

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Actuality

Generally, studies in African religion include scanty references to prayer. Furthermore, although prayer is a primary phenomenon of religion, it has received less attention compared to other aspects of African religion (Heiler 1958:xiii; Mbiti 1975:1; Shorter 1975:1; Opefeyitimi 1988:27; Lindon 1990:205). In particular, prayer for protection occurs far in between. Similarly, an in-depth inquiry into *Lozi* prayer is long overdue. Hence, this investigation is a contribution to studies on *Lozi* religious prayer traditions.

African prayer has been perceived in many different ways. It is sometimes indistinguishable from verbal magic, particularly when the protective is emphasized (Sangree 1966:206). Others see it as an extension of the hierarchical relationship when ancestors are included. In contradistinction, African prayer and ancestor veneration are said to be true examples of prayer (Shorter 1975:2; Lindon 1990:224).

Prayer for protection is common to both biblical and African religious traditions. The cries of the psalmists to Yahweh for protection evidently parallel similar responses by different people of the world when faced by challenging situations and difficulties. During crises, life threatening circumstances, and devastating effects of famine, drought, war and disease, the natural response of the Israelites¹ as well as the Africans², is to implore the Supreme Being for intervention and assistance.

Since this research is conducted in the field of Biblical and Religious Studies, it is expedient that biblical traditions are considered. The Book of Psalms provides a premise for this investigation. Psalms are a collection of various types of songs and prayers. These prayers were addressed to Yahweh in search of answers to needs in various life

¹ See Mowinckel (1962:193); Crenshaw (2001:50); Bullock (2001:166).

² See Mainga (1972:96) and Mbiti (1990:14).

situations. In particular, the lament is a composition befitting such an attitude of requesting assistance from the high God, Yahweh. Amongst laments are certain prayers, which pertain to the aspect of seeking Yahweh's protection from imminent danger. This investigation focuses on protection as theme in the Psalms of trust and lament.

Psalms 91, 28, 64, 77, and 140 as exemplary is the point of departure followed by Psalms 28, 64, 77, and 140 are examined exegetically. The preference of Psalm 91 is based on its theological themes, clear confidence motif and strong presence of the enemy resulting in danger. Subsequently the other Psalms are dealt with according to their sequential order. At the centre of this pursuit is an attempt to highlight prayer during crises. This investigation therefore broadly portrays a perspective on the role of protection prayer in the Old Testament world.

The relation between Yahweh and his people led them to trust him and implore him in times of need (Clifford 2003:17). He, in turn, promised to be with them and to deliver them (Ps 91:14-16). Obviously, the psalmists did not only seek God when they were in distress but in good times too. As an exemplar, Psalm 91 is set in a situation that appears to be challenging. The psalmist declares his confidence in Yahweh's protection. When linked to Psalm 90, "The prayer of Moses", by following the literary context, it is possible to tentatively postulate a theme of prayer for protection to Yahweh in the midst of marauding forces. It is possible that the psalmist was disillusioned after the failure of Yahweh's promise and subsequent collapse of the monarchy in Psalm 89. In Psalm 90, the psalmist laments the lack of longevity in life, and in the succeeding Psalm 92, thanksgiving and praise are given to Yahweh for his faithfulness and works. Thus by taking into consideration the literary historical context, a picture of protection appears regarding Psalm 91. A similar thematic motif has been observed in the other selected texts.

The comparative part of this research is on the Lozi people of western Zambia. Missionaries came to the hinterland in the 1800s and subsequently propagated the Christian faith (Zorn 2004:19). The growth of Christianity has resulted in the diminishing of African Traditional Religion in this area. Today practitioners of African Traditional Religion constitute a rather insignificant percentage of the population, which cannot be easily determined (Barrett *et al* 2001:239).

The encroachment of Christianity has led to the demise of the African Traditional Religion. While this may be the case, religion is deeply engraved in the people's culture. This is demonstrable by the co-existence of Christianity and Islam with African Traditional Religion for over 1300 years in Africa (Thorpe 1991:3). It is thus difficult to imagine that transfer of thought never occurred between the two religions. The question therefore is to what extent has the African Traditional Religion influenced the believing Christian community? It is imperative to mention that even the translation of the Bible into vernaculars utilised indigenous terms and concepts (Sanneh 1989:174). Thus, translation has led to deep theological meaning on the part of the recipients (Barrett 1968:109). Similarly, the dependence and enthusiasm that African Christians express in prayer is to an extent related to their traditional background. In African Traditional Religion the community prays for rain before the planting season (especially when there is a drought), before hunting trips, during child delivery, sickness and so forth. This practice has been carried over and is expressed by many African Christians who seek God for virtually everything (Mbiti 1986:84). Positively, people must employ their cultures, worldviews, hopes, fears and experiences in appropriating the unchangeable Christian message centred on Jesus Christ (Mbiti 1975:19).

In preliminary research, it has become apparent that some scholars have conducted groundbreaking work on the African religious terrain. Mainga (1972) in *A history of Lozi religion* discusses elements of Lozi religion at length. Similarly, Mbiti (1975) in *The Prayers of African Religion* has written extensively about prayer in Africa. My study is distinct from Mainga's work since it takes into account a biblical perspective. Mainga's history of Lozi religion is restricted to the single Lozi tradition. Mainga does not deal with protection prayers extensively and only relates to them in the context of the history of Lozi religion.

In *The Prayers of African Religion* (1975) Mbiti provides a collection and analyses of prayers from different African societies. However, his attempt differs from my investigation in terms of its context. Mbiti's study is broad based and inclusive of various prayer genres. In addition, his scope is not limited to a single tradition but rather is a documentation of prayers from various African people. The present investigation on the other hand makes a consideration of Lozi prayer traditions in relation to the Psalms. Mbiti's effort is exhaustive; it covers many African societies and phenomena making his collection inevitably broad. However, it fails to bring forward distinguishable aspects of the African Traditional Religion

(Ray 1973:75-89; Turner 1981:11-13). African Traditional Religion is tribal and not universal. Furthermore, Africans are not homogenous in customs, histories and ideas (Mugambi 1994:3-4). Therefore, sweeping generalizations by Mbiti arising from an over-emphasis on the commonalities of African Traditional Religion are stretched (Pato 1997:53). At any rate, the apparent heterogeneity of the religious customs set in ethnic diversity is paled by the shared essence of spirituality embedded in the African way of life (Zahan 1979:2).

1.2 Problem Statement

In the quest to convert the Africans, certain cultural practices were discouraged or ultimately prohibited by the early missionaries (Dryness 1990:11; Kwenda 2002:160)³. Traditional local customs and institutions such as veneration of ancestors, tribal ceremonies, authority systems and polygamy, among others, were opposed and denigrated (Bediako 1995:25). It was reckoned that such practices are steeped in evil religious experiences, thus, they must be repudiated (Hiebert 1994:55-57). The result of these restrictions included Westernisation of converts. In some of these cases, converts were ostracised by their own people. Obviously, this negative impact resulted in disorientation of the converts⁴. In other cases, due to the foreignness⁵ of the new religion, some Africans resisted, as they were not ready to break away from their aged practices (Kwenda 2002:169). However, conversion to Christianity needs not imply rejection of traditional culture (La Roche 1968:289).

Another common phenomenon concerns the failure of Christian missionaries to address some of the cultural problems faced by their converts adequately. Equally, Western Hermeneutics lacks relevance specifically in addressing pressing problems in the African context (Adamo 2001:34). The official Church's mode of reading the Bible is faltered for failing to respond passably to the questions that African Christians are asking about their life in Christ and experience with the Bible (Ukpong 1995:4). It is common knowledge that

³ Robert Moffat is criticised for underestimating African religious traditions, introducing a Christianity cast in his background without considering adaptation. Such methods of the missionary enterprise caused cultural damage (Dryness 1990:11).

⁴ Both the resultant schizophrenic behaviour in the individual converts and the polarisation of groups between Christians and non-Christians in society is amply defined by Achebe (1958) *Things fall apart* and Wa Thiong'o (1965) *The River between*.

⁵ See Kraft (1979:308).

in certain instances some members of established churches go to consult with traditional medicine men and diviners secretly. This occurs largely due to the ineffectiveness of medical science and mission Christianity in diagnosing and prescribing remedies for some cultural psychological problems (Kraft 1979:305, 306; O'Donovan 1996:2).

As situations arise that force African people to seek assistance outside their abilities prayer offers an avenue to call on God and to request him for assistance. It is important to realise that African tribal people relate their experiences to the outer transcendent world. In the traditional African world-view, there is a close affinity between the living and the living dead (Mbiti 1975:75). Occurrences in life are not accidental. This means that there are forces beyond the natural realm, which constantly interfere in the different spheres of life (Ray 1987:68). There is a presence of spiritual beings potent with powers that are either malevolent or benevolent. This forces tribal people to search for answers from a Supreme Being and other intermediaries.

The choice of the Lozi people as the context for this research is **primarily** motivated by the fact that this researcher belongs to the same group. Given this reality, it is easy to appreciate and assess traditional views, customs and practices as an internal observer.

The **second** reason for choosing this topic relates to the researcher's past experience. It is not un-common to meet African Christians who revert to their indigenous remedies when faced with difficulties. The belief is that modern Western Science cannot cure certain ailments (Onunwa 1991:278-280). The weakness in Western solutions, for example in the face of psychological disorders, epidemics and natural calamities is the catalyst for seeking spiritual redress among new African religious movements (Jules-Rosette 1987:82). Equally, continued practice of African Traditional Religion, issues from the fact that it is deeply ingrained in their cultural fabric (Musasiwa 1993:65).

This study is **thirdly**, motivated by a need to collect and document some traditional prayers of the Lozi people. The result of this undertaking will be a contribution that could be utilised by posterity. By using indigenous knowledge systems, like the Lozi culture a data bank could be built for future scientific research.

Contextual issues are presently coming to the fore as Africans rediscover their own identity, cultural heritage coupled with resurgence of African Traditional Religion in this

ever-changing African and world community (Dryness 1990:39; Olowola 1993:7; Theron 1996:28). The positive results of the need to rediscover identity include the contribution of a wealth of knowledge to the field of Biblical and Religious Studies. Those cultural practices that were ignored could be carefully examined and utilised to enrich the African religious communities. To this end, the extent of inculturation in Africa has been minimal (Mbiti 1986:7). It follows that Biblical and Religious Studies ought to be relevant to the cultural and religious context of the community (Ukpong 2000:48). African people(s) must fill their own faith. Such an undertaking should consider both the past and the future aspects of Africans (Appiah 2003:55). However romanticising traditional values could overlook the unacceptable and oppressive elements in the culture (Ela 1986:126). This provides a **fourth** reason for the study.

The proliferation of African Independent Churches and their prevailing practice of seeking aid and guidance from the spiritual through designated church prophets is the **fifth** reason. Members of Independent Churches seek guidance and solutions to their pressing needs from such functionaries (Mbiti 1986:124). Although a consideration of African Independent Churches is out of the scope of this investigation, it is argued that the foregone experience is continued from African Traditional Religion. In African Traditional Religion, the diviner or healer is implored to assist in revealing the source of the problem in any given situation (Reynolds 1963:95). In this way spiritual, psychological, physical and material problems are resolved. The need to contact the spiritual arena and manipulate the future is a motivating factor for communicating with the ancestors either directly or indirectly by acquiring the services of a diviner (Mitchell 1977:30). By considering the prayer-practices in African Traditional Religion, this research endeavours to explore this practice further.

This investigation attempts to analyse prayer texts through a synchronic, diachronic and theological approach in conjunction with comparison of the two traditions under consideration. The model is a contribution to Biblical Studies. The development of various liberationist contextual epistemologies for hermeneutical purposes by African scholars necessitates this study. Thus, the application of the proposed methodology is the **sixth** reason for conducting this investigation.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The following are the aims of this study:

- to apply a comparative model through analysis between biblical and Lozi traditions regarding prayer for protection;
- to examine the different aspects of prayer namely function, motivation and settings with regard to protection in:
 - (i) Psalms 28; 64; 77; 91 and 140 and
 - (ii) Lozi religious traditions.

In each of the above references:

- to identify and examine the various elements of prayer for protection;
 - to reflect on the place of the Supreme Being in the given texts;
 - to examine the influence of the adversary and situations of danger necessitating prayer for protection;
 - to demonstrate the place of prayer for protection in both individual and corporate practices;
 - to highlight the role of intermediaries and cult officials;
- and in tandem reflect the results thereof as a starting point for dialogue between the aforesaid traditions and further research;
 - to contribute towards a data bank on Lozi prayer traditions and enrich understanding regarding prayer for protection in the two traditions;
 - to test the thesis that there is religious proximity between Old Testament and African beliefs and practices;
 - to provide aspects of Lozi historical background for the analysis of elements in selected prayers for protection.

1.4 Research methodology

1.4.1 Background

This research will primarily be a **literature study**.

Interpretation methods form a pertinent issue concerning theology in Africa. For a long time Biblical Studies was the domain of Western approaches to conducting exegesis. In the course of time contributions by African scholars such as Adamo, Ukpong and Mugambi have become invaluable. The major methods of performing exegesis, which have been utilised by some African scholars, are traditional Western approaches and contextual methods (Holter 2000:10, 18). Thus in Africa, Biblical Studies has benefited from various theories, contexts and praxis. These influences can be traced historically to three junctures, at which the Bible reached Africa - namely, precolonial, colonial and postcolonial periods. The precolonial era is identical with precritical reading. In the first centuries, North Africa was dominated by rhetorical and typological methods synonymous with elitist and ordinary readers respectively (Sugirtharajah 2001:31).

The colonial period witnessed the emergence of different approaches. In most cases, colonialists employed the Bible to inculcate their ideologies, encroach on indigenous cultures and displace native religious and cultural beliefs. In contra-distinction, indigenous people utilised the colonizers' paradigm subversively. They established cultural differences and affirmations of identity within the discursive territory of the imperialists (Sugirtharajah 2001:36). During the liberation struggle, for instance, **Liberationist approaches** were employed for protestation against political oppression (Frostin 1988:17). In South Africa, proponents of this method include Tutu and Boesak (West 1995:64). Similarly, African Independent Churches engage contextual methods in their endeavour to interpret biblical texts.

The postcolonial era is synonymous with indigenization, inculturation, vernacularization and contextualization. Postcolonial theory has impacted Biblical Studies in Africa. It is premised by the recovery of indigenous cultures and, it is attended by the renunciation of hegemonic Western approaches in favour of the elevation of the indigenous. Like Liberation Theology, it is fore-grounded in the marginalised poor. However, Postcolonial theory differs from Liberation Theology in its pluralistic view (Sugirtharajah 1991:3;

2001:250). On the other hand Liberation Theology is premised by a commitment to the Bible (Bosch 1991:439). Yet classical Liberation Theology with its commitment to eradication of poverty and privileging of the poor is a resource for African contextual models too.

1.4.2 Contextual approaches

Contextualization has played an important role in the formation of Third World and African approaches in particular (Fabella 2003:59). Modifications to the contextual method have been developed and proposed by various scholars. The contextual nature of African readings informed by differences in social, cultural, economic, political and religious conditions on the continent, have resulted in the development of various reading approaches (Asante 2001:366; Ukpung 2002:17). To demonstrate the point, four models are considered cursorily.

West (1999:9-19) provides a **variant of Liberation Theology** grounded in the South African context. It draws heavily from the inequalities caused by the political past. The experience of oppression is fundamental to the approach (Gutierrez 1974:9). The interlocutors of the method are primarily ordinary people defined as poor and marginalised sectors of society (West 1999:124).

There are two classes of readers in the model. The term reader signifies the shift in hermeneutics to the reader (Barton 1984:201-207; Lategan 1984:1-17; McKnight 1985:2, 3; Eagleton 1989:119-127). The first group comprises mostly of those who are illiterate and semi literate (West 1999:8). The second group is the socially engaged biblical scholar who reads critically. Indeed ordinary readers are comprised of the illiterate, unionised workers (Cochrane 1991:177-89), rural women who may not be directly affected by racial oppression, class and gender inequalities but carry the bulk of productive and reproductive responsibilities (Paton 1996:199-210) and the youth who dropped out of formal education to join the liberation struggle but since find themselves jobless.

West (1991:173) draws from Wimbush's African American analysis of the development of their methods of interpretation. Thus, he proposes a model for conducting Bible study that takes the reader's context seriously as a point of departure. Ordinary readers do not follow conventional rules (Moore 1989:85-93). Their reading is precritical. In many cases

they hear and remember the accounts without reading (Draper 1996:59-77; Mosala 1996:43-57). Thus, reading involves a communal process (Nthamburi & Waruta 1997:40-57). Their reading strategy, (although sometimes resembling certain processes), is unstructured and is not controlled by the literal, which makes their reading to resemble rewriting (Banana 1993:17-32). Therefore, their manner of reading involves looseness (Wimbush 1991:88, 89). The text is recreated, almost as though sabotaging dominant readings (Hendricks 1995:79; Fulkerson 1994:152, 153). At any rate, the Bible is highly valued as the 'Word of God' significant for life and survival. It follows that the Bible is symbolical almost magical (Ndungu 1997:62, 63; Yorke 1997:149-152).

Secondarily, the model is complimented through resources of biblical scholarship (West 1999:119). In this way, scholars and critical readers can be engaged in the process. In order to achieve these objectives, probing is conducted, highlighting the socio-historical, linguistic and literary contexts (West 1999:141) and, the suggested Bible study interface is further assisted through the aid of trained facilitators. In this way, the method enables trained readers to read the Bible with the untrained marginalised groups (West 1991:176; 1999:155).

Mugambi (1994:9-16) also proposes a model for **conducting theology** in Africa which is foregrounded in culture and traditional religious experience. This scheme is necessitated by the call for tackling interpretation through the employment of indigenous thought forms (Agbeti 1972:6-7). Coupled with a desire to break from imitating Western norms and the relevance of the church in modern Africa, Mugambi proposes that Africans must set the agenda for their own theologising. This model is underpinned by a methodical collection of data by different African societies to facilitate the interpretation.

In view of African history, liberation is the key objective for contemporary African theology. The term, liberation is specifically addressed to contextual issues in a way that in pre-independent Africa it meant political emancipation whereas in post-independent Africa it has varied references such as economical freedom. Other applications are dictated by historical manifestations. In addition, some fundamental concepts pertinent to the model include the idea of righteousness⁶, man⁷ and eschatology⁸.

⁶ Righteousness refers to the quality of right relationships flowing from God, the arbiter. The concept is valuable for the sake of liberation of the total man, recovery of African identity and the right to determine their own destiny (Mugambi 1994:13).

The employment of indigenous forms has already been taken up by African independent churches and has enjoyed much attention from scholars as witnessed by the many hermeneutical models. Equally, because the process of collection of traditions is ongoing, theologising in Africa must be dealt with simultaneously. Moreover, enough resources are available for the executing of indigenous forms of interpretation.

In *Rereading the Bible with African eyes* Ukpong (1995:3-13) furnishes a model of **inculturation hermeneutics**. Citing the gap between academic readings of the Bible and the needs of ordinary African Christians, it is pointed out that alternatives ought to be developed. Already certain hermeneutic models have sprung out focusing on African social and cultural contexts. Ukpong cites ramifications for the approach as firstly to appraise the cultural-human dimension of the Bible in relation to other cultures. Secondly, the approach seeks to appropriate the message of the Bible to the contemporary context (Ukpong 2002:18). The proposed model is grounded in the readings of ordinary people in Africa generally, but specifically in Nigeria.

Inculturation hermeneutics⁹ is developed from the following components: firstly, the reading focuses on the reader and his/her context (Barton 1984:20-23, Ukpong 1995:50). This brings to the fore the community's worldview, historical, social, economic, political and religious experiences. Secondly, the biblical text is crucial to this method. This involves the inner logic of the text, literary context, historical context and the contemporary context (Wimbush 1985:19; Martin 1987:381; McDonald 1989:545-548). The exegetical framework of the reader plays a key role. Inculturation hermeneutics is borne out of African culture. It is further argued that inculturation hermeneutics like any other hermeneutics is contextual (Tracy 1987:79; Hierbert 1994:61). The following elements are embedded therein: the unitive view of reality, divine origin of the universe and its interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos (Anyawu 1981:93), the sense of community, and the emphasis on the concrete rather than the abstract (Pobee 1979:49).

⁷ This concept is defined as body, mind and spirit. Therefore it infers that liberation must impact on the whole person in the different spheres of political, spiritual and economical (Mugambi 1994:14).

⁸ Eschatology is perceived from an African point of view. It is grounded historically not futuristically. The future is temporal and should not be seen in terms of transmigration to another world (Mugambi 1994:14-15).

⁹ Inculturation hermeneutics takes its cue from the methodology of Third World theology (Torres and Fabella 1987:269-271).

The sacredness of the Bible and its worth for Christians is presupposed (Stendahl 1984:4). Thus, the objective of exegesis is the actualisation of meaning in the contemporary context. Since the Bible is ancient, its historical aspects must be attended to via historical-critical tools. However, historical tools should function as servant and not as master (Stuhlmacher 1979:86-88). In addition, it is argued that the biblical text is plural, capable of bearing diverse meanings (Croatto 1987:19).

Ukpong's procedure for conducting inculturation hermeneutics demands an awareness and commitment to the aspects of African and other cultures as a pre-requisite. Thereafter the interpreter's context is identified and approximated to the text. Then the context of interpretation is analysed bearing in mind the phenomenological, socio-anthropological, historical, and social aspects. The historical context of the text is then examined and followed by its relation to the contemporary context. Lastly, the results of the process so far are synthesized with a view to actualize the message in the real life situation.

Adamo (2001:3-4) proposes a similar method of Hermeneutics as a vantagepoint for theologising. Adamo's **African Cultural Hermeneutics** is contextual in approach. It is estimated to the African social cultural context (Ukpong 1995:5). In addition, the method is also a protestation against the hegemony of Western approaches. It seeks reappraisal of both ancient biblical and African worldview, culture and life experience (Yorke 1995:145-158). The method is synonymous to Inculturation Hermeneutics, Contextual Hermeneutics (Ukpong 1995:6), Afrocentric Hermeneutics (Yorke 1995:142-158) and Vernacular Hermeneutics (Sugirtharajah 2001:175-202).

African Cultural Hermeneutics presupposes adherence to the Bible as God's Word. The Bible is alleged to possess potent words that are effectual resembling similar words in African traditions (Adamo 2004:29). In order to perform African Cultural Hermeneutics the subject must be an African or someone living in Africa. This matter of fact ensures that the subject has experienced African culture. It is also fundamental that the subject exhibit personal faith in the Bible. Belief in God and his ability to perform miracles, protect, heal and provide success is vital to the process of African Cultural Hermeneutics. Yet another requirement is the subject's ability to memorise Scriptures.

The above models are foregrounded in varied contexts even though they are products of a similar liberationist paradigm (Frostin 1988:2-26; Sugirtharajah 2001:177-186). In relation

to this study, the interface between ordinary and professional readers in West is an invaluable contribution to Biblical Studies. Equally, the reappraisal of both biblical and African cultures coupled with the paradigmatic departure with Western approaches in Adamo is essential. Ukpong's historical and contemporary contribution is similarly lauded. Prior to presenting the proposed approach in this research, it is worthwhile to observe approaches related to the study of prayer in Africa.

The premise for conducting contextual hermeneutics in Africa is the socio-cultural structure. It is prudent, though, to integrate historical questions given the ancient nature of biblical texts (Mosala 1989:34). The assumption by some proponents of African contextual epistemologies, namely that there is closeness between African and biblical worldviews, is problematic (Barret 1968:165)¹⁰. This assertion brings about conceptual difficulties related to the term "African". Such an all-encompassing statement bears definitive and ontological weaknesses. For example, to embark on a journey to find African primal traditions in their pristine state could be a futile venture (Buthelezi 1969:178; Theron 1996:27). The current African environment is a result of the process of transformation over a long period. The African background is greatly broken up (Mbiti 1975:90). Simultaneously change has not taken effect in all African societies at the same pace. For instance, rural Africa is slow in the process of transformation. In certain instances, the rural area continues to resist change (Theron 1996:28). Beside profound mutations in culture, it is evident that there is diversity and complexity across Africa (Penoukou 1991:29). Culture must be critically evaluated in order to filter out oppressive elements (Kanyoro 2001:167). Nevertheless, there remain certain features in both African Traditional Religion and the biblical world, which are similar. While contextual reading has the benefit of making interpretation relevant, if unstructured, it can lead to violation of cultural particularity (Smith 2000:25-26). Hence, biblical exegesis must place the text in its literary-historical context without which there is no hope for correct interpretation (Nthamburi & Waruta 1997:48).

From the onset it is important to indicate that cultural practices from both Western and indigenous religions have become part of Christianity in Africa. It is apparent that there are two schools of thought on the relevance of traditional cultural practices in African

¹⁰ Scholars have suggested that there are many similarities between beliefs and practices described in the Old Testament and the African way of life (O'Donovan 1996:25). This point is informed by the following arguments: firstly, those ideas filtered through the encounter between the Jews of the Diaspora (721 BC and 586 BC) and the Africans. Secondly based on contemporary archaeology both Jews and Africans share a common descent hence the Old Testament grew out of African roots. Thirdly, that there was continued interaction between the two is indisputable (Schaaf 1994:4, 5; Amanze 2001:276-386).

Christianity. The first one simply shows the inadequacy of traditional beliefs, hence, rejecting them from Christian experience (Musasiwa 1993:65). The second approach blends traditional practices with Western Christian trends. Proponents of the first method deem the foregoing approach as syncretistic. Thus, African religious practices are rendered incompatible with biblical ideas (Kato 1985:20). In defence of the integrative approach, it is argued that an assessment of the Judeo- Christian texts portrays a product of the writers' culture (Adamo 2001:3, Mbiti 1986:19). At any rate, syncretism is not easy to eradicate completely (Yorke 1997:149). Further discussion on approaches in African hermeneutics is dealt with simultaneously.

1.4.3 Research approaches on prayer

Typical models, which are linked directly or indirectly to prayer, are now considered. These approaches are generally classified under two study categories namely: comparative and particularistic studies. Comparative studies are broad based and cover multicultural groups. Particularistic studies on the other hand, focus on single cultural groups. Mbiti, King and Thorpe have undertaken examples of comparative studies. On the other hand, McKenzie's approach is an example of particularistic studies.

1.4.3.1 Comparative studies

Comparative studies have been conducted at different junctures in Africa. However, critique of such studies led to a general wane of use. Early African scholars inclined to comparative studies. Motivated by a search for an underlying unity in African society they were compelled to collect data from different groups and analyze it under the hypothesis of unity.

Mbiti for example has utilized **theological approaches** when considering prayer and other aspects of African Traditional Religion. His approach in *African Prayers* (1975) is attended by the hypothesis of unity in African society (Shorter 1975:6; Turner 1981:5-6). Mbiti's motivation is a quest for African authenticity (Musopelo 1994:18-21). In *The Bible and Theology in Africa* Mbiti (1986:80, 84) argues for commonality between the biblical and African Traditional Religious prayer experiences. This investigation is pursued from an inclusivistic point of view. Mbiti does not differentiate between the Israelite and African Gods. Thus, Africans pray to the God of the Bible howbeit differently.

There are positive and negative results from such an all-encompassing approach. Its tendency to harmonize cultures is problematic in that valuable cultural differences are easily glossed-over (Ray 1973:75-89; Shorter 1975:6; Paden 2000:184-185). At the turn of the 20th Century, there was indeed urgent need to collect data from different societies that has become critical for later studies (Turner 1981:12). Notwithstanding differences, there are commonalities in African religious and philosophical experience. At any rate, it is evident that there is a variety of views on African Traditional Religion.

Recent comparative studies in African Traditional Religion are not as general as earlier works. They are restricted to close cultural contexts. Exemplary Thorpe (1991) has investigated the San, Zulu, Shona, Mbuti and Yoruba religious experiences. His approach is based on **historical and cultural review**. Similarly King (1986:2-4) has utilized an **anthropocentric comparative approach**. He compares societies in close contexts. King's phenomenological description focuses on West Africa's Yoruba and Akan, Dinka and Acholi (river and lake people) and Ganda and Swahili (Bantu). This study takes linguistic connections and historical roots of the societal pairs into account. King investigates communication with the divine through prayer and sacrifices among the groups of people.

King's limited comparative analysis is commended for its strength in juxtaposing phenomena that is related through geographical proximity. This approach allows for ease of analyzing concepts between close cultures. Unfortunately, King schemes over prayer and only highlights a few aspects. King's endnotes on prayer bear no significant variations. This is either a consequence of cultural closeness between the considered societies or his failure to consider elements of prayer contextually prior to reaching a composite reformulation of prayer.

Other earlier limited comparative studies include Evans-Pritchard (1956) in his *Nuer Religion*, employed in the study of the Nuer tribe of Sudan. Shorter's (1975) *Prayer in the religious traditions of Africa* is also a limited comparative study using a **multi-dimensional approach**. His approach is not limited to elucidating similarities but also explicates demonstrable diversity (Shorter 1975:6). He analyses prayer from various African societies cognizant of different historical and cultural religious schema. Shorter simultaneously analyses prayer functionally, correlating social situations with dominant

themes and theological issues (Shorter 1975:14-15). In this way, Shorter distinguishes his study from early African comparative studies. Shorter's approach is not devoid of critiques for ultimately it is reducible to social anthropology (Turner 1981:10).

1.4.3.2 Particularistic studies

Besides comparative studies, individual African, ethnic groups have been studied as entities. Proponents for particularistic studies argue for the relevance of in-depth investigations as pre-requisite to comparisons (Shorter 1975:6). For example, McKenzie (1997) in his *Hail Orisha* has conducted a study of African Traditional Religion among Yoruba people of Nigeria. This investigation is designed by broad-based African historical studies. McKenzie has conducted an ethnological study of prayer. His **approach is phenomenological**. His key chapter on prayer (The sacred word to the deity) is developed under genres and forms of prayer. Firstly, McKenzie analyzes primordial sounds, greetings and salutations. Secondly, he identifies blessings and curses (McKenzie 1997:334-338). Thirdly, he considers oaths, vows and compulsive prayers (McKenzie 1997:341-344). Fourthly, he examines other forms of prayer such as invocation (McKenzie 1997:344), thanksgiving and praise (McKenzie 1997:347) and supplication and intercession (McKenzie 1997:353).

1.4.4 Integrated approach

A comparative model is applied in this research. This model employs an integrated exegetical approach. It is informed by the preceding approaches but also departs at certain points in order to execute the purpose of this study.

This study differs from the mentioned frameworks firstly in terms of context. Although the model is grounded in African cultural context, each approach has a particular context attended by different political, economic and religious factors (Mugambi 1994:9-17; Ukpong 2002:17). Secondly, this methodology draws on integration of synchronic, diachronic and theological theories and comparative aspects (Gorman 2001:23; Neuman 1997:402). Although comparative studies have been conducted in Old Testament and Africa for example Ukpong (1990) *Ibibio and Biblical sacrifices* this research is unique both in terms of context and theme. Similarly, it is distinct from the aforementioned comparative

studies on prayer. This is noticeable from the matrix of the approach and the people group examined.

To achieve the purpose of this study, Psalms 28, 64, 77, 91 and 140 are examined exegetically by applying synchronic, diachronic and theological perspectives. An integrated, literary-historical approach is proposed for this investigation.¹¹ It follows that an analysis taking into account literary elements such as genre, structure and literary context is done. Additionally, cultic and historical contexts of the texts are provided with background studies to particular concepts and phenomena. Detailed analysis of the text is conducted, highlighting theological aspects and is followed by a synthesis of the whole text. A similar approach is followed when examining Lozi prayers. Exegetical results are herein thereafter compared.

In proposing a model that utilizes comparative aspects, one is aware of the charges against it. Substantial challenges have been raised, such as intellectual imperialism and anti-contextualism (Patton & Ray 2000:1). Relating religious concepts from different cultural groups is problematic, as they are conditioned by their original contexts. However, through careful investigation and experience, it is possible to adequately describe phenomena that would otherwise be foreign (Ray 2000:101). Further, a comparative approach has been equated to magic as very often superficial similarities are drawn (Smith 2000:23-26).

It is vital for purposes of this study to underline the contextual element. Firstly, its comparative aspect is foregrounded in Lozi religious culture. Secondly, religious traditions construe a totalized worldview. They transcend the local thereby creating possibilities for meaningful analysis (Patton 2000:168). Intellectual imperialism found in previous comparative studies, was motivated by Bourgeoisie tendencies. On the other hand, there is great potential of decentring approaches through opening marginalised cultures for examination (Ray 2000:101). The present examination is a consideration of texts within their contexts (Paden 2000:184). This research focus, prayer for protection elucidates similarities and differences from the aforementioned traditions thereby avoiding superficial equating of concepts. Thus, comparison is vital to the very acts of knowing and perceiving (Neuman 1997:402).

¹¹ An integrated method uses synchronic, diachronic and existential elements (Human 1999:354-368; Gorman 2001:23).

It is therefore proposed that an in-depth study be conducted on the theme of prayer for protection. This research is an endeavour to investigate both the Bible and African religious experience in particular that of the Lozi people of Zambia. This model presupposes that a combination of literary, cultic and historical analyses of texts on the one hand and comparison on the other will enrich understanding of the theme. It is argued that comparing cultures of primal people with the Bible adds value to Biblical Studies (Schapera 1982:26-42; Steiner 1982:21-25). Although the two cultures are distanced historically, it is argued that through examination of contemporary systems it is possible to comprehend ancient cultures (Fabian 1988:215). Consequently, the results of this study will contribute to the process of dialogue between biblical and African traditions.

1.5 Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this research could be formulated as follows:

A comparative analysis of African Traditional Religion and the Old Testament detects proximity and distance amid the two traditions. Microcosmic similarities in prayer for protection between biblical psalms and Lozi prayer traditions confirm closeness in religious experience during times of danger between ancient Israelite society and contemporary African tribal societies. Further, these similarities provide concrete points for dialogue between African Traditional Religion and biblical studies. Inversely differences underscore the uniqueness of prayer for protection in each of the biblical and African traditions.

1.6 Chapter Division

The scheme of this investigation is developed as follows:

Chapter 1 constitutes the introduction. It outlines the study by stating the actuality, problem statement, objectives, the research methodology and hypothesis of this study.

Chapter 2 is a literature review. It consists of three key sections namely overview of Lozi historical background, overview of prayer in Africa and research review of prayer in the Old

Testament and representative approaches of studying the Psalms. Equally representative contributions on aspects of prayer in African to are examined.

Chapter 3 describes an investigation into biblical accounts of the theme of prayer. Since the study is conducted in a Department of Biblical and Religious Studies, the mentioned texts will form a point of departure in this endeavour. An exegetical method focusing on genres, literary, cultic and historical contexts, as well as a theological perspective are employed to analyse the selected texts. Other matters of discussion include the function of Yahweh, the response of the psalmist to imminent danger, the nature of the adversary, and circumstances motivating the prayers.

Chapter 4 considers prayer in the Lozi tradition. This portrayal includes a number of issues from the Lozi tradition: worship of a Supreme Being, response to the spiritual world with sacrifices and offerings, libations, blessings and salutations. Another vital aspect concerns intermediaries like diviners, elders and ancestral veneration - also, the occasion, time and place of prayer are addressed: these include temples, altars and trees. Other means of acquiring protection such as medicine and charms are discussed simultaneously. Importantly prayer texts are analysed by considering genre, literary, cultic and historical contexts. In addition, elements of danger, nature of the enemy, the victim's response and God's role towards the petitioner are examined.

Chapter 5 comprises of a comparative analysis on the two traditions. Similarities and differences between Lozi and biblical prayers are considered for the sake of building trajectories, which could be of assistance to the believing community. The findings could be used as entry points when conducting dialogue.

Chapter 6 is the final conclusion. Following the analyses and comparisons a summary of the results is provided. Outcomes include similarities and differences, implications of research, motivation for further research and conclusions.