the text, those that focus on the writer(s) of the text, and those that focus on the reader (ibid). Ukpong asserts that the inculturation hermeneutic falls under the last group, but he explains that “reader” should be understood as “reader-in-context”, meaning the reader

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who consciously takes his or her socio-cultural context as a point of departure in the reading, and who is part of the Christian community whose world-view and life experience he or she shares.

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

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

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

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

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

While this may refer to the Biblical text to be interpreted, it also refers to the theme of the text to be interpreted. Ukpong points out that the focus of interpretation is on “the theological meaning of the text within a contemporary context” (ibid). The interpretation involves interactive engagement between the Biblical text and a particular contemporary socio-cultural matter such that the gospel message serves to critique the cultures, and the culture perspective enlarges and enriches the understanding of the text. An integrated view of reality is maintained in the hermeneutical process in such a way that religious issues are not discussed separate from their secular dimension in implications, and vice-versa. Texts are interpreted holistically in inculturation hermeneutic, which interpretation may be said to rotate on the following axes: “the inner logic of the text; the immediate, mediate and larger literary context of the text; the historical context of the text; and the contemporary context of the interpreter” (UKPONG 1995:7). Inculturation hermeneutics puts emphasis on a careful analysis of the structure of the argument or narrative in the text in order to grasp the inner logic of the text. Studying the text within its literary context, which is the next axis, is based on the fact that text is not seen as independent of the larger whole to which it belongs, nor is the Bible seen as the sum total of its parts. Rather, Ukpong notes, a text is seen as “a living component in the interactive process of interpretation” (ibid), and must therefore be understood as an integral part of the whole. Possible

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lapses into overly subjective and skewed understanding of the text are avoided if we study a text in this way, thus giving a balanced theology. Another axis is the historical context of a text, where again the text is not seen as an isolated entity, but as belonging to a particular historical socio-cultural context. Hence, an important step in interpretation is analysis of the socio-cultural context of the text. This is vital for determining the particular orientation the text, and giving a historical perspective to the text without which it is impossible to make a clear assessment of the Biblical “world” that made the text meaningful in the first place (ibid). A careful analysis of the historical socio-cultural context of the text is thus important for making the text resonate in the present context. Ukpong emphasizes that the strongest and most specific feature of the inculturation hermeneutics is critical analysis of the interpreter’s context, which has already been discussed above. He cautions, though, that this is not merely reading the interpreter’s context into the text or reflecting it in the interpretation. A critical analysis of the interpreter’s context enables him or her to be conscious of the influences that impact on his or her reading of the text and to utilize them positively and thus exercise control over them. It also helps him or her to understand the text in a contemporary setting. Ukpong argues that “a text is not an archeological specimen, but a living reality capable of coming into interaction with a contemporary context to transform it and forge history” (UKPONG 1995:7). To interpret a text, therefore, means placing it into interaction with our world and with our personal being to address and question them.

Ukpong reckons that the exegetical conceptual framework, together with its procedure, is the most important component of the interpretation process (ibid). The framework is a “mental construct” within which the exegete is trained, into which he or she grows and with which he or she operates (ibid). Exegetical frameworks are geared towards certain areas of concern about the Biblical text and include the historical-critical method, literary criticism, and liberation hermeneutics. The inculturation hermeneutics emerged as an attempt to respond to questions and issues emanating from the African Christian experience with the Bible which present exegetical frameworks are unable to handle adequately. Ukpong points out that all exegetical frameworks comprise theoretical assumptions “which frame the understanding of exegesis, its operation, and condition the exegete in his/her activity” (UKPONG 1995:8). He cites as an example the framework of the historical-critical method, within which the aim of exegesis is recovery of history, that is, the historical context of a text, its historical meaning, and wherein the exegete

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applies historical tools to a text. In this instance, it is assumed that a text can only have one meaning, and that is the meaning, which was intended by the writer and could have been understood by the writer's first audience. Within this framework, therefore, literary questions such as the structural relationship among characters in a text are regarded as irrelevant (ibid). Thus, the framework within which the exegete is working conditions him or her as to the type of questions he or she may put to the text and come up with a satisfactory answer. Ukpong deduces that ultimately, the exegetical framework is the product of certain cultural factors: "the assumptions of any framework are derived from the basic assumptions of a particular culture / cultures about reality and the collective and shared personal experiences in the culture / cultures at a particular time" (op.cit:8).

Basic cultural assumptions on which inculturation hermeneutic is based, for the purpose of this study, are observed in the African context. While conceding that there is a multiplicity of African cultures, Ukpong nevertheless argues that there are at least four identifiable aspects that are common to all African world-views and that belong to the root paradigm of African cultures. These aspects constitute the basic cultural assumptions on which the theory of inculturation hermeneutic is grounded, and they are: the unitive view of reality wherein reality is seen not as composed of matter and spirit, profane and sacred, secular and religious, but as a unity with visible and invisible aspects (UKPONG 1995:8; 1999:325). The world is seen as a unity having visible and invisible dimensions, and the human being is not seen as composed of body and soul, but rather as a single being with visible and invisible dimensions. The dead are regarded as human persons who currently exist in the invisible realm of the world, which means they inhabit the same world with visible humans, but are invisible (ibid). The spirits, both good and bad, also inhabit the same world with visible human beings, but are unseen by humans. The spirits and the dead interact freely with human beings, but are unseen. The second basic feature of African world-views is the divine origin of the universe and the interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos (UKPONG 1995:9). The whole universe is seen as participating in the one life of God, and there is supposed to exist a web of relationships between God, humanity and the cosmos wherein the human being is at the centre such that the conduct of human beings affects not only their relationship with one another, but also with God and nature (ibid).

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

All the above cultural assumptions lie at the basis of the African’s experience of the Bible, and they inform the understanding and methodology of the inculturation hermeneutics. The African commuter-train worshipper naturally brings these cultural assumptions into the reading and interpretation of the Bible.

Methodological Presuppositions. There are certain presuppositions about the nature of the Bible and the goal of exegesis, with which the inculturation hermeneutic framework operates, which Ukpong explains. The Bible, in the framework of inculturation hermeneutic, is seen as “a sacred classic...a book of devotion, the word of God containing norms for Christian living as well as an ancient literary document ‘worth attention beyond its time’” (UKPONG 1995:9). Interpretation focuses on the interface between these two categories and on the theological meaning of the text for today. The goal of exegesis is thus to actualize the theological meaning of the text in contemporary context. Since the Bible is an ancient document, attention to the historical context of the text being interpreted is required of the exegete. The latter is required to employ the

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historical-critical tools. These tools should be used precisely as servant and not as master, because it is the theological meaning of the text which is sought and not its historical context.

Since the Bible is a sacred religious book, the presence of the miraculous and the supernatural in it is taken for granted. The Biblical text is seen within the inculturation hermeneutic framework as “plurivalent” – capable of yielding many different, yet valid meanings depending on the point of departure of reading it (ibid). However, Ukpong warns of the possibility of correct and wrong readings of texts, because, firstly, any meaning derived from a text has to be judged in the light of the meaning of the whole Bible and, secondly, the theology of any text has to be judged “against the basic biblical affirmations and principles” such as the love of God and neighbour and the existence of God as creator and provider (UKPONG 1995:10). An Ukpong further point out that the meaning of a text is not seen as concealed in the history of the text, but is seen as “a function of the interaction of the contemporary context with the text and its context” (ibid). The meaning is seen as emerging, within a contemporary context, from the nature of the interaction and relationships among the role players in the text in the light of its historical context. In other words, the meaning of the text is revealed by the way in which the interaction and the interrelationship among the different role players in the text seen against its context resonate in our context. This means that both the context of the text and the reader play a crucial role in the production of meaning. “Inculturation hermeneutic sees the Bible as a document of faith and therefore demands entry into and sharing the faith of the Biblical community expressed in the text” (ibid).

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

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The first step in the process of interpretation is to identify the specific context of the interpreter which corresponds or approximates dynamically to the historical context of the text, and then clarify the interpreter's perspective in relation to the text. In the same way as "dynamically equivalent" words are used to translate the Biblical text in the absence of exact equivalents, "dynamically equivalent" contexts are used to mediate the message of the text in the absence of exact equivalent contexts (ibid). Identifying the interpreter's specific context and perspective involves interaction between the total context of the interpreter and the historical context of the text. The reader has to ask what socio-cultural, political, economic or religious situation the text reflects, and what situation in the reader's context approximates to it. Using historical research, the reader finds out how and why the text would have been significant and meaningful in its historical context, and what concerns in the reader's context this reflects. Ukpong uses the parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1ff) where a historical research reveals widespread corruption and exploitation in Palestine at the time of Jesus' earthly life reflects in the parable. The interpretation process would next identify a comparable situation of exploitation in a contemporary context. Another example is the story of the woman who suffered from bleeding (Luke 8:40ff).

The second step analyses the context of interpretation; and the interpreter's context forms the background against which the text is to be read. The context of the interpreter – identified in the first step – is analysed at five levels, which Ukpong points out, may not all be required in all instances. Using the basic assumptions of the inculturation framework in the analysis, the level of phenomenological analysis seeks to clarify the identity of, say, the shrewd manager, and this would involve a clarification of the particular issue of exploitation against which the text is to be interpreted. Ukpong cites the example of West Africa, where cases of middlemen produce traders who exploit peasant farmer through low pricing of farm produce and charging huge interest rates on agricultural loans (op.cit:11). In the case of woman suffering from bleeding this would mean clarifying the identity of the woman and the inability to get a cure for a similar ailment in contemporary Africa context, especially since cases like these are very real to African readers. The socio-anthropological analysis seeks to explain the issues in terms of the people's world-view (ibid). In the case of the parable of the shrewd manager this would mean an analysis of the people's world-view in respect of exploitation. Ukpong points out, for example, that the

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West African traditional world-view regards material possessions as God's gift to the community, and they detest exploitation (ibid). In the case of the woman suffering from bleeding, attention would focus on the consequences of such ailment in a contemporary African woman's social and religious life. Ukpong observes that the first thing to strike an African reader is that for the twelve years that the woman had this ailment she could not bear children. Therefore the misfortune of not bearing children and other ailments associated with this in the community could be "dynamically" associated with this situation (ibid). The historical analysis investigates the issues in relation to the people's life history. In the parable of the shrewd manager this would mean finding out how exploitation came into being in the society despite it being distasteful to the people's traditional world-view. Ukpong points out that the case of the bleeding woman does not warrant historical analysis. The social analysis probes into the interconnectedness of the dynamics of the society in relation to the issue. The question is how the situation is connected to other aspects of society – political, economic or religious – and how it is being maintained in existence by the dynamics of the society. In the case of the parable of the shrewd manager this question is asked about exploitation, while in the case of the bleeding woman the question becomes that of the socio-cultural effect of the situation in the lives of the people. In the parable of the shrewd manager the religious implications of exploitation would be probed, while in the case of the bleeding woman the religious implications of the ailment would be probed.

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

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The fourth step analyses the text in the light of the contemporary context that has already been analysed. This step could begin with a critical review of current interpretations, and follow with a textual analysis employing different tools depending on the nature and motif of the text.

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

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The fifth step involves gathering together the fruits of the discussion and a commitment to actualizing the message of the text in a concrete life situation. Ukpong cautions that the above steps need not be followed slavishly in order in which they appear above, nor is it necessary to try to use all of them in actual exegesis since two steps could be telescoped into one. The interpreter will be guided by the nature of the text as to which order to follow. He emphasises, however, that it is important that “analysis of the context of interpretation is given at the beginning as it is what should condition the evaluation of the discussion in the other steps” (UKPONG 1995:13).

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

Conclusion Ukpong concurs with West that modern Biblical interpretation can conveniently be classified in three main approaches (UKPONG 1999:326; West 1995:131). One is the historical-critical approach which focuses on the historical background of the text, its writer and the original audience. This approach identifies the meaning of the text with the meaning originally intended by the authors. The second is the literary approach which focuses on the text

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