

**HUMAN RIGHTS FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

by

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The culture of human rights is currently believed to be a new reality that humanity cannot afford to live without. It is generally perceived as a requirement that is likely to improve human relations and bring about continuous peace and harmony between individuals and among groups of people. However, this does not necessarily mean that there is unanimous consensus on the interpretation and implementation of the concept of human rights. While there is general agreement in principle on the concept of human rights, which is based on human dignity, **it is also undeniable that there are disagreements on the credibility of some actions resulting from the same concept of human rights.** It is my impression that people's views about human rights are mostly being determined and influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, social, cultural and religious influences of people play a major role towards the nature of agreements and disagreements about the understanding and interpretation of human rights. The socio-religious values and norms have a large influence in people's understanding, practice and interpretation of the concept of human rights.

#### 1.1 Hypothesis

##### 1.1.1 Inclusiveness of salvation

Much has been and still is being said about human rights. Human rights have in a sense come to be understood and accepted as a measuring stick to determine whether people's moral lives are acceptable or unacceptable in their society. In this sense it has become

some kind of social authority to either justify or condemn social issues. This high regard for human rights has to a certain extent been expressed in such a manner that it now sounds to have replaced the authority of the Bible, which Christians and even non-Christians happen to have once acknowledged and subjected themselves to in their private and public life. As far as I can remember the Bible was commonly used as a common source of reference for any issue that needed either moral justification or condemnation. To many people that I have met amongst my community of Ga-Rankuwa, Zone 16, North of Pretoria, Republic of South Africa, the culture of human rights is seen as a political and legal authority which Christians and non-Christians see as leaving them without choice but to subject them to it. In some instances human rights have been misconceived and misunderstood for a foreign culture that threatens the contemporary culture. My impression is that human rights to some Christians and other people are seen as a new authority that has been found to replace the previous authority of the Bible in their lives. I regard these prevailing kinds of perceptions as both misconceptions of what the Bible is actually about (which is the message of salvation from sin for all mankind) and what human rights actually are about (which is a human attempt to promote world peace and improve human relations globally). My belief is that these misconceptions unnecessarily result in both the: (1) fear of human rights as a threat to the existing traditions and beliefs and (2) the contemptuous attitude toward the Bible with its central message, namely, the salvation of all people from sin through Jesus Christ. This central message of the Bible needs to be seen and understood to be accommodating the need to promote human rights. My opinion is that **the scope of the message of the Bible needs further to be seen as being far more comprehensive over the nature and intention of human rights.**

My intention with this thesis is to try and show that the current promotion of human rights is a **human discovery and awareness of what has long been implied in the comprehensive message of the Bible** (which is the message of salvation of all mankind from sin).

### 1.1.2 Origin of rights

The questions for whose answers I am looking for are: (1) **Is the human rights issue exclusively a modern phenomenon?** (2) **Is the human rights issue an absolute need that had existed from the beginning of the human race?** (3) **Have human rights been implied in the central message of the Bible** (implying all Scriptures), **which is the salvation of all people from sin?** (4) **Has the Bible happen to have said nothing about human rights?** My conclusion about whether the Bible has addressed the issue of human rights will be based on the assessment of the credibility of the ways in which the Bible is believed to have comprehensively, meaningfully and basically provided sound moral principles for mankind, which **could have unlikely left out the currently much needed human rights.**

### 1.1.3 Scriptural adaptability

My belief is that either the credibility or incredibility of the Bible has to be found and judged within the contemporary social and cultural context concerned. In other words, the Bible has to be evaluated or judged by the relevance of its message to meet the needs of the contemporary people. In this case it would therefore have to be assessed by its relevance to the needs, which are sought to be addressed by the current culture of human rights. In my view, among others, these needs include the need for a peaceful and harmonious co-existence between and among various individuals and groups of people.

The **needs which human rights were meant to satisfy**, therefore, **provide a suitable context within which the credibility of the message of the Bible has to be evaluated.**

The various literary contexts (i.e. historical and fictional) within which the Bible was written should be allowed to caution us, that our modern human rights culture is nothing, but a culture like all the other cultures that are now probably considered to be old and inferior. It is my opinion that the various literary contexts of the Bible on the other hand not only reflect the perspectives from which the Scriptures were written, but they also reflect the various social and cultural contexts within which the various Bible passages need to be understood and accepted. These cultural and social contexts create a common platform, that makes the human rights culture to be commonly seen as a culture like all the other cultures. My view is that, the only difference between human rights and other cultures is that there have been a consensus and campaign to promote and implement human rights globally, while there were probably no consensus and campaign to promote other cultures around the world. When compared to human rights the other cultures could not be extended beyond their geographic areas where they had existed before.

#### **1.1.4 Divine advantage**

But, unlike many other cultures whose influences were confined to certain geographical areas, the ancient Israelite culture's influence went far beyond its geographic boundaries. This is very significant. It was due to the fact that **the Israelite culture was uniquely attached to the divine and absolute principles whose impact and relevancy went beyond both their geographic area and period.** For example, the requirement to **love God whole-heartedly and to love another person as one loves him or herself**, to my knowledge is a divine Israelite social instruction whose ramifications went beyond their

specific culture (even though similar concepts can be found in other cultures of the ancient world). It has been an instruction that other communities probably felt a need for and it had relevance to promote unity and love amongst their citizens. Its aspects of being monotheistic (i.e. being loyal to and worshipping one deity and promoting both brotherhood and oneness) and its moral principles that appealed to and satisfied the inner emotional and spiritual needs of a person could not be resisted by people of other cultures.

The principles of both monotheism and the divine requirement for people to love one another were further developed in the form of the Judeo-Christian faith. The progressive revealed nature of the Judeo-Christian faith shows how the message of salvation was meant to be received first by the Israelites, who were then supposed to pass it to other nations who had not yet received it. The preliminary conveyance of the message of salvation to the rest of humanity through the Israelites with their culture is significant. It demonstrates the manner in which this message could co-exist jointly with the Israelite culture. It further signifies **the capability of this message to exist in and with other cultures**. During the co-existence in and with other cultures the message of the Bible has by its nature identified people with their creator, God. The identification of a human being with God, who is the maker of all the existing things, exalts every person from an ordinary natural and biological level to a higher and superior position, which is made unique and special by the identification. It also had the potential to promote both the acknowledgement of every person's God given dignity and a sense of oneness amongst various individuals and groups of people. **From the truth that every person is born with human dignity emanate the truth that every person is born with human rights.**

**Belief in every person's inborn dignity, in my opinion, serves to facilitate a belief that every person is born with human rights, too.**

The contexts of the various passages of scripture (in the Bible) provide different social backgrounds, which help to demonstrate the unique nature of the Bible that enables it to appeal and adapt to various social and cultural situations and needs. In my view, the capability of the message of the Bible by means of its variety of contextual backgrounds to adapt to every cultural situation, confirms its credibility, reliability and dynamism.

It also needs to be remembered that the value of a container is determined by the value of its content. Similarly the Bible, as a book, becomes valuable in proportion to the value of its content, which is the message of salvation. This is despite criticisms by some scholars and theologians that, certain portions of the Bible were not scientific enough, and that the Bible either worked against or fell short of promoting the current culture of human rights.

Contrary to the view that the Bible promotes the violation of human rights, **I consider the Bible to be promoting the current culture of human rights in its unique Christ-centered way.** This has been confirmed by the manner in which Christ constructively (without criticizing) and authoritatively (acknowledging old meaning and giving new meaning) used the Old Testament as his scriptural reference. He also served as a role model to demonstrate how people need to relate to one another. He treated people of both his own and other cultures with love and respect. He taught and put more emphasis on the inner love rather than external cultural aspects. The climax of his love and respect for all people was demonstrated in his sacrificial death on behalf of all humanity. This

kind of loving and respectful attitude toward other people derives from the immeasurable love of God for humanity.

Despite the impartial and unlimited love demonstrated by God through Christ to all humanity, there is a belief amongst some scholars and theologians that the Bible has lost the influence and authority that it used to have in the past. This belief, in my view, result from the perception that there are current moral problems which fall outside the ambit of both Christ and the Bible. For example, the issue of human rights is seen by some to be something exclusively modern. This kind of perception about the Bible has further been worsened by an attempt to divorce both Christ and the Bible from each other.

In contrast to these perceptions, I believe that the confidence in and credit that has been given to the Bible right through the years make it difficult, if not impossible, to believe that it now has little or nothing to say about the currently important issue of human rights. Its moral principles have said a lot about the need for good relationships between God and humanity, as well as between humans themselves. In my opinion the issues of **(1) the authority of the Bible, (2) inherent human dignity (3) and human accountability to God (that goes with the final judgment of humanity by God)**, make the Bible relevant to the need that we intend to satisfy by means of the current culture of human rights. The fact that the Scriptures are about people and God, and were given to people to learn from about other people's experiences; human dignity has been inherited from God; and humanity is accountable to God (Hebrews 4:13) and other people; and it is only God who qualifies to finally judge humanity (Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6:37-38, 41-42; Revelation 20:11-15); **dignifies every person**. It leaves every person with a freedom of choice. It is freedom that dignifies a person and allows him or her to be what he or she chooses to be.



This is to let people have human rights. It is my opinion that the **human rights issue finally reaches its climax in human accountability to God**. Human rights and human accountability to God are believed by me to be the same truth that happens to be approached from different angles, namely, a religious Christian perspective and a legal-political perspective.

The authority of Christ and the authority of the Bible respectively need to be seen in their correct perspectives. While **they are not identical in nature and equal in value**, my view is that **they are complementary in function and purpose**. For example, the Bible is informing us about God's prophesied message of salvation for all people, while Christ is fulfilling the same message.

The fact is, the good intention of the promotion of human rights is undisputable. While I stand subject to correction, what I have learnt is that the concept of human rights was developed mostly against the background of consequences from both the First and Second World Wars. This concept was also developed after realizing that people had different beliefs and cultures, which needed to be harmonized for the peaceful co-existence of all humanity. For example, the human rights culture has been developed from a mixture of various social backgrounds and cultures. Similarly, the various Bible passages were written from a mixture of various historical and cultural backgrounds. The common intention of both the Bible and human rights has, therefore, been to promote peace and tolerance between individuals and groups of people. In the light of its unique and good intention, it becomes unlikely that the Bible can have broad and absolute principles that do not imply the need for promoting human rights.

## **1.2 Survey of research**

This thesis is about **the essence of human rights against the background of the essence of the divine authority of God**, which has been communicated in terms of: (1) the authority of the Bible (implying all the Scriptures), (2) the inherited human dignity and (3) every human being's personal accountability to God.

### **1.2.1 Authority of the Bible**

The Bible has served as a literary means of communication to spread the message of salvation from sin to all people. It inherited its authority from its content, namely, God's message, and God's plan to save people from both their sinful nature and acts. Its inherited authority is confirmed by the nature of its timeless message that has been able to adapt to various social and cultural contexts. The morally informative (descriptive) passages of scripture, that inform us about events that can be misused to promote the violation of human rights, need to be seen against Christ's approval or disapproval of them. Also the morally prescriptive (normative) passages of scripture need to be judged in the light of whether Christ approved and maintained their morality. It is my opinion that from the human rights culture point of view, the Bible (implying all the Scriptures in general) promotes the human rights culture in a Christ-centered way.

### **1.2.2 Human dignity**

The Bible is a classic book that has much to say about the creator, God, and his creation. I am under the impression that it is only the Bible, as a religious book, that **morally** identifies every human being with a **loving, caring, moral God**. This has been done comprehensively and significantly in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. God has been described as the only highest being above the whole creation, whose identification with

humanity rightly gives people the **worthy being** to be identified with. The special status and greatness given to man in the creation story (cf Genesis 1&2) help us to objectively reflect on every human being's God-given dignity. In other words, **without identification with God, human dignity becomes void of the only highest and greatest being worth identifying every person with.** I am convinced that it is only the people's maker, God, who is the best being to identify human beings with, in order to promote their unique dynamic human dignity and rights. Without identification with their creator, God, people allow themselves to be identified with what is lower than them.

It is my belief that it is only the Bible that reflects a balanced original concept of human dignity. This has been done by the way that both male and female people have been equally created in the image of God. Contrary to cultural and traditional norms, gender equality is not a new thing to the Bible. Instead, it has long been entrenched in the creation event according to the Bible. 'God created human beings, making them to be like him. He created them male and female,' (Genesis 1:27). This does not deny the fact that people had the freedom to choose the way they wanted to live, and that they happened to live differently from this long entrenched principle. While people lived diversely both culturally and morally this entrenched principle remained an unchanged norm to be complied with by all humanity.

### **1.2.3 Personal accountability**

In my opinion the Bible has further demonstrated its authority by acknowledging every person's freedom of choice, which goes hand in hand with every person's accountability for his or her life and the way each person relates to other people. The controversial issue of homosexuality will be used to try to illustrate this truth. While traditionally and

culturally the Bible (implying all the Scriptures) is generally believed to be in contrast with homosexuality, it however acknowledges every person's right to be what she or he is, chooses or wants to be. But it also holds every person responsible for his or her choice or what he or she does with his or her life. Unlike the Old Testament that puts more emphasis on the law that disapproves and condemns certain homosexual acts, the New Testament puts more of its emphasis on Christ, who indiscriminately loves all people and is available as the solution to all problems, including rejectable homosexual acts. This is done by making it clear that all people are equal before God and that it is to Him that every human being will have to account (Hebrews 4:13). In my view the issue of accountability before our Creator, God, is tantamount to the concept of human rights. It allows every person to have personal choice with personal accountability to other people and our creator, God.

### **1.3 Research gap**

Human rights have currently become our global social background and context against and within which the credibility of any social or cultural matter is measured. On the other hand there are world religions against whose backgrounds and within whose contexts social and cultural issues have always been credited or discredited. The various interpretations and implementation of both human rights and religion (in this case Christianity) have been understood to have developed some kind of tension between human rights and Christianity.

#### **1.3.1 Nature of tension**

This is the **nature of the tension**: As far as I know the Bible has often been regarded as

being a negative book towards human rights. There are those scholars and theologians who acknowledge the positive contribution made by the Bible towards human rights. What I have perceived is not only the ordinary positive acknowledgement of the Bible toward human rights, but to some scholars it is an acknowledgement that ends abruptly with a critical attitude toward the same Bible. The positive contribution made by the Bible seems to be discredited by the belief that there are certain portions of scripture in the Bible that are understood to be contradicting the promotion of human rights. They are believed to be encouraging the violation of human rights. In my opinion this kind of perception and attitude are determined by the way people happen to contextualize and interpret certain events of the Bible. In other words this is a matter that results from hermeneutics.

### **1.3.2 Ambit of morality**

On the other hand human rights have also been seen by some people as **a reality that has been outside the ambit of the morality of the Bible and the person who I regard as its main character, Jesus Christ.** In other words human rights are seen as new a challenge. They are made to look like a challenge that has never been met before. Therefore, they are interpreted as a problem that seems to have never been addressed before (which includes the period ever since the time of creation by God) except in modern times. With this kind of perception human rights have been expressed to sound and appear strange to and different from the central message of the Bible (which is about the salvation of all people). My opinion is that there is an impression given that makes human rights mean something other than what the Bible is about. By so doing an attempt

has been made to make the Bible sound and look outdated and irrelevant to modern times.

### **1.3.3 Balanced truth**

In contrast to the two above-mentioned perceptions my intention in this thesis is to try and show that neither of the two concepts does justice to what I perceive to be **the balanced truth**. My perceptions are based on **the highest status given to man in the entire creation** as narrated in the Bible and **the exemplary role portrayed by Jesus Christ**, who I regard as the main character of the Bible in his earthly life and ministry.

#### **1.3.3.1 Highest status**

According to the Biblical creation story in Genesis 1:27 man was created in the likeness (i.e. image) of God. ‘The image refers to the entire human being, not to some part, such as the reason or the will...The image functions to mirror God to the world, to be God as God would be to the nonhuman, to be an extension of God’s own dominion,’ (Fretheim 1994:345). In other words man was made to be like God. To be created in the image of God is to have the resemblance of God. I believe that to have the image of God expresses both the **unique nature and the highest status** that a human being has within the overall context of God’s creation. **Every person has been identified with God, who is above all his creation and unique**. My opinion is that in our modern concept and language the unique identification of every person with God is expressed in terms of human dignity and human rights.

According to Genesis 1:27 man and woman were created in such a way that they had a common element, namely, the likeness of God. Although they were created as separated independent beings with different personal identities, they shared a common aspect, which is the likeness of God.

This likeness of God, according to the context of Genesis 1:27-28, is among others, the **power to control nature**. In other words both man and woman were given power by God to be in charge of all the other created things. Therefore, against this background human dignity means that all people have naturally been empowered to govern the creation. It is something inherent in all people. Mankind discovers and achieves many things in life, because they have been ordained to be in charge of the creation by its creator from the beginning.

The context of Genesis 1:27-28 has further shown human dignity as a reality that is comprised of various aspects. For example, the issue of various aspects is displayed in the creation of the male and female persons respectively. It means that the man was created with his individual human dignity, and the woman was also created with her own individual human dignity, too. Although they were two separate beings, they had and reflected common human dignity, which is the likeness of God, in a collective way. It means that, human dignity, which is implied in the more comprehensive concept of the likeness of God, has been demonstrated in the creation of different complementary identities of being human. The opposite sex of man and woman, therefore, serve as an example of how **human dignity exists in diversity**. By its nature, therefore, human dignity is derived from the common source, who is God, but it is commonly found in various people.

While in general people are not identical in their thinking, beliefs, desires and cultures, they all share the common human dignity, which is the image of God in them. It is

against this background that I infer that **the nature of human dignity requires the acceptance of various people with their differences, in the spirit of love and tolerance.**

As already explained, human dignity shows itself as the divine empowerment of all humanity. It is the empowerment of people with different identities. In my view, **different identities imply that people may be of different sex, beliefs, cultures and perceptions of their choice.** The freedom of choice leaves every person with the responsibility to account for the consequences of his or her choice in the way that it affects other people. It is also every person's responsibility to account for the choices he or she makes before God.

The context of Genesis 1:31 explains that God was pleased with all that He had done. This includes God's empowerment of all people and their differences. I believe that the empowerment of the various people was required to please God, too. It has remained humanity's obligation to maintain God's original requirements with his creation. Mankind was supposed to rule the earth in a way that would please Him. This, I believe, still is humanity's obligation to the Creator, God.

#### **1.3.3.2 Role model**

My other perception is based on the exemplary role played by Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry. It is commonly agreed that Christ did not agree in totality with the belief system of his community and its culture. But, it is also known that his approach toward what he did not agree with was the most constructive and mindful of the motive behind every moral teaching and ritual.



It is in the light of Christ's example that portions of scripture which are seen by other scholars as promoting the violation of human rights need to be seen against the background of Christ's attitude towards the Scriptures in general, as well as his high regard and love for other people. It needs to be examined closely whether Christ sustained and maintained the violation of other people's rights or whether Christ did engage himself constructively by setting and introducing a new dimension of moral standard of how people needed to relate to one another.

My opinion about the Bible and Christ being outside the ambit of human rights culture is that this matter needs to be looked at from within the **larger context of every person's accountability to both other people and God**. It implies the principle of being non-judgmental toward other people, while allowing the creator, God, to be the judge. The acknowledgement of both the principle of being not judgmental toward one another and God's will for how people need to treat and relate to one another as demonstrated by Christ, can help us resolve our disagreements in a way that upholds human rights.

Accountability to God by all people means that it is only God who can judge people perfectly, without making any misjudgment. It means that no human being qualifies for judging another human being. 'Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you,' said Jesus (Matthew 7:1; Luke 6:37, 41, 42). Therefore, in order to fulfill God's commandment for people to love one another, we people need to patiently tolerate and love one another (1 Corinthians 13:4). Tolerance implies that there is acknowledgement of differences amongst people. Love unites us as people and allows only God to pass

final judgment on all moral trespasses. However, the required non-judgemental attitude by people towards others does not necessarily mean every person should do as he or she pleases. On the other hand it does not condone evil nor require that all people have identical perceptions and beliefs. But it also means that people's opinions, beliefs and cultures, need to be assessed with love, because love begets love and hatred begets hatred. This need for the right attitude toward other people means that their human rights must be acknowledged and respected.

In implementing accountability to God, the fact is that people either practice it in accordance with Christ's principles, or they do not. The other fact is that neither practice nor non-practice can take away every person's human dignity or rights. Every person has the right to live his or her life the way he or she likes. According to the Bible (Hebrews 4:13) it is to God that every person is accountable. Every person will finally be judged by God for how he or she would have lived his or her life. It is against the background of every person's accountability to God that every person's rights are found implied in a person's accountability to God.

#### **1.4 Relevance**

It is commonly known that the Bible was written by authors from various cultural and social backgrounds. The common goal of their messages was to convey the message of God to all humanity. The fact that most Bible stories have been written in ways other than the modern scientific way, confirms the various contexts from whose culture and time the Bible stories were written.

Despite the different story contexts in the Bible, the latter also contains forms that are regarded as **Biblical Christian principles** by many Christians. These principles **go across and over** various religious, cultural, social and gender barriers. In my view they make the Bible relevant to all different social and cultural needs and problems, even in our modern times. They address moral problems that commonly exist in all cultures and societies. For example, prior to and after Jesus' life time a person was required to love other people as she or he loved her or himself (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39). In the light of these exemplary passages of scripture, the Scriptures maintained the necessity of people to love one another. This requirement has been made to people of all social and cultural groups. It was meant to convey the absolute moral norm through the medium of the Israelite people and culture. This requirement was expressed religiously as a divine command to humanity. Through the various Bible characters concern for peace and love among people were expressed. For example, Micah (6:8) comments that '...the Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.' These passages of scripture show how the Bible had long acknowledged and promoted every person's human dignity and rights. This is an indication that the Bible had foreseen and addressed the problems that human rights are now trying to solve long before modern people could exist or think of human rights as rights.

It becomes scientific in modern times to investigate and try to understand the contexts within which every Bible passage was written. It is also scientific to scrutinize and find out from the Bible passages the ancient cultural principles that still apply to our modern culture of human rights. For example, Jesus Christ serves as our example as to how

Christians and even non-Christians today need to understand and apply the Old Testament concepts in an amended New Testament way. For example, Jesus said, 'You have heard that people were told in the past ... But now I tell you: ...' (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39.43-44). **Without discrediting the Old Testament scriptures and beliefs he added clearer and better understanding and meaning to them. He demonstrated what he said with his mouth by the manner in which he treated and lived with other people.**

The above-mentioned passages of scripture are examples of how Jesus approached the Scriptures of his time. Instead of treating these Scriptures as an end in themselves, he indicated that they were talking about him (John 5:39; Luke 24:27). He was above them. It was the reason why these Scriptures had portions of them significantly refer to him. Unlike the Bible, He, as the Son of God, could see people's thoughts and motives. He could further help people overcome evil and temptations with good. Instead of the outward cultural outlook of people's life styles, Jesus concentrated on the inside to identify people's heart conditions and taught them that they needed to change bad attitudes for good ones. He showed the willingness to help any person who wished and prayed for his assistance. 'Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest,' He said (Matthew 11:28-29). He also demonstrated spiritual and moral criteria according to which people were supposed to live. This he exemplified by the way he lived with and among people. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your entire mind. Love your neighbour as you love yourself,' Jesus said (Matthew 22:37, 39). This kind of

love is something that every person may have by consciously choosing to have it by faith.

In the light of faith as the result of a person's conscious decision making, Christian faith is not in conflict with the concepts of human dignity and rights. Faith is determined by a person hearing the message and then deciding whether to believe or disbelieve what has been heard. In other words, faith may be had or not had depending on a person's choice. In this way it does not impose itself on any person, but acknowledges every person with a free will of choice and dignity to make a personal choice. Against this background every person's human rights are being acknowledged and honoured.

An illustrative picture is given in Revelation 3:20 where Jesus declares: 'Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them and they will eat with me.' Here Jesus declares that becoming a Christian takes mutual co-operation. The initiative taken by Jesus and his message can either be accepted or rejected by the person who hears it. Surely, this must mean nothing else, but to acknowledge and honour every person's rights by Christ, who is communicated to us through the Bible. In my view this is one of the ways by which the Bible makes itself relevant to our culture of human rights. This flexible approach to cultural and social situations, including the human rights, in my view makes the Bible authoritative.

The relevancy of the Bible needs to be understood in the way that Jesus makes it to be. He is the one who authoritatively interpreted certain Old Testament passages, such that they became understood in a new and different way. What is significant is that, **Jesus never criticized the previous concepts of the believers who had lived prior to his life**

**time.** Instead, he made many of the previous religious concepts to be understood better by the way he lived and showed that they referred to him, as their fulfillment. In other words, these Old Testament concepts were directly and indirectly referring to him.

In addition to Jesus' making the Old Testament relevant to his time, the Apostle Paul followed in his foot-steps. He also interpreted the Old Testament passages of scripture in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. The significance of his death and resurrection determined the meaning of the Old Testament events. Many Old Testament events were interpreted in the light of the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. The mainly legal and ritual content of the Old Testament began to be interpreted with much more emphasis on faith. Instead of being continuously legalistic and judgemental, the message of the Bible was amended to allow every person to have a free will of choice.

Jesus did not only make the Old Testament relevant to his life time. But, he also **made it relevant to the future.** The future relevancy was implied in his dealings with the contemporary issues. For example, the future was seen as the period between his life time and the final judgment. His command for people to **love others as they love themselves** (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:27) undoubtedly **cuts across time, culture and religious barriers.** It is an instruction that had long contained what the current concept of human rights is aiming to achieve, namely, the right of other people to be loved regardless of their being different. In the light and spirit of promoting peace and love, the Bible makes itself very relevant to the current culture of human rights.

## 1.5 Methodology

It is essential to look at the perspective of the Bible on human rights from a Judeo-Christian point of view. I intend to look at a complementary perspective from both the Old and New Testament point of view. Here I would like to look at the profile of the Bible (which represents the Scriptures in general) about the inherited status of man through its main characters, namely, God and his messengers such as the prophets. My aim is to **figure out the extent to which human rights have been acknowledged or ignored by a classic book such as the Bible**. In other words my aim would be to find out how do scholars and other people understand and interpret human rights from a Christian point of view.

I want to find out the perspective of the Bible about the current concept and culture of human rights. I intend to achieve this goal by: **(1) looking for and using passages of scripture that are relevant to the concept of human rights from the Bible, (2) using Bible commentaries in order to get the exegesis of other scholars and theologians about the selected passages of scripture, (3) searching through other literature to get scholars and other people's opinions about the matter, (4) interviewing individuals in my community to hear their opinions, (5) conducting a test case on homosexuality to see if my hypothesis can be substantiated, and (6) making my personal conclusion on the matter.**

My approach would be developed by tracing the origin and nature of the concept of human dignity. The question is whether human dignity is a modern concept or can it be

traced to the period of the creation of man. **The outcomes of the finding are likely to serve as our indicator to caution us whether the way we currently promote human rights will last or be sustainable.** My belief is that any basic need (which in this case is human rights) for all people does not exist as an outcome of the discovery by modern people. It has existed at and since the creation of the first people (Adam and Eve). If the Bible is about all people and their creation, there is much more probability that it will have reference to acknowledge all their basic needs, which include every person's human rights. Like any other manufactured machinery I believe that human creation by God has also been supplied with a manual on morality to promote a God favoured life style.

My approach would further be developed by looking at human rights from a Biblical perspective by using a controversial issue such as homosexuality. I believe that human rights do not do away with every person's right to be him or herself. This includes their individual right to have individual perceptions and to differ with other people. Surely, if the Bible is about the creation of every person it is also expected to give constructive guidelines about the differences on the issue of homosexuality. I plan to hear scholars, theologians and other people's (especially my local community of Ga-Rankuwa Zone 16) opinions about people's rights as related to homosexuality within a Christian context.

This approach will probably help show how Christians and non-Christians need to relate to one another in controversial matters by emulating Jesus Christ when facing what is difficult to people. While Christ always addressed and solved every basic problem, he taught and made every person accountable according to their understanding and age.

## **1.6 Research plan**



In this thesis I have decided to use the authority of the Bible as both my text and source of reference. This is due to the fact that in my area, Ga-Rankuwa, Zone 16, there are not less than four Christian denominational churches which use the Bible to nurture, strengthen and guide their congregants' moral and spiritual lives. For example, this has been done by comforting the bereaved during funerals from the Bible, counseling the couples for marriage before or after their wedding, motivating in general and current motivating by motivational speakers and in church services. Therefore, the Bible, as is the case in my area, is probably still being highly regarded as a classic book in nurturing and guiding for moral purposes by people in many places.

I have further decided to use the concept of human dignity because it has been used as the basis on which human rights have been founded, vindicated and justified.

Finally, I have chosen homosexuality as a controversial subject to illustrate what I consider to be the actual Christian Biblical perspective and the secular perspective of human rights respectively. This is done with the hope that it will vividly show the extent to which the Bible's message of salvation for all humanity and the need to promote human rights overlap. It will further show how the message of the Bible makes every person to be accountable not only to other people, but to God, too. The Bible warns people not to play God by judging other people. It challenges people to share their beliefs, opinions feelings with love as Jesus Christ did and allow God to become the final judge. Human rights on one hand are positively inclined to protect individual people's rights. But on the other hand I consider them to be lacking the implicit inclination to discourage selfishness except by explicit legal confrontation by other people.

### 1.6.1 Bible authority

The Bible contains various story contexts within which it was collectively written. It is against the background of various story contexts that the Bible has shown flexibility and relevancy to every situation of its audience and period. My aim is to find out the status quo of its contemporary beliefs within the various cultures, and the influence and impact brought about by the entering of Jesus Christ into the picture. I would like to find out how Christ unifies and blends together the significance of the various Biblical events to make them relatively relevant to the current culture of human rights. Christ brought about unity and relevancy by his **attitude** toward and **interpretation** of many Biblical passages of the Old Testament. I believe that his attitude was that of seeing and accepting every culture as belonging to a particular time frame and geographic area in history. By so doing he allowed every culture to be fairly judged within its rightful context of norms and values. Every culture, therefore, needs to be seen and judged within its own historical context. However, history has shown that cultural practices, especially the Old Testament ones in this case, are often inclined to be judged differently or negatively from the perspective of another culture. If it were not for the role played by Christ, these Bible passages could have otherwise forever been interpreted as promoting the violation of human rights by some scholars, without refutation. The authority of the Bible, therefore, needs to be looked at through Christ's attitude, as displayed in Matthew 28:18: 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples... I will be with you always, to the end of the age.' He declares his given authority without negativism towards all the people of the world who were supposed to be given the gospel. This is the kind of attitude that Christ demonstrated. Instead of showing arrogance, he showed how he loved people of both his own and other

cultures. The manner in which he treated and respected people of various cultures alike demonstrates how God loves every human being without discrimination. This kind of love needs to be accepted and practiced by people in and between the various cultures.

There is no doubt that Christ also implied the current human rights by his absolute principles. These are principles which were applicable and relevant not to his life time only, but were applicable and relevant also across his Jewish culture and period. For example, Jesus instructed: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind ... Love your neighbour as yourself,' (Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27).

### **1.6.2 Human dignity**

It is a concept which up to the present time has been known as the outcome of the consequences of both the First and Second World Wars. It is also generally believed that much influence and contribution towards the formation of this concept came from the Christian Church.

My intention is to find out the significance and implications of human dignity from both the Bible and Christian perspective, and relate them to the current concepts on human dignity and rights.

According to the Bible, human dignity is as old as humanity. It was inherent in people since their creation by God. My belief and understanding are that human rights become real and justifiable only, if they are based on the common belief in human dignity. My belief is that, just as **human dignity is as old as humanity, human rights, too, are as**

**old as humanity.** Human rights should not be separated from the basis on which they are based. I am of the opinion that, the nature of human dignity must determine the nature of human rights. I believe that human rights need to be developed and harmonized with a God-given human dignity.

In the light of the belief that both human dignity and rights were inherent from creation, the current concept on human rights is mainly a development of the old. Therefore, the people who were directly or indirectly affected by the two World Wars had long had both their human dignity and rights before these wars. My aim in this thesis is to find out whether both concepts of human dignity and rights are exclusively modern concepts, or whether they were inherited from creation. My approach will be to find out from scholars, theologians and other people, what their opinions are about the two concepts. This is important for establishing the credible nature of human dignity, as the basis on which the current concept on human rights needs to be based and developed. I am of the view that, the way that a person understands human dignity determines the manner in which that person will develop and implement the concept of human rights.

### **1.6.3 Personal accountability**

In order to illustrate my view I have chosen the controversial issue of homosexuality to be serving as my point of reference. I have chosen homosexuality as a very controversial subject to be able to use the different interpretations of the concept of human rights. My impression has been that the current culture of human rights is driven by the philosophy of globalization, rather than the comprehensive concept of human dignity as given in the

Bible. My impression is that this is the attitude of being zealous to make everything acceptable to all peoples around the globe. Against this background, globalization has become the criterion by which human rights are justified. However, this does not mean there will always be unanimous consensus about the way some of the rights are interpreted and implemented. For example, the human right to life, is a right that has been constitutionalized in both the Republic of South Africa and the United States of America respectively. But the same human right is not implemented the same way in these two countries. In South Africa the death penalty has been abolished in all its nine provinces. But in the United States of America the same right is implemented selectively. There are states which approve the implementation of the death penalty, and those that disapprove it.

It is clear that from the Bible point of view, certain homosexual acts are disapproved. But, constitutionally homosexuality is approved in the Republic of South Africa. In South Africa, especially amongst my local community of Ga-Rankuwa, Zone 16, there are both the recognition of the constitutionality of homosexuality and its disapproval from the Bible point of view.

My view on this controversy is found in Jesus' statement to **'give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's.'** In this case Jesus was trapped to make a simple choice between being either pro or anti government tax system. I find it significant that he never responded the simple way. My view is that he neither approved nor disapproved paying tax for the emperor. My interpretation of the text is that he made it clear that God's mind and plan are not always identical with people's thinking and practice. This is

shown by the question that he had asked about the image that was on the coin, 'Whose picture was it?' The answer was, 'Caesar's!' Then he concluded by saying, give to Caesar what belongs to him and to God what belongs to Him. Here Jesus avoided blaming the government tax system of the day in favour of God. He also avoided favouring God at the expense of the government tax system.

My personal interpretation of this is that he gave the responsibility back to the individual people to personally make their own decision and judgment. People were supposed to account for the decision and judgment made by them. This means that **God does not work with government the same way that he works with individuals**. He does not hold governments accountable the same way that he holds individuals. The reason is that governments work collectively through their officials and put to practice collective decisions. On the other hand persons are held responsible on individual and personal level by God in matters that necessarily do not require collective agreements. My view is that from a human point of view, people can only fairly and honestly account to God as individuals. It needs to be remembered that government is a group of individuals, whose aims are to protect the general interests of their fellow citizens and maintain peace and harmony. The interests concerned may necessarily not be the Christian ones, as people are likely not be all Christians. Therefore, the responsibility of the government does not reach the point of legislating morality, due to its duty to equally satisfy the majority, if not all its citizens. This can be done through compromise only. My view is that compromising leaves room for and requires religious organizations which include the Church, to interpret moral values and principles to their followers.

The issue of acknowledging other people's rights becomes crucial, when it requires people with conflicting views and beliefs to acknowledge each other's human rights to be what they want to be. Therefore, to give Caesar what is his and God what is his, in my view is about personal accountability. It implies holding oneself accountable for things that one feels obliged to do or have done. For example, people often express a sense of being accountable with remarks such as, '**I should...or I must...**' It further implies being held responsible by other people. For example, a person is held accountable for his or her actions for the way they affect her or him and other people. It finally culminates in being accountable to our Creator, God. This is among others, about a spiritual and moral relationship with God. It gives a person room to prioritize between man and God. Both of them need to be given allegiance. But a person's personal choice will show whose appeal is worth more accepting than the other. Here, a freedom of choice becomes the determining factor. It brings a person to the stage where one needs to judge which is right, 'to obey you (i.e. people) or to obey God,' (Acts 4:19).

### **1.7 Summary**

It is against this background of viewing every person in the light of the Bible's perspective about man, every person's human dignity, individual accountability to God (which implies individual liability to God's final judgment), that I hope to reclaim human rights as one of the needs that the Bible is likely to provide the guide lines for. Therefore, in the light of every person's accountability to God (which implies that every person is subject to God's divine judgment), the need for the acknowledgement and promotion of the culture of human rights will probably be seen not as a modern requirement. What are crucial are the final consequences of both our individual or group choices and actions, as

to how they will affect us individually or collectively as citizens. Every action is likely to be followed by either positive or negative consequences rather sooner or later. The individual or group implementation of human rights is not an exception. The implementation of human rights has the potential of being followed by consequences which might impact either positively or negatively on the doer of the actions or the people with whom they are in contact. The important question is whether they will bring about good and positive things such as peace and joy amongst people in the manner that they had been intended and planned by God.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE**

#### **2.1 Rights role model**

It is common sense that in the past the authority of the Bible was generally accepted and agreed upon by individuals and religious groups in countries such as in Western Europe, North America, Great Britain and South Africa, especially in my home town of Ga-Rankuwa, north of Pretoria. With the authority of the Bible went the interpretation of it. The understanding of the message of the Bible with the subsequent interpretation of it,



determined the kind of authority that would be attributed to it.

In the history of the Bible its interpretation did not go without problems. One main problem was how it could be interpreted correctly. The debate about the correct method of interpretation resulted in the correct method becoming the top priority. Thus, the authority of the Bible moved to the second position of the priority list. My opinion is that the authority of the Bible was and still is not given enough freedom to express itself spontaneously within the social, cultural and religious contexts concerned. Instead, the Bible was expected to be interpreted in a particular way about which there was no consensus amongst individuals and groups of people. For example, currently many Christian scholars and theologians have been sharply divided on the contribution of some passages of the Bible towards the promotion of human rights in our society in South Africa. Both agreements and disagreements on the contribution of the Bible towards the promotion of human rights have been marked by congruous and incongruous interpretations. There are those passages of scripture that undoubtedly uphold and promote human rights, as well as those that are seen to be against both human rights and their promotion. Despite these contradictory perceptions, against the background of the current culture of human rights, the Bible has been credited for **the majority of its passages that are believed to be promoting human rights**. It has also been discredited by some scholars for some of its passages (most of which are taken from the Old Testament) that are believed to be promoting the violation of human rights.

It has thus become compulsory and unavoidable for all people (especially those who believe that the Bible is word of God) to reconcile those passages of scripture that support

human rights with those that seem to oppose them. By so doing we will be reconciling pro human rights interpretations with anti human rights interpretations of passages of scripture.

My opinion is that there is no denial that some passages of scripture are about events that may rightly be literally interpreted to sound opposed to human rights. This is true when they are looked at in isolation from what I believe to be **the overall progressive revelation of the message of salvation**. This progressive revelation I believe has been introduced in certain portions of scripture in both the Old and the New Testament. This revelation is about Jesus Christ (who I consider to have had and displayed the most humane and special noble character and thus worthy to be accepted as the Bible's main character role model). As Christ related to different people of his time he also demonstrated a fully morally developed character that acknowledged and honoured every person's human rights. This is the single highest moral character which is a culmination and fulfillment of various Bible characters, who had collectively and complementarily communicated the message of salvation. I mean that not all the characters in the Bible had acknowledged and respected human rights. However, my opinion is that Christ did acknowledge and respect every person's rights. **He is to be seen as the best role model of acknowledging and honouring other people's rights during his time**. I am convinced that Christ still needs to be seen as the best role model in acknowledging and honouring every person's human rights even in modern times.

It is my belief that, the interpretations that interpret some passages of the Bible as promoting the violation of human rights have been anachronistic (i.e. out of context).

The **main context, which is God's plan of salvation for humankind (that must serve as our hermeneutical tool in this case)**, has not been sufficiently used as a proper background and context. The descriptive (informative) and prescriptive (normative) events of the Bible have been treated and interpreted without making any distinction between the two. This kind of undifferentiating approach has contributed towards discrediting the Bible considerably. The disregard for God's plan of salvation as the proper context and background for assessing the authority of the Bible divorces God and the Bible from each other. It makes the Bible (implying all the Scriptures) to be without God, therefore, Godless. It also makes God to be the type of a deity who seems to communicate through other means but literature.

These are some of the ways whereby the uniqueness and normative (prescriptive) nature of the Bible were denied by some scholars and theologians. Instead, the historical-critical method has been believed by some scholars and theologians as the only adequate measure that can be used to determine the reliability and authority of the Bible.

I believe that the authority of the Bible should not be judged against the background of a few isolated Biblical passages (especially Old Testament ones). But it should be seen against what I believe to be the main context, which is God's divine intention that was purported to save humanity from sin through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is my view that the Bible through its selected passages gives us the over-all context of salvation through its collective moral principles, which promote human rights in a Christ-standardized manner. My opinion is that it is mostly through being

**anachronistic** and the **limited nature of the historical-critical method** for the study of the Bible that its authority has been unfairly questioned. The outstanding and significant saving role played by Jesus seems to be taken out of its collective literary context, which is formed by various passages of salvation.

## **2.2 Anachronism**

Anachronism, as one of the approaches in interpreting the Bible, has the potential to contribute positively or negatively to the promotion of human rights. As the Bible is at the centre of the current Christian debate, many of the conflicting views of the scholars and theologians based on the Bible have often been found to be guilty of anachronism. By this I mean that, the interpretations of the scriptural passages have been found to be out of the actual social, cultural and religious context of the scriptural passage concerned. Instead of a Biblical event being interpreted within its rightful original context, the context has often been judged exclusively from a modern context and modern perspective. If the interpretation of the event is somehow perceived to be failing to answer questions posed from our modern context of human culture, it is judged to be invalid and promoting disrespect for human rights, as required by the current human rights culture. My opinion is that Jan Botha (1999:1098-1125) serves as a good example to illustrate my view. He believes that there are some passages of the Bible, that show disrespect for human rights like 1 Samuel 15:3 (where Saul was instructed to commit genocide), and 2 Kings 2:2-25 (where Elisha approved the death of forty-two children). But, it seems like a re-evaluation of the passages of scripture that are believed to support the violation of human rights is necessary.

### **2.2.1 Fair evaluation**

It is a fact that there has been a debate about whether certain passages of the Bible contribute negatively towards promoting human rights. There is however, what I regard to be a possible reducer of the unnecessary conflict, namely, the consideration of motives of the various characters in every story that has been narrated. The consideration of motives behind every event is what I consider to be something that has been ignored by some scholars like Botha (1999:1098-1125), who consider certain Biblical passages to be promoting the violation of human rights. My question is why he does not consider motives behind these events, as it is generally done before judgment can be passed on the accused in any case. Contrary to Botha's statement, my opinion is that the motives of the author of every scriptural passage, the motives of the main human character in the story plus the motives of God, respectively, need to be fairly scrutinized for a balanced and fair judgment to be reached. Unfortunately, in the two passages of scripture (1 Samuel 15:3 & 2 Kings 2:2-25) the **judgment was based on the ultimate consequences of the event only. Nothing has been said about the good or bad intentions of the author, the main human character or God in the story.** In my opinion this is unfair. The motives of either human beings or God behind every event in the Scriptures need to be considered and allowed, so that the divine perspective can complement the human perspective for a final balanced and fair judgment.

'In judging conduct we have to consider motives, means, and consequences. There is **no part of the process that we can disregard,**' (Titus, Smith & Nolan 1979:126-127).

Failure to acknowledge the indispensability of the consideration of motives is passing judgment in distorted form.

The importance of the consideration of a motive for every event is demonstrated in an

exemplary situation, where a nation and its king were punished by God, but all of them understood and accepted their punishment against the background of God's motive behind it.

For example, in the context of 2 Samuel 24 God used various methods to inflict the kind of punishment that he found to be divinely necessary. This is the punishment which has been referred to by some scholars such as McCarter (1984:508) as the wrath of Yahweh (God). He also expresses it in Caspari's words as 'anger for unknown reason.' From this chapter the culprits, King David and his nation, were to be punished by God. David was allowed to make a choice between: (1) three years of famine in your land, or (2) three months of running away from your enemies, or (3) three days of an epidemic in your land.

2 Samuel (24) shows how David had to choose one of the three punishments. The description of the punishment that was preferred by David is very significant. 'I am in a desperate situation! But **I don't want to be punished by human beings**, (emphasis mine). Let the Lord himself be the one to punish us, for he is merciful,' said David (2 Samuel 24:14). In my view, this scripture shows how David perceived and categorized the various dimensions and phenomenon of human disaster. To him disaster could be either naturally or humanly caused. However, as it is probably the case even with most of the people today, any disaster that is seen to have happened naturally is more forgivable and more acceptable to people than the one that is perceived to have been caused by people. On the other hand even the horrible disaster with the horrible outcomes caused by a human being becomes more bearable, if the motives of the person who caused it become understood and excusable. It goes without saying that, though King David humanly did not like any of God's punishments, he however acknowledged and preferred

the good nature of God above that of a human being. I believe that this was probably one of the reasons why David preferred amongst the given punishments not to be punished by human beings. His clearly stated reason for preferring to suffer naturally (which in his mind was actually to be punished by God) was the perception that God was merciful. The implication thereof was that human beings were not as merciful as God was, or they were not merciful at all. In other words, there is an impression given here that human beings are completely unrestrained and uncontrollable in inflicting punishment, whereas nature is retractable and controllable. The implied belief here is that when the punishment is inflicted on people by the use of other human beings it is wrong, evil and unacceptable. But, if the same (consequence of) evil or wrong is carried out by what is believed to be anything other than a human being, it becomes both understandable and acceptable. Though what is considered to be a natural disaster result in death, too, it becomes more forgivable and acceptable, as it can probably not be associated with any motive.

What is significant about all the three punishments is that they originated from the same source, who is God, to achieve the common goal. Though personal and impersonal they were, they were intended to be used by God to accomplish his will. They would also have the same negative effects on the people who were to be punished. A portion of these people would die from anyone of the three punishments. The common end results of each punishment would be death. Therefore, **the only difference amongst the three would be a particular method perceived to have been followed to accomplish the same result.** But in the light of their intended purpose, the means of each of the three different methods should not be allowed to overshadow the common motive behind them.

My inference from this story is that the credibility and acceptability of any disaster depends on the motives perceived to have caused it. Despite the negative nature of the end results the credibility of the disaster concerned would be finally determined by the perceived motive of its causer. In the context of 2 Samuel 24 David seems to have preferred for himself and his people to be punished by the type of disaster that does not involve human beings, and thus humanly un-motivated, but divinely motivated. The type of punishment that he preferred amongst the three was not a personal one but an impersonal one.

While the event of any disaster might have either the desirable or undesirable results as its end, its credit or discredit will depend not on the consequences of the event itself only. Instead, **the consequences of the event, even though unacceptable, cannot exclusively determine the nature of judgment without the motive of their causer being considered.** This is my understanding of how judgment is generally practiced in many places currently. Therefore, the intention of the doer behind every incident cannot be ignored for a fair judgment. My belief is that the same criterion ought to be applied when crediting or discrediting the events of the Bible. ‘Human motives, intentions, and schemes, while a mystery to the most advanced techniques of modern science, are open before God,’ (Huey 1993:174). Motives behind all incidents, good or bad, need to be traced even though they are not always easy to discover. This kind of approach, in my view, will help those scholars who unfairly misjudge the Bible for believing that it promotes the violation of human rights in terms of the genocide (1Samuel 15:3). In my view this is not only an unfair misjudgment, but an anachronistic application of this passage of scripture to try and question the authority of the Bible. Just as much as the



motive behind every event in life is given priority prior to its final judgment, even Biblical events such as in 1 Samuel (15:3) should be treated in the same way. For example, I agree with Schroeder (1953:958):

It would be natural for us to ascribe humanitarian feelings to Saul, to believe him to be a kind man in contrast to the cruel Samuel whose God called for the slaughter of every living creature, man and beast, in Amalek. But for both Saul and Samuel, the command of the Lord was inexorable and, according to their belief, one of religious compulsion.

Schroeder (1953:961-962) goes further to explain: ‘However in his initial blind obedience Saul felt compelled to accept the command of implacable justice, **his selfishness finally got the better of him. ... his motive in sparing Agag and the choice cattle was selfish,**’ (emphasis mine). Here Schroeder has put more emphasis on the motive of Saul from God’s perspective. He rounds it off by referring to 1 Samuel 15:22-23:

Which does the Lord prefer: obedience or offerings and sacrifices? It is better to obey him than to sacrifice the best sheep to him. Rebellion against him is as bad as witchcraft, and arrogance is as sinful as idolatry. Because you rejected the Lord’s command, he has rejected you as king.

While I agree with Schroeder’s view and disagree with Botha I need to make it clear that though this event is recorded in the Scripture, Jesus who I regard as the Christians role model, has never used and referred to it as a moral norm for his followers to follow.

### **2.2.2 Various perceptions**

There have been diverse perceptions pro and anti the Bible as an authoritative book.

Conflicting ideas have been based mostly on the process through which the Scriptures have been accumulated and formed to be in their current forms (which imply the Bible with or without apocryphal books).

#### **2.2.2.1 Confidence in Scriptures**

There has been a continuous perception and belief which regarded the Pentateuch as being authoritative. For example, Purkiser (1955:66-67) explains that the Pentateuch, which was known as the Torah in the Hebrew language, originally meant instruction. It meant divine or human instruction. Bryant (1967:444) is of the same opinion and confirms that the canonicity of the Pentateuch 'has never been called into question by the Israelites, Protestants, or Catholics...'

Lately McDonald (1995:92-93) agreed with Barton, Bryant and Purkiser that the Pentateuch had been the canon, in the sense of having been seen as a classic 'at the core of the classics.' According to McDonald the Pentateuch was a canon, but not a closed and fixed canon. While new literature was being produced, the Pentateuch never lost its status of being seen as a classic. It never lost its canonicity. Instead, new ways of understanding it were looked for. The relevancy of its message was sought. It is my understanding that as people trusted the Scriptures they never tried to change their content, instead they sought ways of understanding their message.

#### **2.2.2.2 Need for adaptation**

Anachronism has further shown itself in conflicting views about the correct nature of the canon. There has been no consensus on the acceptable books of the Bible. For example, Barton (1988: 24-35) believes that the conservatives are being anachronistic by being dogmatic about the number of the acceptable books of the Bible. According to him, there

have been various opinions by the religious groups, about what the canon should include as the acceptable books of the Bible. He shows how the canon was formed by groups of people by selecting and including certain books to be acknowledged as part of the Bible. He also shows how the Pentateuch (i.e. the first five books of our present Bible) formed part of the Israelite canon. McDonald (1995:8) agrees with Barton and further explains that the concept, canon, was expressed in various ways, namely, 'Scriptures, creeds, liturgies, traditions, etc.' He, however, makes it clear that 'by its nature canon must adapt to new circumstances of life to remain canonical.' It needs to be contextualized so that it becomes relevant to the needs of the people of its time.

### **2.2.2.3 Development, ratification, clarification by Jesus**

There is a perception about the canon given by Barton (1988:24-35) that Jesus never took seriously the Scriptures that he had found being used. After considering the various perceptions and opinions on the canon, he looks at Jesus' perception and opinion about the canon. According to him Jesus' concept of the canon has been reconstructed from and formulated by his attitude and reaction towards the various concepts on the canon that he had found. Barton's conclusion is that Jesus never regarded any of the perceptions and opinion that he had found about the canon as being authoritative. He believes that Jesus only related to each perception and opinion in a specific way, because each of them was positively intended about the same God. According to Barton, in the light of the various concepts on the canon, during the early Christian period the canon was very loose. It was not as stereo-typed as the conservative Christians make it to look like now-a-days. He believes that Christianity did not, and still does not depend on any book. Instead, it depends on the knowledge and meaning of events by people. My understanding of Barton here is that he means the knowledge and interpretation of events

by people in general. Therefore, his conclusion is that, from and beyond the Bible, there are **religious experiences** and **thoughts** (emphasis mine) as demonstrated by the children of Israel and the Church, which we must depend on and follow up.

In contrast to Barton's view there are several passages of scripture, which give an indication of how before and during Jesus' period Scriptures were regarded seriously. For example, in my opinion there is much probability that passages of scripture such as Joshua 1:8; 2 Chronicle 17:9; Matthew 5:17; Luke 2:22 which speak about the 'law' and the 'book of the law' referred to the Pentateuch in its earliest stages. In the light of the mentioned passages of scripture the common concept of the law was expressed by being referred to interchangeably as the 'law' or 'the book of the law.' My opinion is that this was the preliminary stages of the formation of the concept of the law in its oral and written form, which later on came to be known as the Pentateuch. **It seems like the latest unique concept of the Pentateuch was developed further by the supplementary approach that Jesus Christ and his apostles had adopted towards it.** Instead of literally following the law taught by Moses, Jesus came to make it more understandable. He gave it additional perspective. This he did by revealing a new and higher and deeper dimension of the truth that was intended by this law. This is confirmed by how Matthew (5:17) and Romans (3:21, 22, 31) quote both Jesus and the Apostle Paul respectively as they unanimously explain that Christ came not to do away with the law, but to fulfill and to uphold it. My understanding is that both Jesus and the Apostle Paul adapted the law to the new arising circumstances of life, which did imply the need to acknowledge and to honour every person's human dignity and rights.

My other reaction to Barton's view is that what he says is true. It is true that the mentioned concepts about the canon were written from both the religious experiences and thoughts of people. But this needs to be made clear that these were the experiences and thoughts of people as narrated to us from the Bible. **Out of these experiences and thoughts from the Bible**, I believe there **were spiritual and moral principles whose relevancy extended beyond the actual Biblical events**. The then people's experiences and thoughts were later recorded down for our later references. However, this truth in my view is just one side of the coin. I acknowledge its good intention, which is rightly aimed at purging the Bible from what I consider to be the inconsiderate literal interpretation of some portions of the Bible by conservative Christians. But, to say that Christianity does not depend on any book, in my view goes far beyond what is actually intended by the author. **I regard it to be a statement not only with a positive intention, but with unintended negative implications, too**. For example, firstly, it gives one the impression that the religious experiences and thoughts from the Bible are limited and not relevant to our modern situation. Secondly, it raises the following questions, to which I believe literature is the most appropriate answer: How would we modern people who now live over thousand years after the existence of the children of Israel, Jesus and the Church, know about them without literature? Is it essential for us to know about them or should we depend on anybody's religious experience and thought? How would we (modern people) know what happened to them (i.e. the children of Israel, Jesus and the Church) if it were not written down? How could we acquire religious knowledge, experience and thoughts without reference to what had happened to them as recorded in the Scriptures? In the light of the probable answers to these questions, to say that Christianity does not depend on any book, sounds paradoxical, if not contradictory. By this I mean that it

disregards the fact that to many Christians the Scriptures (the current sixty-six books of the Bible and others) have been the only source through which they got their Christian faith. To them the Scriptures were and still are also the only source of reference for their spiritual growth, revival and strengthening. My opinion is that the immoderate criticism of the way the conservative Christians regard the Bible is not without loop-holes and contradiction. In my view it is as false as a perception that incorrectly makes Christ identical with the Bible. A truthful and balanced approach which rightly shows the indispensability of the Scriptures (which in this case is actually the Old Testament, which I regard as representing the whole Bible) was demonstrated by Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. Both of them avoided going to either extreme.

#### **2.2.2.4 Confirmation by the Church**

Another version (perception) of the canon is that of the Roman Catholics. Unlike the Protestants, whose canon is comprised of only the sixty-six books of the Bible, the Catholics have the sixty-six books, plus the Apocrypha as their canon. Both old and recent scholars such as Bryant (1967:48) and McDonald (1995:116-117) respectively indicate that the Roman Catholic Church had received the Apocrypha as being canonical at the Council of Trent in the year 1546. According to McDonald, 'Church councils did not create Biblical canons but rather reflected the state of affairs in their geographical locations.' They only reflected the general views and feelings of people about the Scriptures according to their particular geographical areas. In my view the general views of people according to their various locations is typical of the Church generally. It is an expression of people's individual and group freedom to the message of salvation from the Scriptures. It is further an indication of how various people understood the Scriptures and subsequently expressed both their individual and collective beliefs, which in my view

has elicited the acknowledgement of both people's human dignity and rights even within Christian circles.

Therefore, this leads me to the point of trying to show how from my Christian point of view, the controversial liberal and conservative views about the indispensability of the Bible can be reconciled. My opinion is that the importance and indispensability of the Bible should not be down played under the pretext that Jesus disregarded the authority of the written Scriptures of his time (in this case the Pentateuch and the rest of the Old Testament writings which formed part of the canon) as being unauthoritative. I want to try and show how indispensable the Bible (not only the sixty-six books) has been as an essential part of communication between God and humanity. Matthew (5:17) quotes Jesus as declaring that he did not come to abolish the Law (which was then already in written form) and the teachings of the prophets. Instead of showing contempt towards the status of the Scriptures of his time, Jesus rather put them in their much clearer perspective: '...these very Scriptures speak about me,' He said (John 5:39). According to this statement, the Scriptures were not the end to themselves. Jesus Christ has been their content and target.

### **2.2.3 Indispensability of the Bible**

Contrary to Barton's view that the Bible (in this context representing all the Scriptures) is not indispensable to faith, and therefore without authority that is currently attributed to it by the conservative Christians, my intention is to show that the Bible has been one of the **essential means of reference through which many people (many of whom are Christians) acquired their faith in God.** Therefore, in this sense it has served as a spiritual and religious resource to many Christians, through which they came to know

God. For example, the authors of 2 Kings (22:18-2) and 2 Chronicles (34:8-28) in the Old Testament give an account of how the book of the Law was discovered in the temple. What is significant about the discovery and the reading of the book is that the king of Judah 'listened to what is written in the book,' and **humbled** himself and **repented** before God. According to this book of the law, God 'would punish Jerusalem and its entire people with the curses **written in the book** that was read to the king,' (emphasis mine). In my view the authority of the Scriptures here is demonstrated in their being read and listened to, which resulted in the king's obedience and faith in God. Another significance from this story is that the book that was referred to here was acknowledged as a whole as the Word of God. The fact that it contained the teachings about God, made the people to respect and accept it as the Word of God. The book was never divorced from God and his purpose, which was to communicate his message of salvation to his people. 'The Bible has one main message. The message is God's love and his plan of **salvation,**' (Eby 1992:22).

The authority of the Scriptures is further confirmed in a similar situation of Nehemiah (8:2). Here the author of the book of Nehemiah gives us an account, where it was essential for the Scriptures to be read to the nation of Israel publicly. What is significant to me is that the writer stressed the importance of understanding. It was essential that the audience understood what was being read to them. Therefore, the first important thing was to make sure that the audience was mature enough to understand the reading of the Scriptures. Nehemiah (8:2) reports: 'So Ezra brought it (i.e. the book of the Law) to the place where the people had gathered - men, women, and the children who were **old enough to understand,**' (emphasis mine). Nehemiah (8:7) goes on to give a list of the



names of the leaders who interpreted the Scriptures concerned to the audience. Here we see the necessity of the right interpretation. Winger (2000:260) comments in reference to the Scriptures that 'A letter will not establish its own authority.' In my view, therefore, **the correct interpretation first connects the passage of scripture with its intended meaning from the owner, God, and thus makes it alive and powerful.** With the originally intended meaning is the authority of the message. Williamson (1985:288) quotes Hosea 4:6, 'My people are destroyed for the lack of knowledge,' to show how the Israelites used and depended on the Scriptures as their **source of knowledge.** The Scriptures were their means to overcome the contemporary prevalent superstition. Williamson explains that 'Mindless superstition was the mark of paganism ('they cannot understand,' Isa 44:18f.) and had been the downfall of an apostate Israel.' He further comments 'the raising of their hands demonstrated their sense of need and dependence (cf. Ezra 9:5; Ps 28:2; 134:2), no doubt with the thought that God would meet that need through the Scripture soon to be read,' (Williamson 1985:289).

In my view Williamson explains clearly the impact that Scriptures had on the Israelites. The expectation and belief of the Israelites that their needs would be met by the passages of scripture that would be read demonstrated the authority of the Scriptures. This authority is further demonstrated in the text of Nehemiah (8:5) when the God-fearing Israelites **stood up** to show respect for the reading of the book of the Law.

This is the first public recognition of the authority of the Pentateuch in the Bible, and indeed, most discussions of canon indicate that by the time of Ezra the Pentateuch had achieved recognition throughout the community and was, more or less, in

its final form, (Klein 1999:803).

When I compare verse 9 to 10, I get the impression that the audience had misunderstood and misinterpreted what they had heard. Seemingly the right interpretation was then given in verse 10. It is my impression that the Israelites did not respond to any other book like they did to the book that contained the law of their God. The content of the book was about care and love for one another. 'Share your food and wine with those who haven't enough,' says Nehemiah (8:10). Therefore, in the light of the humble and respectful attitude that the Israelites showed to their book of the Law, I am convinced that the perception on the authority of the Scriptures was, and still will continue to be shaped by a person's background knowledge about God. What I mean here is that, if a person came to be a Christian or believer by means of the Scriptures, such a person is likely to associate the Scriptures with God's authority. On the other hand, if another person happened to become a Christian or believer through other means than the Scriptures, that person is unlikely to associate the Scriptures with God's authority.

My impression is that some scholars like Barton fall into the trap of indirectly giving exclusive credit to oral proclamation, while plainly discrediting the possibility and potential of acquiring faith from the reading of the Scriptures. The comment that the Christian faith was acquired by people before the Bible was written, is a truth whose value and importance need not be misused to belittle the equally important role played by the same message in the written form of the Bible. In my opinion, the message remains unchanged, but the method to convey it to people is changeable. For example, in the past it could be communicated to its audience either in oral or written form. But, in modern times we know that the methods of communicating the Gospel have increased in the form

of radio, television, computer and otherwise. Besides being one of the methods of communicating the Gospel, the Scriptures also serve as a source of reference.

My view is that it is true according to these passages of scripture that a person is saved or comes to know God by personal faith. But faith in this case ought to be understood as the main emphasis of these passages of scripture. It is common knowledge that every written chapter or paragraph in literature will often be written with a specific purpose and emphasis in mind. Therefore, within a broader context of God's plan of salvation, beyond the contexts of Ephesians 2:5, 8-9 and Romans 3:24, faith becomes an integral part of God's unlimited grace. Faith is another essential aspect of the grace of God that helps a person to acknowledge the importance of the written message of God, namely, the Scriptures (which include the Bible). My view is that, without faith the indispensability of the written message becomes difficult, if not impossible to acknowledge. Without trust in the Bible (which implies the Scriptures in general) as the Word of God, it is like a patient consulting a doctor that he or she does not trust. It is as good as not consulting a doctor if the patient does not trust the doctor concerned.

This is contrary to the Biblical definition of faith in the book of Hebrews (11:1), that 'faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.'

My impression with this passage of scripture is that it is about the fulfillment of a previously predicted message. **The prediction might possibly be a believed promise in a person's memory or a believed promise from a known passage of scripture.**

The faith celebrated in 11:1-40 is characterized by firmness, reliability, and steadfastness. **It is trust in God and in his promises**

(cf. 4:1-3; 6:1; 11:6, 17-19, 29). The context shows that what these attested witnesses affirm is the reliability of God, who is faithful to his promise (11:11), (emphasis mine) (Lane 1991:315).

My view is that the need to have faith in God does not rule out the various possible ways people might develop their faith in God. In other words there are various ways through which God's promises have been communicated to people. I personally regard the Judeo-Christian faith to be a belief which is developed by a person's acceptance of God's message conveyed among others in oral or literature form.

In my opinion faith can further be defined as a condition by which a person can begin to experience the indispensability of God's message in the form of the Scriptures. This is confirmed by the question asked in Romans (10:14), '...how can they believe if they have not heard the message?' **A message may be communicated not only through an audible voice or language, but through a silent sign language or silent reading, too.**

The implication of this scripture (i.e. Romans 8:14) is, therefore, the indispensability of the communicative message of God in various communicating skills. In other words, God had sent his people to convey his message to all people not only through oral proclamation, but also with whatever means and skills at their disposal.

#### **2.2.4 Historical-critical approach**

While the historical-critical approach has served a good purpose, in analyzing and finding true facts about the Scriptures and the Bible in particular, I find this approach to be inadequate in considering the Bible characters' good intentions. I believe that the intentions of both the divine (i.e. God, Christ and angels) and human (mortal) beings elements need to be considered, before any conclusion or judgement can be made about

their actions. In my view, any conclusion about any event in the Bible that does not consider the intentions of both the protagonist (who is God or Christ) and the antagonists (who are Satan and people who align themselves with him) becomes anachronistic. It becomes so because it divorces the actions of the characters from their source, namely, intention. Both De Klerk and Schnell (1987:4) show how important it is for literature (especially the New Testament) to be treated 'in the same way as a work of art, noting harmony and aesthetically pleasing qualities.' In the same fashion as in art I believe that characters' feelings, wishes and intentions need to be considered and used in the final assessment of their story.

### **2.2.5 Pseudonymity**

Many scholars and theologians have often looked at pseudonymity as being evil and contrary to Christian norms. In his book, *The Authority of the Scripture*, Reid (1957: 11-28) shows how the authority of the Bible has been failed by both the historical-critical method and evolution theory by Darwin. According to him there are inconsistencies in the Bible that have been exposed by the historical critical method. For example, tradition ascribed the authorship of the first five books of the Bible to Moses, whereas, close examination of these books show evidence that they were written by four different individuals or schools. According to Reid, wrong impressions like this one, were used to substantiate the authority of the Bible in the past. He claims that in the same way, tradition ascribed the authorship of the Psalms and Wisdom Literature to King David and his son, Solomon, respectively. He explains that the **authorship of the Bible books were deliberately associated with the names of the famous scriptural characters in order to give the books the authority that they did not have on their own.** The people, whose names were referred to as the authors, were believed to be the only people

qualified to speak authoritatively, even though what was said was not necessarily true.

He believes **that this was more a literary device than a historical judgment.**

Therefore, the reasons given for the association of certain passages of scripture with historically honoured Biblical characters, had on the other hand been branded often, if not always, as a pseudonym with a deceiving intention.

### **2.2.6 Advertising**

Contrary to Reid's view, I believe that the truth is rather found in Vorster's (1986:172) positive view of pseudonymity, which takes into cognizance its good motive. According to Vorster the **aim of a pseudonym was not to deceive the readers about a particular Scripture, but to make the message more attractive and acceptable.** My opinion is that the actual spirit of pseudonymity, which is the goodness of its intention, is a permanent reality. It is still alive today, and I am convinced that it will never die. The only thing that makes it sound different is the new name given to it. Its heart and spirit are still alive and kicking more than ever before. It is my view that it has been more acceptable and more widely used than in the past. What has changed is only its old name called pseudonym. I believe that it is currently known by a new and more acceptable modern term called **advertising.** I must make it clear that the extent to which the old nature of advertising that I am referring to has currently been developed is overwhelming. But, the intention of these two advertisings has been common, namely, to enhance the acceptability of their product. It is used to draw people's attention to products that are sold to the public. In other words, it is used to help in making what is sold more attractive and acceptable to the public. What I find to be significant about many advertisements that I have seen is that they were associated with famous, popular and honoured individuals of the society. This is a common aspect that they share with the

ancient pseudonym. They have both used prominent individuals to promote the sale of their product. But, I must also make it clear that, in my opinion advertising has undergone change through the years. I also admit that it continues to change and to become more complicated than ever before. Erasmus-Kritzinger L.E, Bowler A & Goliath D (2001:109) comment about the implied changing nature of advertising that 'over time other cultural and sub cultural aspects will change to meet the needs of a changing society.' Personally, I have never heard any criticism or accusation of an advert for identifying with a prominent person to promote the sale of a product to the public in our times. However, in reference especially to the modern latest advertisements, I agree with Erasmus-Kritzinger, Bowler and Goliath (2001:109) that on certain occasions 'certain advertisements have offended sub cultural groups because the advertisers have not respected the beliefs, values and customs of a subculture.' But in general it is common knowledge that advertising is a normal way of marketing one's product. I believe that **the reason for this to be so is that, people in general understand the generally good intention for advertising.** More often the intention is found to be good and acceptable to the public. It is against this background that I am convinced that, among others, **pseudonymity should be judged in the light of its noble and good intention, too.** Therefore, my view is that, within the context of the acceptable good intentions of associating certain Bible books with certain prominent Bible characters, a pseudonym claims its worth to be judged in line with its good and noble intentions.

### **2.2.7 Diverse contexts**

Another way to respond to criticism raised through the historical-critical method against the Bible is by acknowledging the various social and cultural contexts within which many Bible stories were written. By this I mean those portions of scripture whose events and

contexts are concrete and necessarily not contradicted by science, but rather supplemented by it. On the other hand I refer to those portions of scripture whose events and contexts are necessarily not concrete and necessarily not contradicted by science.

For example, Bartlett (1983:43) suggests that there are many different stories in the Bible through which God's message is communicated to humankind. These stories are known in different ways, namely, myths, legends, sagas, parables, tales and chronicles. Amongst them there are those that are based on events that had actually taken place (which I regard as being historical) and those that are based on fictive events that had not necessarily taken place (which I regard as being non-historical). Those passages of scripture that I regard as being historical, tell about the historical events that can be traced to have taken place here on earth. In the words of McNeill (1999:69) they are traditional accounts (stories) in which 'there is nothing intrinsically improbable about...'. Those that are not historical are considered by me to be those stories associated not with concrete events that took place here on earth. However, the common element in both the historical and the non-historical is their **common goal** to convey God's message of salvation to all people.

#### **2.2.7.1 Historical context**

There are stories in the Bible, which resulted from and were associated with certain historical events. Their messages are therefore based on historical events. What is important about these stories is their common intention to show God's dealings with humanity. For example, the creation story in Genesis (1&2) shows how God interacts with man through providential care (i.e. God initiates help towards man). Every story is not written aimlessly in isolation. For example, the creation story provides a background to Abraham and his descendants. Through the personhood of Abraham moral



requirements are created which would be relevant to all mankind. One good example is in Genesis (22). Here Abraham obeyed God to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. The significant aspect in this incident is in God's response to Abraham's obedience: 'Now I know that you honour and obey God, because you have not kept back your only son from him,' (Genesis 22:12). This response in my view portrays clearly to all the readers of this scripture the kind of attitude that pleases God, which is to honour and to obey God.

Perhaps the best parallel to this passage is Job 1:1, 8; 2:3, in which Job is described as “blameless and upright, one who feared God, **and turned away from evil.** ... “to fear God” is, according to the OT, the fundamental of all religious duties (e.g. Prov 1:7; Eccl 12:13; cf. Gen 22:12; Exod 1;17; Lev 19:14, 32; Deut 6:2, 13). The God-fearing man **is one who cares for the needy and hungry** (cf. Job 29:12-13; Prov 31:20; cf. 30), (emphasis mine) (Wenham 1994:101, 408).

This incident of Abraham has other implications for the reader or listener to the story. It is representative of many Biblical stories. These stories implicate not only the reader or listener to them. They implicate even the future generations. Agreeably Bartlett (1983:59) comments that the **Bible stories always apply to a wide context.** It means that they often are relevant to a broad scope of time. Their implied moral requirements extend beyond the historical events on which they are based or with which they are associated. Therefore the passages of scripture give us not only the information (i.e. the describing aspect), but the moral reason and purpose (i.e. the prescribing aspect) for which each Scripture was written. Thus, it is my belief that most, if not all Bible stories, intend to express clearly morally prescriptive messages to humanity. I believe that their commonly intended message of salvation for all people is discoverable when approached

meditatively and prayerfully.

### 2.2.7.2 Fictional context

There are also Bible stories that are not necessarily based on actual historical events. Their background is not historical, but fictional. Amongst them we have stories like the stories of Job, Jonah and the great fish, and some accounts of Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament. According to Bartlett (1983:64) it is difficult if not impossible for the scholars to reconstruct the historicity of these stories. For example, in the case of Job, there was never a place called Uz, as indicated in Job (1:1). But the story about Job carries a message that implicates both the people of Job's time and the generations that would follow them many years to come. What is significant about Job however, is **the capability of his story to convey successfully the divine message without much historical background.** Although it is not regarded to be historical, it is also not wholly fictional. As Purkiser (1967:20) puts it, there is a difference between whether, Job was a real man, and whether the Book of Job was a real history. I agree with Purkiser that there is a likelihood that the story about Job was founded upon a **true character** (emphasis mine) named Job as confirmed in Ezekiel (14: 14). However, about whether the Book of Job is a real history, I agree with Bartlett that it is fictional, because throughout the book the story is not about the pure historical events. That is why Halley (1965:240) calls it a Historical Poem. Agreeably Thomas Robinson (1974:1) sees it as a

A true history poetically treated. Proofs: (1) Job mentioned as a historical person with Noah and Daniel (Ezek. 14:14; James 5:11). (2) The localities real, and names of persons not significant, except that of Job himself; (3) Extended fiction not according to the spirit of high antiquity, and especially to that of the Bible.

I regard these positive comments about the likelihood of the historicity of Job as being highly significant, as they are still maintained by most recent scholars like Robert Alden (1993:25). The latter believes that Job has been

an actual historical figure. ... Everything said about him is well within the realm of possibility. He did not do superhuman feats nor possess any magical power. Except for his extraordinary wealth and exceptional piety, he was like countless others past and present.

As commonly perceived by most scholars the book of Job is highly poetical. The conversation between Job and his friends reflects wisdom and an unusual poetical speech that is very unique in the Bible. Be as it may, it has been written in such a way that it does fulfill its purpose, which is to communicate the divine message to humankind. In my view the Book of Job is one example that shows that the valuable message of faith does not necessarily have to depend on history alone in order to appeal effectively to people.

The parables in the New Testament are another good example. They show us how the immeasurable value of their messages does not have to be based on what is commonly known as their historical aspect for the authority of the Scriptures to be acknowledged. As Bartlett (1983:63) has shown in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9), what we are given is an un-named individual. The story about the sower is not historical, because, in my view, it is not about and related to a particular historical event. But it is about a timeless truthfulness that has constantly appealed to and changed the lives of many of the people who now call themselves Christians. Yes, it is not related to any particular historical event, hence regarded fictional. However, it is told with a special purpose to

help people of all times to accept the message of salvation. Therefore, it is not necessary for anyone to try and reconstruct this story for another different purpose, than the one inherent in it. Bartlett (1983:71) comments that **Biblical stories get some of their power from the form and nature in which they are.** It means that being historical does not determine the importance and truthfulness of all Bible stories. What we the readers need, is to find out how these stories can contribute positively towards our lives and strengthen our faith. Again, through most stories (especially parables) and other Biblical stories that are classified with them as being fictional, like the Book of Job, faith in God is developed in the readers or listeners of the Scriptures. Through faith the readers and listeners are given the capability and strength to live better lives for themselves and for God. The influence from the Scriptures (which I regard as an indication of their authority), therefore, shows itself to depend not on the historical nature of the subject concerned. As Bartlett (1983:64) puts it, in the case of the parables and other stories such as them, a **relationship between history and faith does not exist.** Thus, the authority of the Scriptures does not necessarily derive from the historicity of any subject. But, the historical aspect of any Biblical subject, if available, has the potential to supplementarily support and strengthen one's faith.

### **2.2.7.3 Relevance**

As the passages of the Bible have been written from within both historical and fiction contexts, they were aimed at people who were similar to us people who live today. These were people who had the same needs as people of today's needs. They include spiritual, physical and emotional needs. Because I believe that all human beings have the same basic needs in common, I think it has been the reason why the message of the Bible has been relevant to all people. **The Bible has never existed in a vacuum. Since its**

**inception it has had a relevant audience who needed and used its message.** In my opinion it is its relevance to and utilization by various peoples in history that make it integral to human history. Despite its dual nature, namely, the partly historical and partly fiction contexts, I believe that it has been both its morally prescriptive nature to people and their utilization of it that have created its historical relevance.

The Bible is a book that has related to various people through its multi-faceted features. Among others, these various aspects have been expressed through the various stories in ways that the stories conveyed their messages. By this I mean the stories narrate their messages in such a way that they reflect the social and cultural aspects of the time of both their writers and audience. **Therefore, for us who live today, we are able to discover the perceptions, beliefs and cultures of the past in their past mind set.** Our minds and feelings are being transferred to places of strange societies and cultures where with our bodies we have never been. In other words, Biblical stories give us the divine message in contexts of other cultures and societies. They combine us with the past. Therefore, the intention of every single passage of scripture needs to be interpreted, first within its original and then its modern context. My belief is that, for us who are culturally distant and years apart from the Biblical times, we need to consider the gradual change of cultures, which necessitate that we understand the message of the Bible in its old social and cultural contexts, with its implications for our current social and cultural context.

For example, passages of scripture such as Deuteronomy 29:23; Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 49:18; Amos 4:11 in the Old Testament, and 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7 in the New Testament about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, in my view seem not easy to interpret.

However, my personal opinion about these passages of scripture is that they were and still are demonstrating and promoting the **wrath** of God, as part of his holy nature. Their message was probably purported to enhance the fear of God across the nations and to facilitate obedience to his holy commandments amongst his people. By being able to soundly relate these passages of scripture to our lives in our time, in my opinion, it gives them the aspect of their historicity.

However, there is naturally often a likelihood of first perceiving, understanding, and consequently interpreting the passages of scripture in the light of our situation and environment. For example, I learnt from experience that amongst many Bible students that I knew, most of them felt that the Old Testament was more difficult to understand compared to the New Testament. One of the Old Testament features which made it stranger and more difficult to understand was its overwhelming rituals with their specific meanings. Regardless of being not understood well enough by many people today, the Old Testament formed part of history of both the Israelites and the Israelites. My opinion is that it got (i.e. inherited) its relevance from its audience's history. People have used it as their moral prescription. It became part and parcel of millions of people's lives down the line of history. The same applies to the Bible as a whole. As already mentioned, there are scholars like Jan Botha (1999:1104) who, despite being critical of the Bible, rightly acknowledge a positive contribution made from the Bible towards the birth of the acknowledgement of human rights. In my view this is an applausive credit seldom given to the Bible in our times.

We also need to acknowledge those events (whose clearly intended message has not been

revealed to us) that are reported to have taken place between God and people. These I believe to be the passages of scripture whose unscrupulous (i.e. conscienceless) interpretation by any person, has the likelihood of making the Bible with its sound resolute principles sound shaky, irrelevant and unreliable to its audience.

### **2.3 Human suffering**

Human suffering has directly impacted greatly on the authority of the Bible. Suffering in many ways drove people to seek help for survival. Amongst the suffering people, Biblical scholars and theologians were not exceptions. They became part of seeking a solution to the suffering people's problems. Some of them believed they needed a religious and spiritual solution, while others believed they needed a material solution. For example, it became clear during and after the First and Second world wars, when the Christian theologians became divided with regard to the Bible as the Word of God, that, it could solve humankind's problems. While many theologians considered the Bible to be capable of solving their problems when believed, others disagreed. This disagreement between the scholars was a reflection of the division amongst the scholars on the authority of the Bible.

#### **2.3.1 World Wars**

The negative outcomes of the two World Wars have been counted by some scholars as some of the factors that unfairly contributed to the high status of the Bible.

In his book, *The Bible in the Modern World*, James Barr (1973:1-12) explains the history of the authority of the Bible. According to him, the authority of the Bible reached high status immediately after the First World War, with the influence mostly from theologians

like Karl Barth. Barth and his contemporaries preached that the Bible was the Word of God. They also referred to God as 'the God of the Bible.' The theology of that time made the Bible the main point of reference for the Christian faith. It gave the high status to the Bible. This status grew from strength to strength as time went by. According to him (Barr), until after the Second World War the Bible was highly regarded to have had steadfast authority within the Christian faith.

### **2.3.2 Preaching**

Gollwitzer (1961:1-23), in his book, Karl Barth Church Dogmatics, is also of the same opinion that Karl Barth contributed greatly to the high status of the Bible. According to him, it came about as Karl Barth's reaction to his former theological teachers' consent to the war policy of their political head in Germany. According to him, Karl Barth did not expect the men that he so highly respected, to be the ones who supported the policy that would facilitate the looming and imminent destruction of mankind, in the form of the First World War. Gollwitzer (1961:15) quotes Barth:

If they could be so mistaken in ethos, I noted that it was quite impossible for me to adhere any longer to their ethics or dogmatics, to their exposition of the Bible or presentation of history. So far as I was concerned, there was no more future for the theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ... .

As the First World War continued, and many people lost their lives, some of the theologians affected by the war decided to put aside their spiritual and religious obligations, in an attempt to ease the discomfort and burden caused by the war. They were looking for something practical, by which they could bring to an end the unpleasant consequences of the war. But, to Karl Barth things were different. It was time to re-



examine his theology, as to how it was supposed to redeem the desperate war situation.

He has remained true to the conviction that the way must always lead from within outwards, from the centre to the periphery, and that reflection on this centre is thus the most relevant and promising of all undertakings in unsettled times. Hence he did not follow the example of many others...,

comments Gollwitzer (1961:15). Unlike other preachers and theologians, Karl Barth continued to adhere to the Bible as the main available source from which to address the problems of his time. He did not depend on what was considered to be practical tasks by other theologians and philosophers for the solution to the existing problems. Unlike many of his colleagues, he continued to operate and work as a pastor. Not very long, his attitude of making and keeping the Bible as his source of reference for solutions to the crisis of his time, showed itself through the voices of theologians and philosophers like Kierkegaard, H.F. Kohlbrugge, Blumhardt and Hermann Kutter. In other words, he was supported by these theologians.

Gollwitzer ( 1961: 15 ) goes on to show how the message of the Bible began to be spread to people about their troubled situation through the commentaries like the one on Romans by Karl Barth. At that time the book of Romans was seen as a good example of the demonstration of the interaction between the Gospel and human striving.

Despite the positive contribution made by Barth and the colleagues who later on supported him, there is a perception that what they had erected soon deteriorated. It is believed by Barr that it was the scholars who brought about a speedy radical change to the

perception about the authority of the Bible. According to him, the scholars applied the historical-critical method in their exegesis of the Bible. As they analyzed the Bible using this method, it came to question some of the traditionally believed elements in the Christian faith. This discovery by scholars discredited the previously beautifully painted picture about the Bible, which contributed to the essence of its authority.

In my view, it could have brought about the more balanced truth and facts, if scholars like Barr could have also acknowledged the fact that, it was after the wars that the scholars brought about this perception. In other words, it was during the time of peace when scholars came with their solution, which, in my opinion was a solution in the period of peace. They became fighters who wanted to be the heroes at the time of peace. I also need to say that, **it was Karl Barth's and his colleagues' preaching that gave hope and encouragement to millions of people who were suffering from the bitter consequences of the wars.** It is true that the status of the Bible went higher during the First and Second World Wars, because it was probably the only literature of that time that could meet people's needs. It probably gave them hope when they were hurting and desperate. I need to emphasize that **the painful outcomes of the wars could not be pacified and healed by the scholars' analysis and criticism of the Bible. But they were most probably healed by the messages that could give them hope out of the lately criticized Bible.**

My impression is that Barr (1973:1) has acknowledged only one aspect that had elevated the Bible to its highest status, namely, the scholars (Karl Barth and his colleagues). My response to this is that, Barr has come short of realizing and acknowledging that **the two**

**world wars themselves, were basically the main cause that had elevated the Bible to the highest status he has mentioned.** The crisis of the war surely, made people to feel the need to prevent the causes and the consequences of the wars. While the warring parties could not prevent wars from taking place by means of their technology (i.e. weapons of war) and human wisdom (i.e. knowledge that excluded God's moral principles) that they had, they probably felt and realized that they needed more than just human efforts for their survival. With human efforts in the establishment of the organizations like the League of Nations and the United Nations, it had already been felt and acknowledged by many other people the need of the supernatural intervention in human affairs. Purkiser (1960:66) describes the situation before the two world wars:

Liberalism and modernism for decades had virtually abandoned the idea of a special revelation of God in time.

What may be known of God was assumed to come through reason in the contemplation of nature.

It appeared as if people were continuing and would continue to develop and to improve on their own. Man's inherent sinful or evil nature that had manifested itself in various ways, as explained in the Bible had been ignored. People strongly hoped for some kind of a humanly created Utopia in their life time. Unfortunately the **first** world war brought horror and destruction which annihilated most, if not all the high hopes of the people of the time. The deaths of thousands of human beings by other human beings proved that **man, on his own, could not and would never ever change his naturally evil character.** Something more serious and deep in people's hearts needed to be done to change their attitudes toward one another. **The Bible, with its message of love for God and one's neighbour, showed itself to have been the only book and literature of the**

**time to provide the needed message to meet the challenge.** In reference to the Bible as the Scriptures, Purkiser (1960:67) comments: 'they alone, carry us back to within a generation of the greatest of God's redemptive deeds, the **Christ-event**, that is, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.'

My opinion about the question on the authority of the Bible is that, this is a very old question. The authority of the Bible had been questioned long before the disaster of both the First and Second world wars. It was and still it is seemingly during the good and peaceful times when the authority of the Bible became and becomes questionable to some people. But, to many other people like Karl Barth, it became the only literary source of the message of hope for the warring nations and individuals. **What is interesting and ironic is that scholars like Barr (1973:1), admits that it was during the critical times such as the war times that the authority of the Bible had reached the highest status ever.** In my view, this is the time when military weapons or any other human plan could not produce positive results to prevent the blood shed. It was during the situation of despair that the Bible provided the message of hope and salvation.

### **2.3.3 Current crisis**

It seems to me a similar desperate situation is recurring to us in the years 1999/2000. In the years 1997/1998 safe sex in the form of using condoms was preached as the main means to curb the spreading of the HIV/AIDS (cf. Soul City 2001:2,6 & Soul City 2002:18). In order to facilitate this prevention of HIV/AIDS, condoms have been distributed in towns and townships to the residents free of charge. It is common sense that the distribution of millions of condoms to the residents of South Africa, does and will, cost the government of South Africa lots of money. This money could have been

used for other needs of the people of South Africa. Presently, the distribution of condoms for free has decreased considerably. When comparing with the past, my common sense tells me that it is probably due to an additional need of the femidoms (condoms for females) by women, who were previously not catered for, when condoms for men were provided (cf. Soul City 2001:5). These demands, in my opinion, make people's safety and survival against HIV/AIDS unnecessarily very expensive for the government. Presently, as I write this paragraph, the priority-list for the prevention of the spread of the HIV/AIDS has become (1) abstinence, (2) faithfulness to one's partner and (3) condomising. My analysis and interpretation of the mentioned list is that abstinence mostly relates to the youth or unmarried; faithfulness relates to the married, or those who have a partnership that involves sexual relationship; and condomising among other reasons, intends to protect people who are promiscuous. My perception and belief is that the community of South Africa is being forced to reckon with the fact that, the safety and survival of its citizens cannot be guaranteed by condomising as its main means for survival. Nur Samuels (2000:19) is of the same opinion. Pastor Agrippa Khathide (2003:32) supports it, too. 'Though the TV studio audience still insisted on condomisation, the home audience differed immensely: 84 to 16 in favour of abstinence as a way to curb HIV/AIDS,' he commented in reference to

a debate on SABC channel on ... the best way of combating  
the HIV/AIDS pandemic: condomisation or abstinence. ...  
this is indicative that the mood among old and young is changing  
and we need to plan and act properly to manage the swing of  
opinion and, hopefully, a change of behaviour.

My conclusion is that, it seems to me other solutions used to solve serious crises like the

two World Wars and the current HIV/AIDS epidemic have had little, if not none effect at all, towards alleviating these crises. In comparing these solutions to the moral solutions offered from the Bible, the latter's solutions (in the form of spiritual and moral principles) are more reliable than the human-made solutions. For example, in the case of the spreading of HIV/AIDS, abstinence outside of marriage and faithfulness to each other within marriage, are in my opinion the most reliable and remain unchangeable. 'Truth crushed to earth will rise again,' comments Felicia Mabuza-Suttle (Barron 2004:18). In the light of its reliable and unchanging principles such as the one just mentioned, the Bible demonstrates its authority, which has constantly been measured against its contribution towards alleviating humanity's problems.

#### **2.3.4 Inhumanity**

The Bible has sometimes been blamed for its potential to incite inhumane attitudes in people, as well as its being abused by its readers and followers to violate other people's human rights.

For example, Botha (1999:1098-1129) has tried to prove how some parts of the Bible contribute negatively to the respect and promotion of human rights. But, he begins with a positive attitude towards the Bible. For example, he begins by admitting and confessing that the majority of rights in the bill of rights originate from the influence of the Christian Church, which has mostly used the Bible as its source of information. 'Ninety-four percent of the source material used in the Bill of Rights came either directly or indirectly from the Bible,' agrees Hammond (1999:25). Botha further expresses the need to develop and to nurture the respect for a culture of human rights in South Africa.

According to him, **the Bible also has the power that can be used to persuade and to**

**inspire people to promote the respect for a culture of human rights in South Africa.**

He feels that the Bible that is correctly interpreted, together with the Christians, ought to be in the fore-front in the promotion of the respect for a culture of human rights by their preaching. He also believes that there are passages of scripture that can be used to support the promotion of the respect for human rights.

However, his comparison of the part of the Constitution of South Africa on human rights to the Bible, (which, according to him, has some portions of scripture that violate human rights) leads him to conclude that something ought to be done to correct both the wrong literal interpretation of these particular passages of scripture, as well as the notion that the Bible is the absolute divine word of God. For example, the passages of scripture such as 1 Samuel 15: 3 (where God approved the genocide), 2 Kings 2: 23-25 (where Elisha murdered children in the name of God), Psalm 137:8 (infanticide was promoted), and the so-called hate speech by Jesus in Matthew (23: 15, 27, 33) and Paul in 1 Timothy (1:18-20) are used by Botha (1999:1110-1113) to prove what he considers to be the violation of human rights in the Bible. He further shows what he considers to be the discrimination against women supported by the Bible in Genesis 16: 1-16; 21:9-21 (about rejection of Hagar by Sarah and Abraham) and Judges 11: 29-40 (about the inhuman murder of a daughter by her own father). Therefore, against the background of all these passages of scripture, it has not been acceptable to him to regard the Bible as the absolute divine word of God, if it still has portions of itself, which he believes, promote the violation of human rights.

But, what is of significance to me is what Botha has hinted, which is their **literal**

**interpretation.** In my view Botha is guilty of doing what he is asking other people to avoid, namely, literal interpretation. For example, the passages of scripture said to be supporting the violation of human rights by Botha, in my opinion, are simply reporting what the story tellers had experienced. I mean they report what they believed had happened within their particular cultural and religious contexts. In my view it does not matter what had happened. What matters is how each event continued to be valued after it had happened. What moral implications and demands did it make to people who lived later on? **After an incident had happened and then recorded down as a passage of scripture, was it used and regarded as a moral criterion for people to follow continuously?** As far as I know there is no evidence that shows that these events were meant to serve continuously as moral norms and values to be cherished and practiced by all people. Concerning the recorded events that have troubled Botha to the extent that he felt that such passages of scripture work against the promotion of human rights, my response is that such passages of scripture were **not meant to be morally normative (i.e. prescriptive)**. This is probably why any interpretation that says these passages of scripture were meant to promote the violation of human rights cannot be sustained and maintained from a sound Biblical perspective, especially the complementary part of the Bible, namely, the New Testament. Had they been the ideal norms, Christ could have confirmed and sustained them; for example, the genocide as a principle to solve racial problems. Instead of doing that, Christ probably acknowledged their particular past social and cultural contexts and unique purpose, and rather provided the much needed ideal norms that he had come to demonstrate and impart to humanity.

#### **2.4 Leading concepts**



There are many concepts which have been developed in the history of mankind, which have impacted negatively on the authority of the Bible. James Barr (1973:13-34) explains the four main concepts about the status of the Bible, namely, inspiration, the Word of God, authority and function. But I would like to focus on inspiration and evolution as concepts that I consider to have had a considerable impact on the authority of the Bible.

#### **2.4.1 Inspiration**

Inspiration has been used to explain and to sustain the status of the Bible, namely, its authority. Part of the concept of the status of the Bible is that the Bible or its message originates from God. This idea makes the Bible to look different from all other books, whose messages are from human beings for other human beings. Inspiration was also understood to mean that the Bible is infallible, without error. James Barr (1973:13-18) explains that the Bible has historical errors, which implies probable consequent theological errors. According to Barr, the discoverable historical errors are an indication of the theology or theologies that have been established on the wrong historical information. It therefore implies that we have many wrong theologies.

Barr and Purkiser agree on the problem caused by the interpretation that inspiration means dictation. They all explain the disadvantages which would confine the inspiration of the Word of God to the writings and the original languages, namely, Greek and Hebrew only. This theory excludes the inspiration of the writers of these writings. Dictation would also mean verbal inspiration where the receivers of God's message were made to have been passive when receiving it. This theory has been caused by direct statements like, 'Thus says the Lord...' which appear several times, especially in the Old Testament.

Barr's bone of contention is based on the mode of inspiration. He believes that it is not yet clear how inspiration takes place, which makes the Bible special and different from all the other books. He therefore concludes that the inspiration, through which God inspired the first writers of the Bible, is similar to the way through which God reveals himself to people today.

Alternatively Purkiser (1960:72-73) after he had shown the limitations of the theory of dictation, shows that inspiration goes beyond that. It also includes the historical research (Luke 1:1-4), acknowledged personal opinion (1 Corinthians 7:12), free quoting, that is not word for word, but the quoting that preserves the thought and not the wording (compare Matthew 3:17 with Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22).

It is commonly agreed that the Bible was written by many different individuals. Purkiser (1960:70) comments:

Scripture came from every walk of life: shepherds, priests, prophets, kings, farmers, fishermen .... We find in its pages the kinds of persons we are: the quick and the slow, the impulsive and the deliberate; the intellectual, the man of action, and the person of deep feeling.

Amongst the most recent scholars James Mays (1988:1014) is of the same opinion as Purkiser about the prologue of the Gospel of Luke that it is 'a statement of the author about sources, **research** (emphasis mine), method, purpose, and addressee.' In my opinion Mays' comment about Luke's research complements and supplements the

previously narrowed nature of the concept of inspiration. Instead of narrowing the meaning and essence of what inspiration is all about it broadens its scope, comprehensibility and possibility. It is against this background that I find it inadequate to discredit the authority of the Bible from the previously narrow definition of inspiration.

#### **2.4.2 Evolution**

Evolution is one factor that has been used to discredit the authority of the Bible. The negative effects of this theory had a considerable impact on many scholars' perception about the authority of the Bible. In my opinion it made even those who used to have confidence in the Bible as the Word of God, to begin to approach it with less respect and less confidence.

Reid (1957: 21-28) and probably many other scholars are of the opinion that the authority of the Bible was shaken by the theory of evolution by Darwin. According to him the Genesis story about the creation (which is believed to explain that the earth was created in six days, of twenty-four hours each), has created a division between science and faith. Evolution gave a different view that the earth got created within a much longer period than the Bible story, which seem to explain that the earth was created within a very short time.

Contrary to Reid's criticism about the creation days, Wiley and Culbertson (1946:138-137) explain that the statement about the creation days 'cannot be considered a scientific statement, and must not be regarded as contradictory to science.' In the light of Wiley's and Culbertson's view, I believe that Reid's criticism about the authority of the Bible based on evolution probably has been based on the wrong interpretation of the scripture

concerned. For example, my question is, on which first solar day did God create the light and the darkness, which both made our first solar day and night, according to Genesis 1: 3-5?

In my view, the way Reid has confused our current solar system days with the unique creation days is anachronistic. This is to discredit the Bible and its authority unfairly.

The truth of the matter is that creation should be understood as a theological doctrine and evolution as a scientific one. An affirmation of creation should not entail the adoption of a particular set of scientific theories. Similarly, an affirmation of evolution should not entail any particular theological stance. They are unrelated concepts that cannot be incompatible, because they are not related to one another (Karl Giberson 1993:142).

As Giberson has made it clear - there has never been conflict between the message of the Scriptures and evolution. But it is scholars who made unnecessary arguments. The root cause of anachronism in this case has been biasedness, which has not allowed the Bible to speak out the divine view about its authority.

## **2.5 Divine grace**

The credibility of the Bible has also been under attack from the perception that it is by God's grace that people come to know Him, and not through the Bible. In contrast to this perception, my view is that the Scriptures are part of a demonstration of God's grace. In other words, the impartation of the message of salvation from God to humanity through

the Scriptures needs to be seen as resulting from the unlimited grace of God. A perception that divorces the literary means of communication in the form of the Bible from the grace of God, is an attempt to limit the **unlimited grace of God. I find it to be impossible to separate the Scriptures from the multi-faceted grace of God.**

### **2.5.1 Faith in grace**

I believe that it is very essential to see the importance of faith in its rightful perspective within the wider context of the grace of God. I assume it is undisputable that it is people or a person who has to have faith. Therefore, it is us, people, who need to believe (in God). People need to believe, because God had out of his grace, initially disclosed and revealed himself to them. Purkiser (1960:37) describes faith as a 'response to divine revelation.' Grace is therefore, God's loving self-disclosure to people in various ways. This implies communication between God and people even through the Scriptures.

### **2.5.2 Indispensability of faith**

The indispensability of faith has often been used by scholars at the expense of the credibility of the Bible. For example, some Christians discredit the validity of the Bible from the perception that people come to know God by their personal faith, and not through the Scriptures. For example, the children of Israel came to know God during the time of Moses, without the Scriptures. Moses is believed to have written the commandments later, after he had met with God. This kind of belief is also derived from passages of scripture such as, 'It is by God's grace that you have been saved,' (Ephesians 2:5, 8-9; Romans 3:24).

This is both fully and partially true. It depends on the contexts within which the concerned passages of scripture are interpreted. But, it has been unfortunate that some

scholars have unfairly used these passages of scripture with an attempt to show that the Bible is without the kind of authority that is ascribed to it, because people like Abraham and Moses happened to have faith without it.

My reaction to this kind of thinking is that it is partly true. In this case consideration was given exclusively to isolated cases about Abraham and Moses, whereas there are many other ways, which complement and supplement ways through which God had communicated with mankind. God's message has been communicated to people in various ways as implied in Hebrews (1:1). In their book, 'God, Man & Salvation,' Purkiser, Richard and Willard Tailor (1977: 38-42) give the various ways by which God has revealed himself to mankind through 'the creation, mighty acts in history, visions, prophets and their word, the Law, appointed symbols, and **Scriptures as a whole,**' (emphasis mine).

### **2.5.3 Scriptures from grace**

There is nothing good that people have, which they happen to have without being facilitated by the grace of God.

#### **2.5.3.1 Divine initiative**

According to the Old Testament religious context writing was practiced not by people only. Instead, it was practiced by God the creator, too, to keep anything that he found worth remembering by his chosen nation, Israel. People would record anything that they would need to refer to in the future for remembrance. As people had probably often kept any important thing that they would like their children or grand-children or distant descendants to remember and live by in writing it down, seemingly they had the same perception about God. They probably believed that the keeping of written records by

God, was one of the ways that God used to remind himself of anything worth remembering. For example, the writers of Exodus 24: 12 and Deuteronomy 4: 13; 5: 22; 10: 2, 4 portray God as the author of the laws that he gave to Moses. Here God has been shown to be the original writer of the instructions that Moses was supposed to convey to the Israelites. These passages of scripture show that Moses had accepted the already-written-by-God instructions. My view is that this kind of perception should not be taken out of its social, cultural and religious context. I believe that it needs to be seen against its multi-faceted cultural background in which God and things associated with him were awesomely respected. It is my view that, the belief that God personally wrote some parts of the scriptural passages was a perception developed from the culture of fearing God. For example, Bryant (1967:270) comments that 'the Israelites took seriously the third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold guiltless those that taketh his name in vain," (Exodus 20:7). He explains that 'around 300 B.C. they decided not to pronounce it at all; but whenever in reading they came to it, they spoke the word **adonai** which means Lord.' Their fear of God could be developed to fearing even to fully pronounce his name. In the light of Bryant's comment the Israelites were not only careful to use God's name with respect. **I believe that, their fear and concern to use God's name respectfully developed to the stage of identifying the message about God by human authors with God.** Therefore, it is my opinion that it became culturally and religiously normal to see and to accept God as the literal author of his message, though it has culturally and religiously become different to modern people. I believe that the belief that sees God as the literal author of the Bible should be seen against the background **of the good intention to secure and promote both the fear of God and the respect for the literature, which was believed to convey**

**the message from God.**

But, I ask myself what could have happened if there was not such a culture that took God so seriously. It is a well known historical fact that God has been conveyed to other cultural groups of people by means of the Israelite culture. To a large degree, at least, I believe we are like people who still have the baby, the water and the tub. There is a need to try in our efforts never to pour out the baby (which I liken to many written scriptural passages which have led many people to have personal experiences with God) with the water. I cannot imagine how it could have been like without certain scriptural passages that mean so much to me. I find it difficult, if not impossible to imagine, how it would have been, if after a thousand years after the first eye-witnesses to Jesus and those who were close to them had nothing written down from them about what Jesus had said.

There is a great unlikelihood that in the absence of the first eye-witnesses we would know any of the words generally attributed to Jesus and his apostles. Thus, I believe that it has been part of God's plan to reveal himself to other people by means of many of the kept written scriptural passages.

God was also believed to have possessed a register, where he had kept the names of the people who obeyed him. For example, Moses believed that his name was amongst God's people who had pleased God. In Exodus 32: 31-32 the writer reports him as he prays for his fellow Israelites to God: 'these people have committed a terrible sin...Please forgive their sin; but if you won't, then remove my name from **the book in which you have written the names of your people,**' (emphasis mine).

**2.5.3.2 Divine writing**



The importance of the written record is indicated further by the New Testament writers. For example, the writer of 2 Corinthians 3: 2-3 indicates the importance of the written record. This time it is not necessarily on paper, but on human beings' hearts. The writer, through the personality of the Apostle Paul, explains that this kind of the written record is done not with ink, but with the Holy Spirit. What I find to be very significant about this scripture is that, it stresses the importance of the written truth by the Holy Spirit. Both the human heart and the Holy Spirit are not as visible as a book or ink or pen. They are spiritual. Because they are spiritual, they therefore refer to a different kind of written record. Foster (1998:64) comments:

In study there are two "books" to be studied: verbal and nonverbal. Books and lectures, therefore, constitute only half the field of study, perhaps less. The world of nature and, most important, the careful observation of events and actions are the primary nonverbal fields of study.

In my view, therefore, these passages of scripture teach us another dimension of the written record. It is that **not all the writing has been done on and with the visible material like ink and paper.** Writing has also been done invisibly or spiritually or nonverbally. For example, memorizing the passages of scripture with the intention to live by sound Biblical principles, I believe that it is one of the many ways of writing down the truth in one's mind and heart. From the mind and heart a person can act out the acquired message.

### **2.5.3.3 Means of assurance**

Another significance is taught by the writer of the book of Revelation 20: 12-15 where he shows the important role played by the written records. 'Books were opened, and then

another book was opened, the book of the living... Whoever did not have their names written in the book of the living were thrown into the lake of fire,' he says.

My personal view about this passage of scripture is that it assures the readers of the Bible of the coming judgement. The author of this passage of scripture narrates the reality of the final judgement by using a common way of book record. The question that I ask myself is, **which familiar scene could the author have used to visually communicate the guaranteed final judgement?** If the author had lived during our times, I believe that he or she could have used the current means of record saving to assure us about the certainty of the coming final judgement. For example, I believe computer, computer disk and computer printout could have been used by the author as point of reference at the final judgement. Personally, I do not believe that God literally needed a common paper book to record mankind's deeds. But, the concept of the book was needed mainly for communication purposes. **It was used to confirm to the Bible readers that the final judgement will surely take place.**

But the Scriptures need not be used to substitute God. They should be used to serve as a witness to God's promises. It is as Richard S Taylor (1985:178-179) puts it that our

... real trust is not in the Word as an independent power - that would be bibliolatry - but in the God of the Word. Our faith is in the promises only because it is confident of the Promiser. This recognizes that the Bible cannot be detached from the action of the Spirit, who alone can authenticate the promises.

#### **2.5.3.4 Identification with humanity**

Another purpose for portraying God as a being who uses books to record mankind's actions, was for identifying God with humanity. This kind of identification brought God closer to people. It gave both God and people common features that helped people to find it easy to relate to God. While God was believed to be transcendent (i.e. beyond reach and knowledge) this identification made him immanent (i.e. inherent in nature). Purkiser (1983:23) comments that 'God is the transcendent Being who in the beginning "created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). He is also the immanent Being who "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3).

I personally believe that it is important from the perspective of humanity, to be able to identify their creator with what they are familiar with, in this case the record books. It helps us, people, to understand that, just as much as we are able to remember, there are also other things that help reduce our forgetfulness. They extend our memory capacity, in the form of records and books. In comparison to man's capability to increase his remembrance capacity, God cannot forget anything. God will never ever forget anything. Although unfitting, limited and human the concept of reminding by books may look like when applied to God, it signifies that 'there is nothing that can be hidden from God; everything in all creation is exposed and lies open before his eyes. And it is to him that we must all give an account of ourselves,' (Hebrews 4:13). The portrait of God recording people's deeds in the books indicates people's unchangeable accountability to God.

Nothing will pass unnoticed at the judgement before God.

The book record concept is one of the many God-ordained ways that humanly communicates his will to all people to get his message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

#### **2.5.3.5 Accessibility**

The spreading of the message of salvation through the Scriptures cannot be treated in isolation from the essence of the Great Commission as stated in Matthew 28:18-20.

Spreading the message had been deeply entrenched in the Great Commission.

However, the Scriptures are not the only way through which the message of salvation has been conveyed to people. According to Purkiser (1960:273) there are 'means of agencies other than the Word in the Scriptures (see Rom 1:18-20), and a particular or direct call through the preaching of the gospel.'

The significance of the Scriptures is that the creator, God, had ordained and approved the spreading of his message through other means and the Scriptures too. Jesus' reading and reference to the Scriptures in Luke 4:16-21 and Matthew 4:4, 7, 10 respectively, in my view confirms God's approval of the Scriptures. It would be a **noble example for Moses and other human beings to follow**, by recording the message and then spreading it to the rest of the people by proclamation and writing. **This would increase the capacity of accessibility of the message of salvation to the rest of humanity.** Therefore, the recording of the scriptural message signifies the accessible nature of the message to other people who are without it.

#### **2.5.3.6 Human delegation**

As already shown in the above paragraph, the writers of the Exodus and Deuteronomy had portrayed God as the original author of his word. It probably became necessary then to God to delegate the responsibility of passing and spreading his message further to his people through Moses and other people.

Exodus 17: 14 shows how God found it necessary to instruct and to involve Moses to write down an account of the war between the Israelites and the Amalekites. This was the recording of the already known historical events to the people of Moses' time. It was probably what Moses knew well. I personally believe that the situation was such that, Moses could have consulted his contemporaries to remind him, if he happened to have forgotten anything related to this historical event. There was, therefore, enough room for both individuals and group contribution to the recording of the historical event concerned. It was not to be recorded for a historical reason only. Instead, it was to be recorded particularly for a divine reason, which was to show how complete trust and dependence upon God can release God's power. This is a recorded historical event that teaches the reliability of God when completely and humbly trusted and relied upon by mankind. 'Write an account of this victory, so that it will be remembered,' God told Moses. Earl (1967: 120) comments: 'This is the first mention of writing on record.' In the light of this scripture it is obvious that our creator, God, knew the importance of the recording of the divine information to mankind.

## **2.6 Nature of Bible authority**

It is essential to understand clearly the kind of authority that the Bible is all about. I believe that it will probably answer many questions which have been asked to question the authority of the Bible. According to D. Elton Trueblood (1957:70) 'We must use reason to determine which authority to follow, just as we use reason to determine which faith to follow.'

### **2.6.1 Inherited authority**

The authority of the Bible should be understood in both its right context and

perspective. The first context and perspective is its relation to God as its cause and origin. From this point of view its authority is seen to exist because God is its origin. He necessitated and caused its existence. In comparison to other important things worth recording in human life, God's word never was an exception. I believe that it out-weighed them all, because all these things were made by his word. Nothing exists that was not made by this word (John 1:2). According to the context of the latter passage of scripture, **there is nothing in the whole creation that out-values this creating Word of God.** It is due to the fact that all and whatever might be considered valuable exists because the Word created it. God, who is also known as the Word (John 1:1), is the reason for its existence.

Secondly, it should be seen as the record of the process through which God revealed and communicated his over-all message of love to mankind within certain social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the authority of the Bible needs to be seen and understood not only from the perspective of the history of mankind, but also from the perspective of God's intention to save mankind. McDonald (1995:118) comments that the authority of Scripture in early Christianity was found in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Although people who proclaimed these prophecies had imperfections and weaknesses, they proclaimed the authoritative **words and deeds of Christ.**

### **2.6.2 Soft-hard authority**

For a long time the authority of the Bible has been scrutinized in many ways by various people. It has been examined both objectively and subjectively by people. The discussion about it raised questions whether this authority was **authoritarian**

**(dictatorial) or authoritative (convincingly in command).** According to Barr (1973:24) the authoritarian kind of authority was described by some scholars as being 'hard' (i.e. being forceful without enough convincing power to the believer). The authoritative authority was described by others as being 'soft' (i.e. as appealing to the believer and willingly being embraced by him or her regardless the imperfections of the Scriptures).

Personally I believe that the ultimate kind of authority taught to us through the Scriptures is the one demonstrated to us by Christ, namely, authoritative authority.

### **2.6.3 Normative authority**

Most Christians believe that it is necessary to have norms. Amongst the norms like the **church** and **reason**, they require the Bible to be one of the norms. To them the Bible is the credible product of the canon. Its trustworthy **prescriptive** historical record necessitates its inclusion with both the ancient and the current writings.

What needs to be remembered is that norms go hand in hand with authority, and vice versa. For example, Macionis (1997:74) agrees that, 'Some norms are proscriptive, mandating what we should not do ... Prescriptive norms, on the other hand, spell out what we should do ...' There are people who ask questions whether Christian principles should have norms. Some of them go to an extent of associating norms with Judaism only. They perceive the New Testament, especially the gospels, to be having freedom only, but, without norms.

Contrary to this, there are those people who consider religious freedom to have limits.

They believe that freedom, as one of the many components of the New Testament message, has the potential of either being correctly used or abused. I personally believe that Jesus is the reflection of the standard for both the authority and norms of the Bible in the New Testament. He set a good and perfect example of morality, which is worthy to be followed by all humanity. This morality has been in the form of the perfect love that he had displayed in various ways. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan. It portrays the kind of love that Jesus had taught as the moral criterion that God expects every person to live up to. Instead of re-emphasizing outward purity, as the Israelites and the Pharisees used to do, Jesus re-focused the attention of his audience on what the Prophet Jeremiah (17: 9-10) once proclaimed: 'Who understands the human heart? ... I, the Lord, search human minds and test human hearts. I treat each one according to the way he lives, according to what he does.' He (i.e. Jesus) also re-emphasized the necessity of human purity in the gospels. For example, Mark 7:20-23 and Matthew 5:8 both stress the importance of sound morality, whose source is a pure heart.

Although some scholars discredit it due to what they believe to be the **accidental** nature of the process which led to the formation of the Bible, many other believers attribute the formation of it to the **providence of God**. The books of the Bible are perceived and believed to be essential as they are understood to be witnessing to the saving acts of God.

One remaining challenge is that the Bible is still used selectively by individuals and groups of people. All the books of the Bible need to be used equally and fully to complementarily convey the message of salvation. Selective use of the books of the Bible is seen by some scholars as expressing some kind of an informal formation of a



new canon. My opinion is that a selective use of the Bible needs to comply with God's plan of salvation for all people.

#### **2.6.4 Multi-faceted authority**

The authority of the Scriptures came with the ways that God revealed himself to mankind. Just as God spoke to people in **various ways** (emphasis mine), according to Hebrews 1:1-2, the authority of his Word, too, showed itself in various ways. All the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament had authority over the Christians, the Church and faith in a particular way. The authority of each book shows itself from the nature and functions that each book has to its reader or listener.

#### **2.6.5 Self-proclaimed authority**

The authority of the Biblical books in both the Old and the New Testaments is self-proclaimed and self-authenticated. There are no outside references or evidence that confirm their authorship. In the same way there is no other source of morality, from which the authority of the Scriptures can be ascribed, except God. Bartlett (1983:11-32) illustrates this fact by showing from the preaching and testimonies of the Old and New Testament characters, namely, the prophet Jeremiah and the Apostle Paul. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah 1:4-10; 2:1-3 refers to God, as the only authority and source of his messages. 'The Lord said to me, "I chose you ..."', Jeremiah said. Similarly, in the New Testament Paul (1 Corinthians 1:21-25; 1:17; 2:4-5) refers to the crucified and risen Christ as the only authority and source of his messages.

The perception of the authorship of God for certain portions of the Scriptures meant much more than the ordinary authorship that has to do with the mechanical writing of literature. My view is that it referred to God as the author (i.e. source) of these passages of scripture.

At the same time human authors were also full of the zeal (emotionally spirited) to promote these passages. At the back of the minds of the writers of these portions of scripture they probably intended to facilitate and promote the acceptance of their message to their audience. Therefore, the acceptance of their product could probably be facilitated by ascribing their message in portions of scripture directly to the author (i.e. source) of creation, God.

#### **2.6.6 Fulfilment of prophecy**

Contrary to the objective references like, for example, the scientific-historical documents, by which some people wished the authority of the Scriptures to be confirmed, are the Biblical historical events and personal experiences of Bible characters that do confirm the authority of the Scriptures. In the case of the Biblical historical events, in the Old Testament true prophets who were trusted by the people, were the ones whose prophecies (messages) were later fulfilled in history. Their predictions were later on fulfilled in history.

Bartlett (1983:38) explains how both Isaiah 44:28-45:7 and Jeremiah (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-6) became the great and honoured prophets, because their prophecies about God's mercy to Israel were carried out in history through Cyrus, the Persian emperor. What is significant about these prophets' messages is that they were fulfilled both during their proclaimers' life time, as well as long after their proclaimers had died. For example, Jeremiah (25: 11-12; 29: 10) lived to see his prediction come true. Probably many of his contemporaries shared with him this experience. They had an opportunity to see with their own naked eyes and experience the fulfillment of what was predicted in their life time. Here their personal experience made them to acknowledge

the reliability of the Scriptures, which in my view contributed towards the authority of the Scriptures.

On the other hand, Isaiah never lived to see the same prediction that he and Jeremiah had made. Halley (1965: 232) explains that Isaiah (44: 26-28) had made the same prophecy two hundred years before it was fulfilled. Unlike in the case of Jeremiah, Isaiah, together with most, if not all of his contemporaries, could not live to see the fulfillment of his prophecy. In other words, Isaiah just believed and preached the message, whose concrete results he saw from a distance, spiritually, by faith. Other peoples than himself, physically experienced the results of his prophecy after his life time. This leads me to the aspect of the potential of the Scriptures to persuade people to have faith in God. In this case the nature of the Scriptures is such that it can arouse faith in a person provided a person so chooses. My next subheading will, therefore, be about the Scriptures as the cause for faith.

#### **2.6.7 Cause for faith**

In his book, *People of the Book?*, Barton (1988: 1-23) tries to bridge the gap between the conservatives (fundamentalists) and the post-enlightenment world of skepticism (liberals). He believes that the Christians got the freedom that freed them from the Bible. I hope Barton means that Christians got freedom that **'freed'** them and does not imply the freedom that **'divorced'** them from the Bible. It is the freedom that they got by faith in Christ. According to him, this freedom is **determined by the Bible, from which the Christians have been freed.** To me this is pure contradiction by Barton, if by freedom he implies divorce from the Bible. How does one become independent from the book that determines one's faith? In my opinion, it is true that Christians are given freedom by faith in Christ. Barton rightly acknowledges that the Christians' freedom is determined,

or in his actual words is '**characterized,**' by the Bible. My argument is that the Bible is about God and Christ. It is not about itself. Various books of the Bible are generally understood and accepted to be about God and Christ, not about the Bible. The Bible is a means of communicating the gospel. There were various ways of communicating the message from God as indicated in Hebrews 1:1. For example, in the New Testament John (21: 31) and Paul (Romans 10:14-17) show how faith resulted from the written records and proclamation of the gospel respectively. As the writer of the Gospel of John has indicated, the written records were written that we, people, may believe. The implication is that **faith in this case, depends on the written record, the Bible.**

Therefore, the importance of the Bible in this sense reflects its indispensability, which makes it authoritative. The same truth applies to the truth expressed by the Book of Romans. The writer of this book shows how important the preaching of the gospel is to those who have not yet heard it. The implication of the preaching in this case is that, the **preachers of the gospel preach either from memory or from the written record,** which are the Scriptures. Since the Scriptures serve as a commonly accessible source, when compared to preaching from an individual's single memory, I consider them to have **authority of reference.** By source of reference I mean that, they provide a much more accessible source to and from which any person can refer. They provide a source without which there would be no positive contribution and positive influence made from the Judeo-Christian faith perspective towards the culture of human rights. Therefore, while faith sometimes serves as a link between the Scriptures and us, it is sometimes produced by the Scriptures.

#### **2.6.8 Characterized by Jesus**

Barton tries to play down the authority of the Bible by showing how both the Apostle

Paul and Jesus Christ informally referred to the Scriptures of their day, namely, the Old Testament. According to him, the informal use of the Old Testament by Jesus and Paul indicates that the two did not consider it to be literally binding on themselves and other people. My opinion is that, yes, it is true, Jesus and Paul did not sound to be dogmatic or legalistic about the message of the Old Testament. In other words, **they did not have a stereo-typed understanding of the Old Testament compared to people of their time.**

I believe that their scope of understanding went far beyond the contemporary social, cultural and religious context of their time. Therefore, their interpretations of the Old Testament were also not confined to the cultural and religious context of Old Testament situation alone. They reflected a broader and much more profound meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures. For example, Romans 4:23, 24 explains that the scriptures about Abraham were written for all the people who succeeded him. Earl (1967:1045) quotes Adam Clarke as commenting that what was written about Abraham was written not as a mere honour. But, it was written as an example to both the Israelites and the non-Israelites, as to how God would save all of them. Again, 1 Corinthians (9: 9, 10; 10: 10, 11) confirms further that what was written in the Old Testament was written purposely for all the people who lived during and after the Old Testament period. The Old Testament is not merely a history of events. It provides us with events with specifically significant divine messages. If and when correctly interpreted the events work towards revealing God's saving plan for humankind. 'Thus, Old Testament history is used to show a pattern of behavior to be followed or avoided,' comments Donald S. Metz (1968: 407). It therefore means that Paul, after he had learnt from Jesus, he imitated him and obviously applied the Old Testament not superficially as it seemed to be, but, with all its implicated truths. Hence, the appeal by Paul, 'Imitate me, then, just as I imitate Christ,' (1

Corinthians 11:1). The importance of both the faith and the human agency in the spreading of the Word of God, leads me to the next concept of the dependence of the message of the Scriptures on the human agency.

### **2.6.9 Dependence and independence**

In the New Testament - Romans (10: 14-17) and Luke (16: 29) show the dependence of the Biblical message on the human agency to convey the message to the audience. The impression given by these passages of scripture is that, without the human agent it seems impossible that the message of the Bible will ever reach other people. Here the Bible writers in a representative way teach the indispensability of people in the spreading of the gospel. Against this background, the spreading of the gospel is totally dependent on man's obedience to take it to the other people. The nature of the gospel is such that those who have received it, in turn are expected to pass it on to those who have not yet found it. The gospel was meant for people, and it must be taken by people to other people.

Some of the prophecies by the prophets happened a distance away from the life time of their proclaimers, especially after they were dead. It allowed space of time to separate the proclaimer from the message proclaimed. It crystallized the proclaimed message away from its proclaimer. It brought the distinction between the messenger and the message. In my opinion this shows how independent the Biblical message has been from its proclaimers. For example, the prophetic messages proclaimed by Isaiah (9: 6; 53; 61: 1-2) are generally believed by Christians to have referred to the awaited Messiah. These prophecies are believed to have been fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ about two thousand years ago. Now, my point is that many **prophecies were fulfilled in the absence of the people who proclaimed them.** They have been effected in the absence

of their agents. The deaths of their proclaimers did not interrupt their being fulfilled. They did not necessarily happen because the prophets had predicted them. The proclaimers' job was just to pass on the information they were given. Prophecies happened because God had said that they would happen. Human agents play their respective roles only, and it is God who does the most critical part that cannot be done by a human being, (1 Corinthians 3:7). In other words, **the message of the gospel is not tied to or depending on any person.** If the proclaimer of the gospel dies, the message does not die with the dying person. Instead, it continues to be proclaimed by both the death and the former life of the then living person. In other words, the sound moral life that the gospel had produced in this dead person will continue to bear witness to the proclaimed word. It means that it can also be accepted by a living person from a person who is no longer in existence. The remembrance of the previous good life of a dead person is able to influence those who happen to have known him or her, to live the kind of moral life that he or she had lived.

Therefore, this kind of flexibility in terms of both its dependence and independence reflects the constant, unchanging and reliable quality of the message of the Bible. I believe it is only right to define it as a paradox. There are not enough words to describe it. This is how the scriptural message was, is and will be found to be, when looked at meditatively with an open mind. It is against the background of its authoritatively complex nature of its message that the authority of the Bible needs to be seen.

#### **2.6.10 Confirmed authority**

Until now the authority of the Scriptures has been evaluated by the audience outside the Scriptures. The characters of the Scriptures have been ignored. I believe that the views

and attitude of Bible characters about the message of the Scriptures also need to be considered, because the Scriptures communicate their message to the audience through them. I regard them as an integral part of this literature, without which the message of the Scriptures becomes incomplete.

The Old Testament has characters who have shown certain attitudes towards their Scriptures. For example, as part of the characters of the Old Testament, the prophets stamped their authority by associating their messages with God. To every message that they proclaimed, 'The Lord says / said: ...' was attached (Isaiah 1:2, 18; Jeremiah 1:4, 26; Ezekiel 3:1; 4:1).

Another most significant character, Jesus, used the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) for scriptural reference. As far as I know he never questioned or disrespectfully criticized the Old Testament. Instead, according to Yancey (1999:65), he 'quoted from it to settle controversies with opponents such as the Pharisees, Sadducees and Satan himself.' Yancey further gives the reason why Jesus had adopted such a positive attitude towards the Hebrew Bible: **'much of the Old Testament explicitly or implicitly points to Jesus,'** (emphasis mine). Another thing that Jesus did was to make the Old Testament better understood. For example, Luke 4:16-21 shows how he read Isaiah 61:1-2 and made his audience understand this portion of scripture better. He further gives a very comprehensive interpretation of the Old Testament in Matthew 5-7, where the Scriptures were narrowly understood and narrowly interpreted. Here statements like, 'You have heard ..., but now I tell you: ...' show how Jesus introduced much deeper and broader insight and understanding into the Old Testament Scriptures (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28,



31-32, 33-34, 38-39). Where there were misunderstandings he did his best to bring in the correct understanding. In the light of his positive attitude towards the Scriptures of his time, namely, the Old Testament, in my view, he imparted value and authority to the Scriptures which were about him. It is common knowledge that the value of every container result from its content. Therefore, in addition to the Old Testament, the New Testament had become important because its contents are mostly directly and indirectly about Jesus Christ.

This, however, is in contrast with the opinion of John Meier (2003:52-79). He claims that ‘Both the historical Jesus and the historical Law are problematic quantities, containing problems. Anyone trying to construct a path through this maze should first post a road sign: Proceed with caution.’

It is obvious that Meier sees no correlation and consensus between Jesus’ teachings and the teachings of the Old Testament. In my opinion he sees the Old Testament as an end in itself. In other words he does not have the perception held by many Christians who perceive many Old Testament passages of scripture as been developed and fulfilled in the New Testament in the personhood of Christ. He also seems to regard Jesus as an ordinary person who had human weaknesses and limitations like all other people. In other words in Jesus Christ’s personhood he does not see the aspects of the Messiah as the Israelites are believed to have perceived and understood them. Some of these aspects are that the Messiah was expected by the Israelites that

He would free them from their enemies. He would make Israel  
a great nation again. They thought that their Messiah would be

like an earthly king. He had been anointed by the Holy Spirit. God had chosen Him to bring salvation (Truesdale, Lyons, Eby & Clark, 1986:186).

Meier's perception about Jesus does not only naturally strip off the attributes of Jesus Christ as the Messiah from an Israelite perspective, but it also strips off the attributes of Jesus Christ from the Christian perspective. For example, according to the general outlook of the New Testament Christ has been portrayed as the Saviour of the world. Matthew (1:21), 'She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus - because he will **save his people from their sins** (emphasis mine),' is typical of New Testament passages of scripture that reflect Christ as the Saviour. It is against this background that Meier's perception is seen by me as his look at Christ as an ordinary human being, who was confined and subject to human inadequacy that all human beings are subject to. But, in my opinion this is contrary to many passages of scripture that are believed by many Christians to be portraying Christ as the Saviour of mankind.

## **2.6.11 Guaranteed authority**

### **2.6.11.1 Christ-centeredness**

Reid (1957: 234-279) believes that the Bible is worthy of the authority that is permanent, simple, universal, categorical and acceptable, even to people to whom it independently imposes itself. From a Christian point of view, one of the factors that guarantees the authority of the Bible is that **it speaks about the Lord Jesus Christ**. Christ is believed to be the theme of the Bible message by many Christians. The importance of Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of all people from sin, makes the Bible to be important. As the protagonist (i.e. main character) in the Bible, he imparts his importance to the Bible. This is done by conveying the message about Christ as a Saviour. Therefore, the authority of

the Bible is derived from Christ.

#### **2.6.11.2 Old-New Testaments pivot**

The authority of the Bible is also confirmed by the way both the Old and the New Testament are **respectively related to Christ**. For example, many Christians believe that many prophecies in the Old Testament are related to the future Messiah, Christ. The latter was the expected Messiah. The people were waiting for the promises about the coming Messiah to be fulfilled. In the New Testament things became different. Instead of looking forward to the yet still to come Messiah, people had to look to the Messiah who had already come. They were then looking and learning from his earthly life, what he had demonstrated to them by the way he had lived and worked. In other words, people were looking backwards to learn from Christ's life's history. They also looked forward to his second coming. Therefore, the people in the Old and New Testament looked forward and backward respectively, towards the common centre, namely, Christ. In each testament people looked to Christ in a particular way. They expected him to help them in their particular situation. Though different their needs could have been, they looked to the common solution, Christ. Therefore Christ served as the climax and fulfillment for these two testaments.

#### **2.6.11.3 Salvation-centeredness**

The Bible also has a **pattern of the saving events** by God to his people. These are the events wherein God saved people in various ways. He saved them politically from slavery and oppression by foreign nations. He also saved them by way of healing them from physical sicknesses. He also saved his people spiritually from their sins, by way of forgiving their sins. Both the Old and the New Testament give accounts of the saving deeds of God to his people. For example, in Old Testament we have the Exodus. Here

the Children of Israel were freed out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12); protected against the planned extermination by Haman (Esther 1-10); and returned from exile in Babylon (Ezra 1-2; Nehemiah 1-2; 7:6-73). In the New Testament we have Jesus in the Gospels, where he is shown healing people who were physically sick (Mark 1:29-34). Jesus is also saving people from their sins (Matthew 9:1-2). By this I mean that he forgives people of their sins, and also helps them to turn away from their evil life styles. After Jesus, his disciples imitated him and carried on with all that he had done.

In both the Old and New Testament there are common elements such as physical healing and spiritual forgiveness. These are some of the big issues that the Bible is currently known to be conveying the message about.

#### **2.6.11.4 Life-changing message**

Bartlett (1983:113-130) shows how the Bible characters bore witness to God. They spoke about God as the eye-witnesses of the things they had experienced from him. For example, Isaiah (6:1-7) tells how he personally saw God through a vision. This experience first made him to change his sinful life-style in the way that it related to both God and his community. Price (1966:51) refers to Isaiah's experience that all his 'sinful uncleanness was burned away' from his mouth and heart. This is the experience that took place subjectively to this prophet, but made him to objectively affect his community in a different, but positive way.

In another personal testimony by the Prophet Jeremiah (1:4-19), he, Jeremiah, has a dialogue with God. He explains how they interacted with each other. Jeremiah (1:9) explains that the Lord stretched out his hand and touched his lips. Unlike in the case of Isaiah, where his conversion is explicit, in Jeremiah's case it is assumed, thus implicit.

The fact that he was sent to tell the Israelites about their backsliding and the subsequent punishment, shows that he was necessarily not one of the culprits. In other words, he had previously repented and continued to live the kind of life that excluded him from the punishment that was aimed at the Israelites, who were then blamed by God. 'I will punish my people because they have sinned; they have abandoned me...' God said to Jeremiah (1:16). Just like Isaiah, Jeremiah's conversion related subjectively to God, as well as objectively to his community. What I am trying to convey is that the life changing message of the Bible makes it to be seen as a life changing book, too.

In confirmation of this life-changing book the New Testament gives several personal testimonies. Acts 26:2-29 gives an account of the Apostle Paul's testimony. Paul explains how he came to know and to accept the Lord Jesus Christ, when he was then the arch-opponent of Christ and his followers. His interaction with God resulted in a changed relationship between him and God and between him and the people of his community. As for Luke (19:1-10), he gives an account of Zacchaeus whose life style was changed to a morally acceptable one.

In both the Old and New Testament the Bible provides us with recorded stories that both give us the history and shows us incidents in which people's lives were morally changed for the good.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

My opinion is that the authority of the Bible is being enhanced by Biblical principles which generally acknowledge every person's human rights. The acknowledgement and

upholding of human dignity, which are re-enforced by the scriptural principle about the need for people to be accountable to other people and God, make the Scriptures very relevant to the promotion of human rights. It is against their background of acknowledging and upholding human dignity and making people accountable to one another and God that all scriptural principles need to be seen. Some of the Scriptures' descriptive events reflect probable norms and values of the time which need not be mistaken for their sustainable prescriptive ones. In my view it is by emulating the exemplary attitude of Christ towards other people that the actually determinative scriptural principles need to be implemented to promote human rights. With the Christ-like attitude scriptural principles do not impose themselves on any person. The Scriptures' message of salvation allows every person to have a free will of choice. In my opinion, therefore, the authority of Scripture is self attributed by the manner in which the Scriptures acknowledge both people's freedom of choice and the potential to develop their faith guided by conscience. Therefore, this is the type of authority that is persuasive and religious. It cannot be imposed or legislated politically. My belief is that this authority is determined mostly by the extent to which a person has yielded to the persuasion and appeal of scriptural principles.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **HUMAN DIGNITY**

Human dignity is a concept as old as humanity. This concept, however, has seemingly been understood in various ways, which in turn have been expressed in particular ways, by individuals and communities. History shows how the various concepts from the various communities have in unique ways expressed common acknowledgement of the need to promote human dignity. These various concepts also reflect a socio-religious convergence and consensus of the various cultures and religions about the fundamentality of human dignity. In a mosaic fashion they positively portray different ancient cultural beliefs which serve to reflect the fundamentality of human dignity. These ancient and modern concepts serve collectively to form a corner stone and pillar, which can be used to promote the modern concept of human rights.

#### **3.1 Origin and Source**

The reality of human dignity resulted in what is presently known as the necessity to

acknowledge both the respect and promotion of human rights. Just as much as there is a global consensus about the acknowledgement of human dignity, there is also a general agreement on the issue of human rights.

### **3.1.1 Religious influence**

There is a lot of historical evidence that confirms the truth and fact that the concept of human dignity has been indicated in various cultures and communities in one way or another. What I regard to be the general and universal acknowledgement of human dignity was expressed by various communities in their religious and cultural practices.

For example, in his article titled, 'Human rights: The influence of the Hebrew Bible,' in the Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages,' Otto (1999:1-20) gives us two typical examples of the communities that had maintained the concept of human dignity in their own respective ways. For example, the Israelites were one such group. The non-Israelites, namely, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Assyrians and the Greeks formed another group.

#### **3.1.1.1 Israelite influence**

In the light of the teaching of the Old Testament the Israelites, through their faith, were one of the nations that contributed very significantly to both the current concepts of human dignity and human rights respectively. Different from the way the other nations contributed towards the current concepts of the human dignity and human rights, the Israelite scholars, according to Otto (1999:4), showed how the Israelites, with influence from the Hebrew Bible, made a significant contribution to the current concepts of human dignity and human rights. They achieved this as a result of their struggle with their contemporary neighbouring Assyrian dictatorial



rule of their time. The Assyrian rule was religiously and politically implemented by one state over the other states. That is, the other states were subjected to the rule by a single state in politics and religious matters.

Unlike many other nations that entrusted their loyalty simultaneously and equally to both their gods and kings, the Israelites were instructed to entrust their loyalty to their God, I AM, alone. They were taught that I AM only was and is God. 'Israel, remember this! The Lord - and the Lord alone - is our God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Never forget these commands that I am giving you today,' said Moses to the Israelites (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). With the influence of these instructions, the Israelites were able to discern what was due to man and what was due to their God, I AM. For example, Otto (1999:10) shows how the Israelites took the loyalty oath that was meant for the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon, by the Assyrians, and changed it to be a loyalty oath for the Israelite God. This is comprised by Deuteronomy 13:2-10; 28:20-44. Though the loyalty oath was originally not meant for God (I AM), the Israelites scrutinized it and found only God to be worthy of it.

This belief in one God only was kept and sustained through the history of the Old Testament. For example, 1 Kings (18:21) shows how the prophet Elijah made the Israelites to make a choice between God and the other gods of the time. The context of this chapter portrays a phenomenon wherein God proved himself to be the only true, living and almighty God. My opinion is that **the significance of this belief is the way it exposed the nature of the limited the power of the government of the time (which was representative of all governments in the past and presently) and both allowed**

**and encouraged all people, individually or collectively to practice what was dictated to them by their individual conscience.** This appeal to acknowledge the dictates of one's conscience was at that time not generally acknowledged and promoted as an integral part of human dignity, as is the case today. In my view it was then a principle still encapsulated within both a Israelite cultural and religious teaching, which also needed to be practiced by all other communities in relation to God only. Therefore, it goes without saying that in comparison to other nations this was a unique aspect. It seems like it was a reality that was by then still confined to the Israelite faith only. The significance of this ancient teaching today is that it helps people to acknowledge and promote freedom of choice resulting from the dictates of a person's conscience. In turn the acknowledgement of a person's freedom of choice serves to complement every person's human dignity.

The Old Testament acknowledgement of the human dignity has consistently been sustained by the New Testament. For example, the New Testament book of Acts (4:19; 5:29) reports how the apostles publicly stated in protest that it was better to obey God rather than people. This was said in the case where a person was supposed to choose either to obey God or man. The context of this scripture shows that the Christians of the time concerned were in a situation similar to our own. It means that they lived within communities where either a collective or individual decisions had to be taken. Every Christian had to make a personal choice, whether to side with the majority or not. If the decision they were to make would be contrary to God's principle, then the Christians knew that they were supposed to obey God, even though it would be against the majority's will.

Jesus too, further confirmed the acknowledgement of a person's conscience. He demonstrated this by the way he lived publicly and privately. For example, after he had taught his disciples what to know and how to live, he promised that he would be with them (Matthew 28:20). Here he promised the disciples that he would be with them, in such a way that they would be prepared to follow him, even though the majority might not side with them. It became a matter of choosing between one's conscience and the majority. This does not necessarily mean that Christ's disciples were taught and instructed to be always negative towards the majority's decision. But, they were empowered to stay alert, lest they did anything out of pressure from the majority that would violate their personal conscience and Christian principles. On the other hand, they were taught and instructed to do and to keep that which would credit God and consequently benefit humankind.

The significance of the Judeo-Christian belief is that their loyalty to their God moderated their loyalty to other human beings and things, including their own government. It helped to bring about the consideration of both the public and individual interests. The considerations of both the individual and public interests had to be balanced, in order to evenly and fairly maintain the respect and promotion of human dignity. This was 'a way of presenting a comprehensive picture of one's duty to God and to brothers and sisters of the human family ...' (Hagner 1995:647). The difference between the way the other communities acknowledged the inherent human dignity and the way that the Israelites were taught to acknowledge it was that, the other communities generally tried to acknowledge and to protect the feeling and concept of human dignity only in external matters in a collective manner. It means that they tried to find solutions for the problems

that were outwardly visible to most of the people. For example, it was seen to be easier to adhere to the rules of the same deity in a collective way. People were expected to do the same thing publicly. But, with the Israelites it went further than that. **They were taught also to voluntarily comply with God's commands from the secrecy of their hearts.** They were taught that their God considers the attitude and condition of the heart. '...I do not judge as the people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart,' said God to the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16:7).

### **3.1.1.2 Egyptian influence**

According to the Egyptian political-religious ideology, Ma'at, the Egyptian king was religiously mandated to govern his people as the only guarantor of unity and peace in his community. The belief was that, without the Egyptian king's rule there was no guarantee for justice, truth, righteousness and peace, even in the whole world. The king was believed to be a divinely ordained figure with whom the general public was supposed to form solidarity against selfishness, lawlessness and all the injustices in the community. This was the best ideology of its kind, because its main intention was to unite all the Egyptians, as well as all the other peoples of the earth. John Bright (1979:40) comments about the gods of Egypt that 'the high gods of Egypt were not local gods, but were honored all over the land and accorded cosmic dominion.' Human dignity was necessarily not expressed clearly enough, but it was acknowledged and efforts were made to protect it. I mean that unity, peace and justice, which were sought after so seriously and desperately are an indication of the inherent human dignity, which drove the Egyptian community to seek to acquire the best things for themselves. In my opinion this kind of attitude which sought to protect people promoted human dignity.

### 3.1.1.3 Persian influence

In my view the Persians had basically the same political-religious ideology as the Egyptians (cf. Bright 1979:40 and 1999:59). They also believed that their king was divinely ordained to overcome all the disorders and evils in their land. As for the other kings of the other nations, it was believed that they were assigned to accomplish the same purpose in their respective geographic and cultural areas. However, the Persian capital city, Persepolis, was to serve as the governing centre for the other areas. The Persian government was believed to have been assigned to lead the whole world in maintaining the universal order.

During the rule of Cyrus (who lived 559-530 B.C.) the Persians contributed positively towards the promotion of human dignity. Bright (1999:59) comments:

In the civilized heartland of the Middle East  
itself the Persians at first undertook to restore  
local freedoms and traditional religious and legal  
systems to all the peoples they annexed to their empire.

In agreement with Bright, Purkiser (1955:383) comments in reference to the Persians that

With the advent of Cyrus a new policy was inaugurated  
with regard to the treatment of conquered nations. Instead  
of tyrannizing over them and holding them in subjection by  
brute force, Cyrus chose to treat his subjects with consideration  
and to win them as his friends.

It is against the background of how Cyrus and the Persian society treated their foreign subjects that I consider the Persians as a nation that once upon a time unusually

contributed towards the acknowledgement and promotion of human dignity.

#### **3.1.1.4 Assyrian influence**

The Assyrian rule considered itself to be entrusted with a political-religious mission, as the other already mentioned governments. Otto (1999:7) comments that 'Assyrian rule over the world was expected to be the only way for all nations to live in peace, concord and social justice.' This belief was based on the belief that the Assyrian king was divinely ordained and mandated by the Assyrian gods to rule and to govern the Assyrian people and the rest of the people in the world. This confidence in the king was expressed by the fact that he was not even voted for by his people. Instead, he was automatically accepted as being one with the Assyrian gods. Every Assyrian king was believed to have been mandated by the gods to rule all the Assyrians and the entire world. Any criticism of the king was regarded as a rebellion and evil which had to be got riden off by any means, lest they destroy the whole world. On the other hand, through the king the people expected that the economy of their country would prosper and that there would be political stability too. What is significant about the Assyrian rule is that, there were no various authority structures. It means that the rule was without any other hierarchy than that of kingship. The king was identified with the gods. This is what Otto (1999:7) calls 'a hierarchy-free society of equal communication.' It was an excellent attempt, in my view, to acknowledge, to promote and to protect equality, human dignity, as well as human rights, which were then generally probably not understood or communicated to the extent that they are today.

#### **3.1.1.5 Greek influence**

According to Otto (1999:4) the Greeks contributed considerably to the concept of human rights, by the manner in which they had contributed to the concept of democracy. The Greek concept of 'isonomia,' meaning the equality of all the laws and rights of all people, and tolerance were necessarily not the only preliminary contributory factor to the concept of democracy as the impression has been given. According to the Greek political context, the development of the concept of democracy brought about a great change amongst the Greeks, and accordingly influenced the rest of the world. But, credit is due not to the Greeks only. The Greek contribution was mainly about 'common affairs.' It means that only issues which resulted from the democratic decisions were given attention. For example, women and slaves had to take part in the decision making of the government. Otto shows the inadequacy of the Greek concept of democracy, as to how it did not limit the public power, in order to acknowledge the individual rights. This is understood more vividly when contrasted with the current American concept of democracy that is expressed by John Macionis (1997:72):

Members of our society recognize numerous individual rights that cannot be overridden by government. ...

Our cultural value of freedom means that we favor individual initiative over collective conformity.

Although we acknowledge that everyone has responsibilities to others, we believe that individuals should be free to pursue personal goals with minimal interference from anyone else.

It means that the ancient Greek concept of democracy had much room waiting for development. It did not give consideration to individual conscience and choice which must not be subject to any majority decision. According to Otto (1999:4) the discovery of

the consideration of every person's conscience was an achievement made only by the Judean intellectuals. The latter's achievement resulted from their struggle with the Assyrian hegemony, which was the kind of ruling where many states were under the influence and governance of the one state. My personal opinion is that both the Israelite intellectuals (in as far as they considered individual conscience and choice) and the Greeks (in as far as they considered decisions determined by the majority) complementarily contributed positively towards the acknowledgement and promotion of human dignity and rights.

#### **3.1.1.6 Judeo-Christian influence**

The Judeo-Christian faith is actually the Israelite faith that has been both developed by and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. I regard Christ as the one who lived out the Israelite faith perfectly well and went further to develop it into what is currently known as the Christian faith. He did this by fulfilling what was believed by many Christians to be the initially awaited Israelite prophecies. These are many passages of scripture in the Bible which many Christians believe prophesied about Christ. From these passages of scripture Christ is seen as showing by example how people are supposed to relate to one another and to their creator, God, in a loving and positive way. In my opinion the kind of life style demonstrated by Christ was the best way ever to acknowledge and to promote human dignity, and it is the most worthy to be emulated by all people.

##### **3.1.1.6.1 Origin**

The Christian faith is an extremely deep and broad concept with much more meaning than one can imagine. Inherent in it is the essence of human dignity. I believe that the



significance of the Christian faith goes much deeper than a human mind can perceive. I believe it needs more of the divine revelation from the Holy Spirit than anything else, to begin to develop a much more comprehensive understanding of its nature and implications. It also becomes easy and simple to understand when learned from the way Christ lived and related to different types of people. In my opinion what is referred to as the image of God in all people in the Bible and what is currently being understood as human dignity by many people are expressed in the earthly life style of Christ. These two concepts are blended together and demonstrated in the exemplary way that Christ lived and related to other people. Therefore, according to the Bible, human dignity is not a new reality. The concept of the image of God, which is the concept of human dignity in secular terms, originated in the mind of God. According to Genesis 1:26-27 God was the one who first thought and intended to create man in his image and likeness. It was first decided and approved by him before the existence of humanity, and then implemented by him in creating people in his own image. People were to be made so that they could resemble their creator. In other words, people would become like God who had already existed before them.

#### **3.1.1.6.2 Corporate nature**

The image of God in people (which is human dignity) was not something given to persons unevenly and discriminately. But it was a plan which had been decided for all people before they were brought into existence. People were made to exist in fellowship with one another as equals. A person was supposed to be at peace first with him or herself, and then with his or her fellow man. This intent implied both the people who would come about by creation and through birth. 'Let us make man in our image and likeness to rule the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all wild animals on

earth, all reptiles that crawl upon the earth,' God said (Genesis 1:26). While God introduced himself in the plural, namely, '**Let us..**,' this nature of plurality was duplicated in the plural nature of his image in man. God created them male and female in his own image and they together reflected his image. 'The reference to both implies that their roles in life are not identical, and that likeness to God pertains not only to what they have in common but also to what remains distinctive about them,' (Fretheim 1994:345). This means that the image of God was in each person as well as in all of them collectively.

### **3.1.1.6.3 Responsibility**

The dignity of every person needs to be seen within the broader context of man's creation, as accounted for in Genesis 1 and 2. My belief is that human dignity cannot be seen fully and treated fairly, if it is isolated from the Biblical context which enhances and empowers human beings by identifying them with their creator, God. The Bible portrays a human being as an **empowered being**, who is **responsible to rule** all the living things on earth. It did, therefore, relate to the nature of the responsibility that was entrusted to people in the environment in which they lived. For example, people lived in an environment surrounded by various things, some of which were necessarily not human, such as the natural world. **People were originally given the responsibility to rule and to subdue the earth and everything living on it.** This means that they were made caretakers over the natural world. In other words, at the time of creation people were put within a certain particular relationship through which they could exercise their human power and control over nature. Therefore, the responsibility to rule and to subdue the whole earth and everything living on it, put people in a relative situation of dominating. The dominion of man over the earth made people special. Instead of being subjected to

the domination by the other creatures, the other creatures were subjected to people. For example, Genesis 2:19, 20 explains how people gave all the living creatures each its name. They exercised their power and authority over the other creatures by giving them names. During the flood Noah protected all the other living creatures by collecting and putting them in the ark (Genesis 7). Against this background, we see the privilege that was given people to exercise power. This is one of the ways that portrays to us one of the aspects of people's deputed dignity.

#### **3.1.1.6.4 Divine-human relation**

People were never created with dignity that is foreign to God. They were by their nature related and connected to God. While people were dominating the entire natural world, they were also at the same time subject to God. They could relate to their creator, God, in a way that was different from how the other creatures related to him. According to Genesis 1:26, 27 the dignity of people was found to be within a relationship, wherein God was its source and people were its inheritors. This is a reality that needs to begin to be seen in a comprehensive multi-faceted relationship as portrayed in the creation story in Genesis 1:26 in the Bible. Besides the natural world, man was also in the presence of God. He needed to know how he could reflect on his high status by reflecting on his high creator, God. Genesis 2:16, 17 teaches us that God initiated the kind of relationship that he had expected between himself and people. It was a master-servant type of relationship. It was the creator and creature relationship. God instructed people to obey his instructions. Here people had a personal relationship with God. Therefore, amongst all the creatures, it was only human beings who were made to have a privilege to have a personal relationship with their creator, God. The context of both Genesis 2 and 3 shows how human beings had a free will of choice to obey or not to obey God. Genesis 3:6

shows how the people were treated with dignity to respond voluntarily to the given divine instruction. They could choose either way according to their wishes. What is significant about this is that, after their being created by God people were not abandoned to be alone on earth. Instead, Genesis 1 and 2 show that God monitored them to see to it that they lived peacefully amongst themselves according to his principles.

According to Boer (1990:1-9) the authority that was given people has been qualified. Unlike God's unlimited and absolute dominion over the entire creation, human dominion is limited to the earthly context. God relates to creation as its creator and sustainer, but people relate to it as its caretakers. Unlike God who created it, people only discover what is in it and use it for their benefit. In proportion to the limits of their nature, so is their dominion. In other words, human dominion is determined by God's dominion. It is also derivative from God's dominion. In this case **the dominion by people over the creation of God forms part as one of the main features of human dignity.**

Gerhard Van Den Heever (2001:165-203) acknowledges the influences of both the Judeo-Christian faith and other secular factors to the current concept of human rights. From the socio-economic perspective, human rights were seen to be originating and being based on religion. For example, in the Bible the Old Testament is full of passages of scripture that protect the poor. Amos (2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6) was one such prophet who preached against the ill-treatment and oppression of the poor by other human beings. Isaiah (14:30) also proclaimed how God would protect the poor against famine and starvation. Finally, the New Testament confirmed and concluded the same message on the protection of the poor by portraying through the teachings of Jesus, that the kingdom of God would come being

established on fairness and justice. In fact Van Den Heever (2001:167) does agree with the existence of human rights in the Bible, except that the human rights in the Bible are not arranged in a currently recognizable codified order, as they are commonly found in a secular setup. My belief and opinion are that the **unquestionable spontaneous general acknowledgement of human rights results from every person's inherent human dignity, which is narrated in the creation story in the Bible.**

### **3.1.2 Secular influence**

However, Van Den Heever also feels that human rights should not be looked at from the perspective of the Bible, as the Bible also has many other passages of scripture that are not in favour of human rights. His belief that the Bible has also many other scriptures that are anti-human rights, makes him believe it is unworthy to be the possible source of human rights. The example that he gives is that the Bible promotes intolerance towards other religions for fear of losing Bible believers to other religions. He also feels that the canonization of the Bible was one of the ways through which intolerance was further entrenched by the Bible. According to him there were also many people in the past history of humanity, who took other people's lives and those who lost their lives due to the influence of the Bible, which did not respect human rights. What I infer from Van Den Heever's opinion is that, as he openly discredited the Bible, **he implied the credibility of the secular influence and contribution towards human rights at the expense of the Bible.**

My reaction to this kind of perception is that this is the likely negative attitude towards the Bible, when many of its passages of scripture are looked at in isolation from Christ's

general approach to the Scriptures. I believe that Christ's approach needs to be emulated instead of being ignored. My opinion is that the Bible becomes vulnerable and easily discreditable when looked at against the background of the culture of human rights without Christ as its moral criterion and standard setter.

### **3.1.2.1 Inter-religious influence**

Van Den Heeverer further denies the Biblical influence on the current concept of human rights by looking at the human rights from the present inter-religious cultural point of view. In other words, he discredits the contribution of the Bible towards the promotion of human rights from the presupposition that the Bible is intolerable towards other religions.

My reaction to this view is that this kind of perception about the Bible is doing injustice to the Bible. It is based mainly on particular Old Testament passages of scripture, without considering both their historical contexts and the intention for which every incident was allowed to take place, which was for a divine reason. To try and judge some of the ancient cultures, values, norms and incidents by today's standards is being anachronistic. It would only be fair if the messages of certain passages of scripture were criticized from their particular historical and cultural contexts. The other justified measure to evaluate the contribution made by the influence of the Bible toward the consideration of human rights would be, to judge it in its completeness. It means that it is fairer to judge it, not in its developing stages, but to judge it by its **already fully developed saving** historical event; for example, Christ's death and resurrection. It is rather fair to measure it by its developed historical event, which is its climax and central message. Its developed message, climax and central message have been fulfilled in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. The latter is the only being through and in

whom the Biblical message becomes fully developed and fulfilled. The Bible, therefore, cannot avoid criticism, if the one who is regarded by many Christians as its center, Christ, was not immune from criticism that resulted in his death. In my opinion, criticism of the Bible is a natural consequence of the criticism (which is also a negative attitude) against its protagonist (i.e. main character), Jesus Christ.

### **3.1.2.2 Conflicting interests**

Despite the corporate influence and contribution of both the religious and secular factors towards the acknowledgement of human rights, in my view, **there has never been identical and unanimous understanding that resulted in unanimous implementation of human rights.** For example, from the research that Van Den Heever (2001: 170-181) did amongst their school learners from various denominations he concluded that, it became clear that, 'religions are not coherent, consistent, uniform, closed but multifaceted, more or less loosely related, fluid configurations of beliefs and practices, which may account for both syncretism and anti-syncretism.' By syncretism he means religious beliefs that compromise with one another. For example, Christian denominations may use the same Bible and believe in the same God, but not agree on the method of baptism and the kind of people to be baptized. Some would believe that God is exclusively immanent in his creation, whereas others would believe that he is exclusively transcendent. By anti-syncretism he means beliefs which commonly negate one another. For example, some African people believe in their ancestors that they are the ones who bring about rain. But when it does not rain and there is drought, they become angry and blame God, that he is the one who causes the drought. In the light of all these consenting and conflicting religious beliefs, Van Den Heever (2001:191), therefore concludes that 'belief in God functions in a neutral or negative way.'

My opinion is that Van Den Heever's conclusions sound and appear good from the perspective of the research he had conducted amongst the African Christians. The latter believe that their ancestors bring about rain. However, if it is dry, because it does not rain, they blame God. But, **this conclusion**, in my opinion, **does not portray the attitude of these Christians long before and long after they had believed in God.** I am under the impression that Van Den Heever's findings are from a one sided perspective without equally considering both the short and long term effects of the belief in God. I regard his conclusion as being short-sighted. It does not observe the gradual change in attitude and understanding effected in the believer, as he or she reasons with the passages of scripture and implore the Holy Spirit for his revelation. This is about the potential of the growth of both the belief in and knowledge of God to effect change in the believer. Van Den Heever (2001:191-192) shows how either syncretism or anti-syncretism portrays itself in the population characteristics. Based on the characteristics of the demographics, namely, gender, home language and type of school, people tend to portray particular interests in particular rights. For example, in the research with his colleagues Van Den Heever found out that in comparison to males, the females appear to be more

in favour of freedom of speech and less of freedom of religion than the male students; they are more in favour of rejecting political suppression and less of political action than their male counterparts; they are more in favour of socio-economic equality, environmental appreciation, and environmental sacrifice than the male students.

According to Van Den Heever the research further found that all the students who spoke



one of the Black official languages of South Africa were mostly in favour of both the political and socio-economic rights. In comparison to that the Afrikaans home speaking students appreciated the socio-economic rights the least. A further comparison showed that the English home speaking students appreciated the environmental rights the most, whereas the African home speaking students appreciated it the least.

The research further revealed how the students' political background had influenced their attitudes towards human rights. For example, the students who favoured the African National Congress (ANC) were mostly in favour of civil, political and judicial rights than the rest. Those who favoured the National Party appreciated the religious freedom the least. Those who favoured the ANC appreciated the religious freedom less, and those who favoured the Democratic Party appreciated it little. Therefore, in the light of the results of this research similar aspects of syncretism can be said to exist even in the various people's interest in the various rights. By this I mean that **even concerning human rights people's likes are not unanimous**, they differ and disagree with one another in ways that they consent in less numbers to the other groups' most favoured rights.

### **3.2 Status**

Man's special status in the whole creation is undoubtedly one of many aspects that comprise his dignity. It is the kind of status that was demonstrated at the stage when he was created in the manner in which he was created. For example, according to Genesis 1:28-31 man was created at the end of the programme of creation. He was the last item on the list of the created things to be created. He was made to exist only after all the other provisions had been made in preparation for him. **He was given the highest status**

**because every thing else was prepared for him in advance.** His was nothing but to live where-ever he wanted and use and control all nature which was subjected to him. The significance of his status here was that the dignity of man was marked by his being subject to nothing but his creator, God.

Amongst all the creatures a human being's special status is a gift from his or her creator, God. In his book, *The True Image*, Hughes (1989:143-144) explains that man's status of freedom was and has been under God's authority. Man does not have exclusive sovereignty or independence. His or her sovereignty is an inherited one. It resulted from God's sovereignty and independence. In comparison to God, man is a finite being. Although he occupies the highest position amongst all the creatures except the angels, he does not live for ever. All people depend on God for their limited span of living. A person is limited by and in his nature.

### **3.3 Freedom**

Freedom, which is also known as a free will of choice, is another aspect of human dignity. In other words it is unthinkable for any person having dignity, if he or she is not allowed to have a free will. The evaluation of the free will for every person is commonly done on the basis of the consequences of a person's actions. Both a person and those around him or her are often either positively or negatively affected by the results of a person's choice. Therefore, the effects of a person's free will are inclined to affect people's perceptions about a person's dignity either positively or negatively.

In his book, *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, Anglin (1990:26) shows how a person's

free will of choice is an aspect of human dignity. He explains that human dignity is such that a person is held responsible for certain acts in his or her life. For example, if a dog does something wrong, it can be retrained, or muzzled or put aside. But if the same treatment is applied towards a human being, then it would be regarded as being inhumane. It would be unbecoming and sad if a human being would be treated like an animal. It would be the worst thing to happen to an individual, especially if it would be done to a person after he or she out of free will of choice admitted the guilt and have asked for forgiveness. This kind of attitude would violate the concerned person's dignity. In the light of the illustration given above it becomes obvious that human dignity is partly comprised of a person's free will of choice. In this case an individual bears the responsibility for the positive or negative results of his or her actions. The person who accounts normally accounts for all his own actions. Therefore, becoming and holding a person responsible for the results of his or her actions is natural. According to Anglin (1990:108) God does respect a person's individual decision. He does not treat people like irrational children. Instead, he allows them to implement their decisions, even if they might be evil or wrong. He rather treats them as friends with the potential (Anglin 1990:143). He allows us in the light of his purpose, to repent of our wrong decisions. He acts with tolerance towards our wrong doings, to show his respect for our dignity and autonomy. This shows that a person has been imbued with the free will to make decisions, which can be judged in the light of their either positive or negative outcomes. While the human dignity is displayed by a person's free will of choice, being responsible for one's decisions, especially as an adult, reflects human dignity too.

Anglin (1990:179) has gone to the extent of showing the capacity of the free will of

choice. For example, on the negative side, a person who wants to do evil and end up in hell is allowed to do so. On the other, hand a person who wants to do well and end up in heaven, is also allowed to do so. Being unhappy in hell or anywhere else does not necessarily mean that it was against the victim's choice.

### **3.4 Self esteem**

The way a person values himself or herself can have either a positive or negative effect on a person's dignity. For example, for a person to identify him or herself with a great being in intelligence, power, creativity, capability and status can be uplifting to most if not all people. A person is inclined to live like the being that is higher or lower than him or herself.

In his book, *Self Care*, Anderson (1995:7-10) shows the various complementary aspects of human dignity, one of which he describes as the self or the self esteem of a person. According to him, the self is imbued with the nature or image of God. It is something that cannot be cured or restored by the acknowledging of the violation of the other person's rights or the retribution of the violated person only. Instead, the acknowledgement also needs to be accompanied by a positive self esteem. This self esteem is discovered by a person as he or she relates him or herself to both God and other people. For example, in order for the first man to identify himself, Anderson shows from the book of Genesis (2:23), how he developed self-consciousness from the acknowledgement of the other person brought to him in the form of his wife. In other words, the sight and acknowledgement of Eve by Adam helped him to acknowledge his

personhood, which was reflected in that of Eve.

But, the acknowledgement of self could not be complete without the acknowledgement of God, the creator of man. Anderson (1995:18) explains the indispensability of the acknowledgement of God as the creator of humanity, in whose image humanity has been created. **The creatorship by God has significant implication that provides the foundation for human moral responsibility.** The status of God and man respectively in this relationship, which is the master-servant or creator-creature relationship, elicits a moral responsibility from the creature, man, to the creator, God.

Anderson (1995:7-9) goes further to show the limitation of the forgiveness of sin in restoring the self esteem of a person. For example, in the book of Acts (19:1-6) after the audience of the Apostle Paul had repented and believed, their being forgiven of their sins needed to be supplemented by the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In other words, they still needed God's grace to further restore the self esteem that had been destroyed in the relationship between God and man, and amongst people.

With a positive self esteem a person becomes empowered to account for all his or her actions, good and bad, in a healthy way. This is in direct contrast with the negative self esteem by which a person's main aim is his or her self gratification only. The consequences of this selfish self often are unbecoming and inconsiderate to other people.

While the Bible does not necessarily have an explicit message that a person must love him or herself, it has explicit message about loving other people. It is assumed that the inherent love that a person has for him or herself serves as the guiding criterion to the extent that other people should be loved (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14). What is significant about this commandment to love the other person as one loves oneself is that it is practical. In other words, as the writer of Romans 13:9

shows, it is about living with and relating to one another in a divinely guided way that make people to be responsible to both God and other people.

### **3.5 Multi-faceted Nature**

It is natural that anything can possibly be looked at from a multiple of various perspectives. Human dignity is not an exception to this fact. It has also been viewed in different contexts and from various perspectives.

#### **3.5.1 Various contexts**

In his book, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, Sherlock (1996:20-23), explains the various human contexts without which our humanity cannot be studied. The three current contexts are known as the First, Second and Third worlds. He shows the perceptions and views of the First World, which includes Western Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; and Second World, which includes the Eastern Europe. These two worlds have contributed considerably to the current concept on human dignity. For example, according to Sherlock the First world people have been influenced more by the movements known as the Reformation, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In comparison with the First World, the Second World has been less influenced. The Second World has rather been dominated by social uprisings and revolutions. The view of the rights of persons as individuals created in the image of God has been held mostly in the First World; whereas in the Second World a view that was held was about the rights of people collectively. This means that the rights of a group of people were emphasized and valued more above those of an individual. That goes to say that even collective

ownership of property was cherished and valued far above personal ownership of property. As for the Third World, Sherlock explains how their influence was overshadowed by that of their colonizers. What is significant about these social contexts is the fact that, they give us the historical backgrounds, from which the current concepts on human rights and dignity have been drawn.

### **3.5.1.1 Judeo-Christian Context**

I regard the Judeo-Christian concept on the nature of man and human dignity to be the most profound and balanced. It also contributes positively to the promotion of human rights as a product of the First World, through its Christ-centred approach.

#### **3.5.1.1.1 Divine plural nature**

According to Genesis (1:26) the creator, God, introduced himself in the plural nature, namely, 'Let **us...**' (emphasis mine). This plural nature of God does not necessarily mean that God is many beings. But it simply means that God being one revealed himself in the plural. Sherlock (1996:34) believes that it reflects the dynamism and activeness of God as portrayed in Psalms 8 and 82. There are also those who believe that it has to do with the Holy Trinity, which are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. On the other hand there are those who disagree and believe otherwise. Despite people's other views about the nature of God, **God's introducing of himself in plurality, as shown by the author of Genesis 1:26, is a worthy and adequate source with which the plural nature of humanity matches and originate from.** The plural nature of God provides us with the unique nature and character that make every person to be able to relate to God. **The significance of the plural nature of God, therefore, serves as the basic source of the plural nature of humanity.** As Sherlock (1996:37) puts it, just as God relates differently to the components of creation such as human beings, animals and plants, it

similarly means that humanity live within a context of various relationships and relates to each relationship differently. Christ serves as humanity's role model as to how to relate to other people, nature and the creator, God.

#### **3.5.1.1.2 Human plural nature**

According to Genesis 1:27 human beings, namely, male and female are both a product and resemblance of God. They, too, have been created to exist within a context of relationships to be able to relate to the natural world, other human beings and their creator, God. These relationships need to be acknowledged and lived out by every person in such a way that they honour God and become beneficial and meaningful to all people. The nature of these relationships was made to comprise the dignity of humanity. Indeed it portrays the original derivation of human dignity from the inheritable nature of God. This means that the culture of human rights is a by-product of human dignity, which is an inherited nature of God.

#### **3.5.1.1.3 Maintenance**

According to Sherlock (1996:158-159) human dignity has always been acknowledged and maintained since the Old Testament era. **Life has been protected without any discrimination against sex and status.** For example, Exodus 20:13; 21:12-14 gives a law that protected all persons against murder. In Exodus 21:15 the Israelites were given another law that was used to protect parents against their children. In Exodus 21:20-21 it is a law that protected slaves against abuse by their masters. The laws were given to the extent of protecting even a foetus (Exodus 21:22). **A common objective for all these laws was to maintain the security of human dignity.** ‘The law reflects the nature of God, but does so in a historical context. It reveals God to people living at a particular point in time and for whom he has a particular purpose. This is a common way of



handling Old Testament law in general,' (Enns 2000:467). The dignity ascribed to human life has been expressed in its depth, among other ways, by the laws that protected the strangers who normally would have no rights.

Luke 10:25-37 shows how the depth and essence of being a stranger have been illustrated and explained by Jesus. The latter narrated a story about a stranger who happened to be sacrificially helped by a strange Samaritan. At the end of the story Jesus explained that it was how people were supposed to have related to one another. They were supposed to accept one another not on the basis of race, creed, sex or status, but to accept and show love to one another on the basis of being created in the image of God. In other words, people have dignity despite their race, creed, sex or status. Sherlock (1996:160) comments that it is because human dignity is grounded in the creation of man. But it is naturally not easy for humanity to accept and to love one another. This is due to the natural inclination by humanity to constantly misuse and abuse their possible personal relationship with other human beings, the natural world and God. This is the visible evil done by humanity all the time, as well as that condition of evil that is only theoretic and becomes visible to other people only when physically put to practice. In Christian terms the misuse and abuse of one's relationships is considered to be due to a person's sinfulness. The failure and inability to develop and maintain these necessary relationships need both the human and super-human aid to be fulfilled. In Christian terms they can be fulfilled and completed only in the spiritual re-birth by Christ. The dual necessity for every person to be helped by both other people and God is grounded in the fact that human dignity was originally begun and maintained by the creator, God, when he created humanity. It also needed to be similarly acknowledged and maintained by people

amongst themselves. In other words, the need for people to acknowledge their dignity by maintaining the proper relationships is part of both humanity and God's nature.

#### **3.5.1.1.4 Fulfillment**

Human dignity is a reality that needs to be realized and experienced by all people. In other words people need to feel how it is like to live and to be treated with dignity. As has already been indicated, life experience has shown the continuous misuse and abuse of relationships with other humans, natural world and God. There is a need for both human and divine help to humanity to be able to develop and to maintain good relationships.

The Christian answer to satisfy and fulfill this need is through spiritual re-birth by Christ. Many of both the Old and the New Testament authors affirm Jesus Christ as the one who had to come to enable mankind to develop and to maintain the necessary good

relationships. For example, Deuteronomy 18:14-22 explains through the person of Moses that there was a need for the Israelites to have another prophet who would replace him.

Here the word, prophet, implied a single as well as many successive prophets. In other words it referred to those who would succeed Moses and end up with Christ. **By sending and using these prophets to challenge and to motivate people to respect and to love**

**other people, God acknowledged and maintained the human dignity that he had**

**created.** The Israelites were supposed to obey every prophet of God. The new prophet was supposed to lead them in such a way that they were not to allow themselves to be

negatively influenced by other population groups, with whom they lived. Instead, God expected them to be the ones who positively influenced the other social groups. They

would influence the other groups morally by living exemplary lives that were in

compliance with God's principles. This is the only way that the Israelites would be able to influence the other nations positively, and by so doing acknowledge and maintain

human dignity. The significance of this passage of scripture (Deuteronomy 18:14-22) is that it reflects the acknowledgement of human dignity, which could be realized by treating other people according to God's laws, as they were taught and practiced by Moses. As both Merrill (1994:272) and O'Day (1995:527-528) put it the term 'prophet' in this passage of scripture is a common Old Testament device used to afford several meanings and arouse several messianic expectations. One of the possible meanings of Deuteronomy 18:14-22 is that it referred to Christ. The latter would be the one by whose help and example human dignity would be developed and maintained. For example, Acts 3:11-26 and Hebrews 1:1-2 explain how Jesus Christ became a fulfillment of the prophecy proclaimed in the Old Testament time. According to the former, Christ showed compassion to people. He healed them of their sicknesses.

Colossians 1:19 explains that Christ is the complete nature of God. By the way he lived and related to people, the natural world and God, he portrayed and demonstrated both the acknowledgement and respect for human dignity. For example, Christ taught what the essence of the nature of God was. This could be heard in his teachings and seen in the way he lived. He demonstrated how a person was supposed to relate to other people, especially those who were strangers. The parable of the compassionate Good Samaritan is one good example (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus further portrays the importance of human dignity that does not necessarily depend on the popularity of a person. Matthew 25:35, 38, 42, 44 also confirms the fact that dignity is not determined by a person's human status. But it is rather determined by the nature with which humanity was created. It is the only type of nature with which God identifies himself. According to the teaching of the Scriptures (Genesis 1:26, 27; 5:1, 2) **people are the only beings that share the common**

**element with God, which is the common nature.** When compared to the rest of the creatures, people are the only creatures that share their nature with that of their creator, God. This commonality came to being as the result of the creator's inheritable nature.

#### **3.5.1.1.5 Religious renewability**

According to the Scriptural teaching one of the aspects of human dignity is its dynamic renewability (Colossians 3:10). It can be renewed both subjectively and objectively.

‘The renewal refers not simply to an individual change of character but also to a corporate recreation of humanity in the Creator’s image,’ (O’Brien 1982:191). This means that I can and should acknowledge that I both do and can possess the God-given human dignity. On the other hand other people also can and must acknowledge that I possess the God-given human dignity. The fact is that this acknowledgement can be revived. It can be personally experienced and accordingly developed to a more humane and godly character as portrayed in the person of Christ. This is not only Biblical, but it is also secular in the sense that even today people are still taught to acknowledge every person's human dignity, which is the basis for the promotion of human rights. They are taught with the belief that their being taught will result in making the difference in the way that people relate to one another. It is believed that teaching the public about human dignity and human rights will end up in renewing and improving their relations with one another. If there was not such hope, there could have probably been no public teaching campaigns about human dignity and rights as they are seen now. What is significant about this modern approach towards human dignity and rights is that it derived from the Scriptures. To make it more understandable, human dignity is teachable, provided a person so allows it.

#### **3.5.1.1.6 Secular renewability**

The fact that it is possible for the dignity of human beings to be suppressed and ignored by other people is reflected in the public address by President Thabo Mbeki of the Republic of South Africa. In reference to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances that was to be held in Durban, South Africa, Thabo Mbeki (2001:14-15) said that 'we must help talks to achieve the aim of equality, justice and **dignity** (emphasis mine) for all.' The implication of President Mbeki's address is an appeal to all South Africans and others to contribute towards the upliftment, amongst others, of human dignity. He uses an example of slavery. In South Africa there is evidence of people who were brought in as slaves, namely, the Indians and the Chinese. They 'were brought in as objects for exploitation.' Mbeki explains how the dignity of the non-whites was graded below that of the white workers, whose number was not enough to do all the necessary jobs. The gist of the matter is that the non-White people were regarded as sub-humans. This kind of attitude and perception did not acknowledge that all people have been created with the common human dignity. It acknowledged some people's dignity at the expense of the other people. It is also a fact that it is up to us, people, to unlearn that which after some time we realize that it was wrong.

#### **3.5.1.1.7 Indignity**

According to Colossians 3:9 there are some of the things done by people that can indignify other people. For example, hatred for other people, insult and vulgar language impact negatively on the dignity of other people. This kind of attitude shows the possibility of people for acknowledging and promoting the dignity of other people. Alternatively, it also shows how it is possible for people to acknowledge their own dignity. According to Colossians 3:10 if a person respects and is considerate to other

persons, he or she is indirectly acknowledging and respecting his or her own dignity, too. By so doing he or she is also reviving and renewing his or her dignity.

#### **3.5.1.1.8 Divine criterion**

The author goes further to explain that the renewal of human dignity is patterned after God's plan, which is his image. God works in partnership with every person to bring about the necessary renewal. According to Martin (1986:165) this renewal takes place as God uses people as 'an avenue through which the message of reconciliation flows.' In the context of 2 Corinthians 6:1 the Apostle Paul 'cooperates with God in bringing the message of reconciliation to the Corinthians.' What is also significant about this renewal is that it provides **a universal moral norm for all humanity**. The teaching of the Scriptures is very significant in the sense that it likens man unto the creator, God. When a person changes and improves his or her attitude towards other persons, he or she is said to be conforming to God's character. In Christian terms it is known as renewing a person after God's image (Colossians 3:10).

### **3.6 Violation**

There is common knowledge that both human dignity and rights are violated continuously. Their violation has often been done out of ignorance, cultural or religious practice or for selfish interests.

In his book titled, Violence, Huber (1996) shows how human dignity has generally unceasingly and unlimitedly been attacked by humankind all-over the world. For example, women and children have been the victims of various abuses, such as rape, harassment and discrimination. Other people, including men and women, are subjected

to the fear of being attacked inside their own homes. The media, though it undoubtedly plays an important role in communicating the essential message to promote the acknowledgement of human dignity and the human rights, it also ironically displays violence that is likely to be and often imitated by other people. Xenophobia is another reality that has displayed humanity to be on the attack of human dignity. The religiously so called 'holy wars' have also been used as an excuse to attack human dignity. The recent great example given by Huber (1996:75-95) is about the Gulf War between Iraq and the United States of America in 1990. Another factor which has generally been used to justify and to subtly encourage violence against human dignity is the psychology of behaviour, that believes that people's desire for both security and happiness ironically make them to lose their natural self-control, and end up causing violence.

### **3.6.1 Media**

As already stated by Huber (1996:13-30), media can be used in such a way that it promotes the acknowledgement and respect of human rights, by reporting the violation of human rights in other parts of the world. But, there is the other side of it, too. It can also be used to hurt and destroy the dignity of the people it is supposed to protect and uphold. **This is done, for example, by reporting the suffering person's problems, not to alleviate them, but just to satisfy the curiosity and lust for sensationalism of the public.** A good example is the most recent incident of the floods in Mozambique, that has been displayed all-over the world. During the floods a woman gave birth to a baby while being on the tree. While the actual phenomenon of her labour could not be displayed on the television screen, after giving birth to her baby, her naked buttocks have often been shown on television screen whenever anything related to the Mozambican floods of 1999 is discussed. I personally believe that showing off the woman's naked

body was mostly to satisfy the public's curiosity and lust for sensationalism, than sympathizing with her. It is true that, instead of conscientizing the public to empathize and sympathize with the victims, it can do just the opposite, by making the public to be insensitive to the victims' problems. Instead of subjecting human dignity to embarrassment and humiliation for its selfish interests, the media should rather be the one that subjects its style of reporting to the dignity of its audience.

Media can also rightly be used to teach the public about sexuality. However, it can also be used to display human sexuality as a business product for selfish gain. Good examples are some of the contributing factors to the death of Princess Diana. In trying to avoid and dodge the reporters she and her lover became involved in a road accident. She found it difficult, if not impossible, to have privacy, seemingly because the news reporters were always after her personal love affairs to make money out of them.

### **3.6.2 Success**

It is another aspect of life in which people's dignity has constantly been attacked. Huber (1996:31-50) explains how often **a person's success is not measured against his or her background, but against whether he or she did better than others.**

### **3.6.3 Sport**

There is no doubt that sport is naturally a good thing that all people need to be involved in one way or another. It is good for both health and socio- economic reasons. It provides people with the opportunities to develop creativity and to socialize with other people. However, sport has been threatened by the abuse of drugs which impacts negatively on the promotion of human dignity. Many sports super stars have been the main targets of the drug lords. The other threat is violence itself. For example, there have been



stampedes which killed many people, especially at soccer games in Africa alone. Muzi Mkhwanazi (2001:3) reports how forty soccer fans died in a stampede at Ellis Park Stadium, Johannesburg, South Africa. On the 9th May 2001 not less than one hundred and thirty soccer fans died in another soccer stampede in Accra, Ghana. These tragic incidents portray how sport, good as it is, has however been abused to assault human dignity.

#### **3.6.4 Wars**

According to Huber (1996:75-95) war has been one form of violence, which has been justified under the cover of religion. The Gulf War of 1990 is one good example to prove this fact. In this war the leaders of both the United States of America and Iraq respectively justified the war against each other. They tried to convince their peoples that they were morally and religiously right. What I find to be significant about this is Huber's comment that, religions that accommodate reasons for waging any war discredit themselves, though they may arouse more curiosity about themselves. **The best approach to conflict situations like these, according to Huber (1996:97-112), is to adhere to the culture of restraint, practice humanitarian acts and apply political solutions to solve the existing conflict.**

#### **3.6.5 Religious violence**

According to Huber (1996:113-149) human dignity has also suffered a serious blow within the church. This has taken place in the church when people are honoured according to their ranks. The high positions of individuals make them to be highly honoured, whereas the low positions of others make them to be honoured in accordance with their low status. People have not been considered to be equal as God's people or children.

It is also interesting to note Huber's comment that the church through its doctrine of the sinfulness of man, made some of the Christians to look down on those they regarded as sinners. By so doing they disregarded the worthy to be acknowledged human dignity in these people.

My personal reaction to this is that, the ranking of people according to the various roles they play is a principle that is followed not only in the church, but in life in general.

Every position or ranking ought to be appreciated and honoured for the positive contribution that it brings about amongst the interaction of people with one another. For example, in the work place supervision or the managing of the existing work needs to be done. The leadership by an individual is necessary to unite and to direct the work force. But this does not mean that the leader is more important than the other workers.

However, he or she is essential in fulfilling part of the whole job, namely, leadership. In other words, he or she complements and supplements the work that is being done by others. Therefore, the value of leadership remains to be essential in a complementary and supplementary fashion. The only difference is the nature of the essential role that it plays.

Against this background, it is obvious that the dignity of a person is independent of the work that a person does well or badly, or merit, or fault, or even the status or position that one occupies.

### **3.6.6 Multi-culturalism**

Huber (1996:51-73) further shows how multiculturalism has been a concept used in an attempt to promote the acknowledgement of both human dignity and human rights. It

recognizes the co-existence of the majority and minority groups within one society, as well as mutual and equal respect for one another. Good as it is, however, it has been threatened by the so called, 'core values,' which are used to develop modern democracy by formulating human rights. Recognition of the status quo of the various parties in the form of the majority and the minorities is more of a **descriptive** concept than being **prescriptive**. This, however, is an evidence in our times of how there has been attempts in the history of man, to acknowledge and identify human dignity in modern terms and context. Attached to the human dignity, there has also been a serious task of promoting the respect for human rights.

In my opinion multiculturalism is inadequate to promote unity and oneness across cultural, sexual and religious barriers.

### **3.7 Unique Faith**

Huber shows also how different and much more radical than multiculturalism was the Israelite faith. The Israelites believed that all humanity resulted commonly from the first human parents who were created in the image of God. The divine command from their God was that they were to identify themselves with other people. In other words, they were to treat others as they treated themselves. 'Do not ill-treat foreigners who are living in your land. Treat them as you would a fellow-Israelite, and **love** them as you **love** yourselves. **Remember that you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt,**' (emphasis mine) said God to the Israelites (Exodus 22:21-22; Leviticus 19:33-34). This instruction was purposefully given to refute the false doctrine prevailing amongst the Israelites that they were not on equal status with the rest of the peoples.

The Old Testament command to love and to identify with the other people is confirmed by the New Testament. The New Testament scripture writers such as Matthew 5:43 and Luke 6:27-28, 32-36 confirm the Old Testament that people must love other people, even those who are their enemies. 'The ethical standard of the kingdom calls the disciples to a much more radical love that includes even one's enemies - the unrighteous and the evil,' comments Hagner (1993:135). Both Matthew and Luke have commonly quoted Jesus repeating the necessity of loving others. According to them Jesus is reported as both repeating the Old Testament instruction about love and making the same instruction to be more radical than in the Old Testament. For example, while in the Old Testament the instruction speaks about the necessity of loving foreigners, in the New Testament it is about the necessity of loving and praying for one's enemies and persecutors. Here Jesus made it clear that his followers had to be extra-ordinary. That is, they were supposed to act like God acted by loving people unconditionally (i.e. across their race, culture or creed barriers).

The New Testament passages of scripture such as 1 John 4:19-21 and Matthew 25:35-36 portray Jesus as he identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked and the prisoners. Jesus' message to his followers was that, if they loved him, they could only show their love for him by loving the people that he identified himself with. Here, Jesus displayed the fact that human dignity is not determined by the changing circumstances of life in which people find themselves, nor people's positive or negative feelings about other people.

According to Ephesians 2:11-22 and Galatians 3:28 the Apostle Paul went further to implement the teaching of love that Christ had left behind. During their time people were classified into two groups of the circumcised and the uncircumcised, and the Israelites and the Gentiles (non-Israelites). Among the Israelites the acceptable people were those who were Israelites by birth and circumcised. The selection of the acceptable people was based on the external physical features of a person and circumcision. Therefore, the human value, which in this case is the human dignity, was determined by the humanly created standards. Therefore, in order to counteract the abuse of the externally made circumcision, Paul made the Christians aware that the sound maintenance of the human dignity could be afforded by living according to Christ's principles. He also went further to refute a similar mistake of the misuse of the law, by which the Israelites believed that they were the only people of God because they owned the law. The other people were discriminated against and despised because they did not have the law. The Israelites would accept other people, only if they had decided to adopt Judaism as their faith and culture. In other words, their human dignity would only be recognized if they became Israelites. But Paul took pains to inform his audience that human dignity could be acknowledged and promoted only, if people allowed themselves to be united to one another by believing in Christ, who came to make that unity possible. He went further to explain that if Christ is accepted, the fact that a person is a slave or free person, Jew or non-Jew, man or woman, does not determine a person's dignity. Human dignity should be seen as part of God's creation, which is confirmed by the manner in which Christ highly valued every human being.

In comparing Jesus and Paul's views about the acknowledgement and promotion of

human dignity, they complemented and supplemented each other. They show that human dignity is inherent in every person. It does not depend on external things. It can only be soundly acknowledged, sustained and promoted if aligned with God's principles.

### **3.8 Modern Application**

The kind of attitude that does not value people on the basis of their achievements or status is possible still even in our times. It is found in the form of love. Allan Boesak (Douglas 2001:1-2) and Beyers Naude (Sowetan, 2001, 8<sup>th</sup> August, pp.8-9) give accounts of exemplary incidents wherein the Christian love showed a unique attitude that resulted in actions that uncovered other people's dignity.

#### **3.8.1 Impartial love**

This love has, in my opinion, partly been expressed by Douglas (2001:1-2) in exchange of opinions between the South African Education Minister, Kader Asmal, and the former president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Allan Boesak. Here Boesak responds to Asmal's criticism of the Human Rights Day Christian rally as being 'sectarian, divisive and non-inclusive.' Boesak is quoted as he was referring to the contribution that the Christians made in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. According to him, among other things, the Christians worked 'for the exiles to come home, for Nelson Mandela to be released, for the detainees to be set free, for the banned to be unbanned, we prayed and we believed...we were inspired, not by Marx or Lenin, but by faith in Jesus of Nazareth...**We did not ask then if Mandela was a Christian, whether the exiles were communists, atheists or agnostics, or those detained shared our faith...**' (emphasis mine). In my opinion the response by Allan Boesak portrays the kind of attitude of love that Christians have been instructed by Jesus to maintain. It is the love that inspires a

person to serve other people who are different from him or herself. This is the love that moves a person to serve others without finding out first who they are, or how they are related to him or herself. It is the kind of love that respects human dignity after the example shown by Jesus unconditionally.

### **3.8.2 Changed perception**

In my view, Naude, in our times, has to a certain extent demonstrated how God's newly acquired divine perception can incite and empower a person to protect and to promote other people's dignity. Amid the political and socio-economic oppression, suppression and discrimination in South Africa he outlawed and worked to redress discrimination against the Black people in South Africa. In the Sowetan newspaper of the 8th August 2001, pages 8 and 9, tribute has been paid to Dr Naude, for the role he had played in his fight against discrimination and his promotion of human dignity. His belief and understanding of apartheid (discrimination) were that 'nowhere in the Bible was there any justification for this policy.' While apartheid was at its climax he experienced what it actually meant to obey God rather to obey human authority.

What I find to be significant about Dr Beyers Naude's struggle against discrimination is his attitude toward it. He personally confesses how he was supposed to have re-acted to the status quo. 'I had to struggle **not to become bitter** (emphasis mine). Paul's instruction not to let the sun go down on our anger (Ephesians 4:26) was a constant challenge,' he said, (Tribute to Dr Beyers Naude). He continues, 'more than anything else I came to appreciate Jesus' prayer on the cross: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."' The re-action by Dr Naude towards his opponents, in my view, reflects his emulation of Jesus' attitude toward human dignity. His Christlike attitude became

evident in and through his refuting, unshaken but calm re-action to the unacceptable policy of apartheid. He was working side by side with other patriotic South Africans for a 'South Africa of the future: black and white, men and women, young and old, **Christian and people of other beliefs and convictions,**' (emphasis mine). The significance of this statement is the fact that Dr Naude understood well what human dignity is all about. His contribution towards the freedom of all South Africans from discrimination and oppression by the government that made discrimination its policy portrays how he equally highly valued all the different peoples in South Africa with the common human dignity. This is the kind of perception that all of us need to rightly perceive the essence of human dignity with and to be able to re-act to it in accordance with its worth.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

According to the Biblical teaching and the Christian faith human dignity has been inherited from creation and the life and death of Christ. There is secular and religious consensus about human dignity. History shows how the various ancient social and cultural contexts had born witness to this truth. However, in the light of the human rights culture, the latter (i.e. human rights) reflect most of their characteristics as the direct outcomes of and influence from the Judeo-Christian faith, which is communicated through the Bible. Human dignity also rightly identifies every person with the supernatural, creator, God. It further requires that every person sees him or herself as a free being, with the especially God-given high status and a healthy self-esteem. It needs to be seen as the dynamic multi-faceted nature of being human. Human dignity is equally inherent in different personalities like male and female people. However, it is not immune to violation by people. In fact it has often been violated under certain pretexts by



certain individuals and groups of people. However, with people's changed mind sets and changed attitudes and the practicing of love, as demonstrated by Christ, can accompany the acknowledgement of human dignity with positive acts of love that contribute towards a loving nation.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

I am convinced that the current concept on human rights both intersects and overlaps to a large extent with the concept of personal accountability before God. In my opinion, these two concepts (human rights and personal accountability) together result in a compound religious-secular theory, which when implemented, end in acts that are considered to be both complementary and sometimes contradictory to each other. I am convinced that it is from the perspective of the sense of personal accountability to not only people, but the creator, God, too, that the contradictions between them have more likelihood to subside.

I am also convinced that among others, persuasion is one thing that can lead the two opposing sides, into a common sense of accountability to God. In my opinion it is the lack to accompany human rights with the necessary God-centred sense of accountability that leads to morally unacceptable acts.

#### **4.1 Homosexuality**

In order to illustrate the essence of human rights from a Biblical perspective, I have decided to use the acceptance and non-acceptance of homosexuality by people who are pro homosexuality and those who are anti homosexuality respectively as case study.

While there is a comprehensive consensus on human rights as an ideal principle, there is, however, less if not zero consensus on the moral implementation of human rights, as a culturally and religiously acceptable life style. The kind of tension that exists between the traditional cultural (especially African) and the traditional religious (especially Christian) practices and homosexuality is very crucial to our discussion. I am convinced that against the background of human rights, homosexuality can serve as a good example to illustrate the relationship that should exist between the Biblical message and the need to promote human rights. I believe that the **Biblical message does promote human rights within an already-built-in Christ-centred moral code.** As messages from both the Bible and human rights respectively are proclaimed, it is necessary for their agents to acknowledge the element of personal accountability that is commonly inherent in both the gospel and human rights. In my opinion, both the current concept on human rights and the gospel commonly promote personal accountability to a large extent.

Despite the difference in the degree of accountability, the extent to and manner in which people express their accountability helps us to see the different perceptions and understandings by different religious (especially Christian) and non-religious individuals and groups on the issue of human rights. **From the differences and disagreements amongst people emerges a common moral requirement for all people (especially Christian believers) involved, not only to disagree or argue out of their reasoning**

**minds alone, but to debate or argue while acknowledging other people's dignity, too.**

**In other words we need to agree or disagree out of loving hearts for one another.**

I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all  
knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith  
needed to move mountains - but if I have no love, I am nothing,  
(1 Corinthians 13:2).

According to the Christian nature love is the only pre-requisite for any action to be taken, including debate or argument. We must remember that love begets love and hatred begets hatred. You reap what you sow.

The positive thing with differences and disagreements is that they provide us, as people, with an opportunity to develop love and to unconditionally love and accept other people **as Christ did** those who are different from us. The **differences and disagreements also provide us with a chance to evaluate our love, patience and tolerance towards people who are different from ourselves.**

## **4.2 Origin**

I believe that it is important to find out about the genuine origin of homosexuality. It is the tracing of its history that will probably develop into the discovery of a unifying and generally agreed upon truth, which will contribute constructively and fruitfully towards the promotion of human rights. As people we need to know the genuine origin of homosexuality, which is likely to further enhance its acknowledgement, which will in turn strengthen the spirit of love and tolerance within the context of human rights and every person's individual accountability to our creator, God.

### **4.2.1 Un-traceability**

Up to the present time there has never been a specific commonly agreed upon factor, which is considered to be the cause of homosexuality. Jones and Yarhouse (2000:84) are of the opinion that 'the scientific evidence about causation is simply inconclusive at this time.' Nelson (1967:271-274) believes that there is not scientific consensus on the origin of homosexuality only, but on the origin of heterosexuality, too. However, he is of the opinion that there has generally been an agreement about the stage when the sexuality of a person, either homosexuality or heterosexuality becomes entrenched in a person between the age of five and seven. This is explained by Nelson as being the predominant chance or tendency to either become homosexual or heterosexual. This tendency is believed to happen unconsciously without the person involved being aware of it.

Schutzichel (1995:47-51) is of the same opinion as Nelson that the cause of homosexuality cannot be traced. He also believes that homosexuality is not infectious or contagious. Instead, it is rather natural and must be discovered and accepted by all people. Schutzichel's appeal to the church is that it needs to re-consider its traditional negative position on sexual morals. Instead of being critical towards homosexuality, it must minister with a **pastoral spirit** (emphasis mine), not only to the general public, but to the homosexuals, too.

Fulkerson (1993:29-46) is of the same opinion as Nelson and Schutzichel that homosexuality cannot be unanimously identified the same way as it had been in the past. According to her, in the past people used to identify a person's sexuality by his or her external anatomical features. But now things have changed. The current debate on identifying a person's sexuality is now challenging this traditional and cultural approach

to identify a person's sexuality. Fulkerson further believes that the people who debate the issue of homosexuality, both believe that personal identity is determined by a person's sexual identity and his or her personal preference. For example, historically and culturally, sexual identity was characterized by the anatomy and appearance of one's body. All these features were external, and could be seen with a person's eyes. They have been accepted as the norm in general both culturally and historically. But now they are being challenged by the current identity of homosexuality.

The fact that the historically and culturally acceptable gender features are external, they are like circumcision, which is external because it is done externally too. Therefore, people who put more significance on circumcision, which is external, fall in the same category with the people who put more negative significance on homosexuality, which is also external. In Fulkerson's view, a negative attitude toward outward homosexuality is as bad as putting unnecessary significance on the outward features like circumcision.

In contrast to these externals, Fulkerson feels we have the love of God which is given extreme significance by the Bible. This is the love that is the most significant and essential issue above the sexuality of people and the male-female gender identity. In Fulkerson's opinion, the genuine love of God rejects the necessity of the male-female relationship identity. The male-female relationship identity and circumcision are equally seen as being against the divine love of God.

My reaction to Fulkerson's view that people be identified according to their preferences is correct in as far as these people's rights are concerned. But, as far as I can imagine here

we are talking about personal preferences that can only be known after been informed by the people concerned, and we can also know the reality which can be seen and known at the first glance without waiting to be informed. I often wonder how it would be like if sports people who have traditionally been physically identified as males or females prefer to be identified differently from their previous traditional identities. Would sport officials classify their sport people according to their external physical features or according to their personal preferences?

As for Sigmund Freud (1974:21), he believed that there is a ‘constitutional bisexuality of each individual.’ It means that every person is believed to be born with the potential of becoming either heterosexual or homosexual. Either sexuality can be expressed or repressed. According to Scroggs (1983:146) while the bisexual stage can either be expressed or repressed it waits to be developed into either heterosexuality or homosexuality by a culture within which a person finds her or himself.

In the same breath as Nelson, Schutzeichel, Fulkerson and Freud, Rudy (1997:127-146) is of the opinion that neither homosexuality nor heterosexuality is important. Concerning the issue of the homosexuals and non-homosexuals Rudy believes that what is important is not the matter of which sex identity serves God better. According to her, to please God is neither determined by people born with particular genitals. But it is a matter of which individual is genuinely committed to Christ. She adds that the Church is not necessarily best served by a particular sexually oriented group, but by the people and individuals who are truly committed to Christ. She declares that the prevailing debate on homosexuality amongst Christians is based mostly on the assumption that all people share the same

identity.

In my opinion Nelson's belief goes with certain implications. One of the impressions it gives is that every person is born with the possibility of developing either heterosexuality or homosexuality. Another impression is that every person is born with both sexualities, namely, heterosexuality and homosexuality. One of these two sexualities ends up being more dominant and more entrenched in a person than the other. The other impression is that a person affected by these sexualities does not have a choice between homosexuality and heterosexuality. A person simply becomes subjected to a sexuality that happens to be stronger than the other.

#### **4.2.2 Traceability**

In contrast to the scholars who believe that it has been scientifically very difficult to trace the cause of homosexuality to any physical cause, Cole (1995:89-100) believes that there is scientific evidence. She believes that there is biological evidence for homosexuality in the homosexuals. According to her, the evidence is such that it elicits acceptance by humanity. This is the kind of **biological influence** on homosexuality which brings about the inclination towards homosexuality.

In contrast to Cole, Berliner (1987:139) is of the opinion that homosexuality can be traced not to any physical or bodily cause, but to a person's mind. It is mostly claimed to result from psychological factors.

Berliner goes on to substantiate his opinion by saying that it is a well known truth that most of behaviour, in as far as people are concerned is learned. **In people instinct has**

**been replaced by learning.** This is the reason why people in general are mostly cultural. In the light of this statement, it goes without saying that most, if not all the homosexual problems, therefore, result from culture and all issues pertaining to it. This means that most of the problems on homosexuality do not stem from biological or physical or bodily development. Instead, they develop from a person's mind.

A supplementary evidence of the mind as a contributing factor towards homosexuality is that it can be traced to the **psyche** of a particular community towards homosexuality. This means that the attitude of people towards homosexuality in this case becomes what has been created in the collective mind of the community concerned. For example, Towne's view (1995:27-47) is that all sexual relationships, including homosexuality, could be seen and accepted to be sinful by the consensus of the society or church. It means that they are not sinful on their own. Their being sinful, therefore, depends on people's collective perception and agreement. It further implies that the sin aspect depends on people's decision and judgement. In my understanding this means that the sin aspect of homosexuality is divorced from God and his principles, which becomes contrary to what many Christians believe. The community concerned becomes the determining factor and thus independent from God. Therefore, in the light of the negative judgement by the community homosexuality is assumed to result from what I regard to be **morally sinful acts.**

The psyche of a community in creating what is believed to be the cause of homosexuality makes **culture** to be seen as a contributing factor towards tracing the cause of homosexuality. This is supported by Scroggs (1983:146) who believes that 'the



expression or repression of one's bisexuality will then be finally determined by **the larger culture**' (emphasis mine) into which one moves. Therefore, in the light of Scroggs' view a person's homosexual identity will either be expressed or repressed depending on the supportive or condemning attitude of the culture within which a homosaexual person finds her or himself.

We also have more evidence that shows both direct and indirect acknowledgement by many scholars how influential culture can be (cf. Bem 1996:320-335; Jones & Yarhouse 2000:83). In this case the Israelite culture is a good example that has been portrayed by many scholars to show how influential and causative it happened to be. It had been known to favour heterosexuality. It is to a great extent the same culture that the Apostle Paul had believed in and ever since promoted. (In the negative sense it is considered by other scholars to be one of the cultures that promoted homophobia. It is also the only teaching generally known to be approved by the Bible). In comparison to the considerably large Greco-Roman empires, it was promoted from within a very tiny geographical and cultural area. When one looks at it against this ancient background, humanly speaking, it appears to have been a culture that was disadvantaged from the very beginning. It was not favoured by the socio-political circumstances of its time. This is the reason, in my view, why Scroggs' reasoning sounds and looks ironically so justifiable. He believes that homophobia resulted from the disadvantaged situation in which the ancient Israelites found themselves. According to Scroggs homophobia has a Israelite origin and influence. He has tried to prove this by showing how in ancient times homosexuality was acceptable in other cultures like the Greco-Roman cultures. He tried to justify homosexuality from the ancient Greco-Roman cultural and historical point of

view. However, when compared to other social groups and world religions McNeill (1999:66) comments: 'only the Israelites were able consistently to carry the trend to a logical, unambiguous conclusion.'

Margaret Davies (1995:315-331) is of the same opinion that the criticism of homosexuality has been a Israelite tradition. Davies believes that **the Israelites were the ones who first criticized homosexuality**. She believes that the Apostle Paul, as a Jew, was wrong to have criticized other traditions which were not like the Israelites' tradition. She believes that people need to recognize the variety of traditions, as well as those traditions' continuity in their particular social contexts, which include their sexual morals.

The implication of Margaret Davies' belief is that the unacceptability of homosexuality is mainly due to the traditional anti-homosexual biasedness of the Israelites. The impression that I get from her is that, had it not been the traditional anti-homosexual Israelite attitude, homosexuality would have been much more acceptable to most people in general.

But ironically speaking, in the light of heterosexuality with which many scholars have associated the Israelite culture, this is the culture which shares a lot of commonality with many sub-cultures in my residential area. My personal experience and impression are that it is generally accepted by most people, even those people who do not profess the Judeo-Christian faith like the black Africans in the area of Ga-Rankuwa, in the North West Province, South Africa. I regard my local residents to a great extent to be typical and representative of many social groups in the continent of Africa. This number grows

when I add to my local people those that they probably represent. This means that even other beliefs and cultures, (which are probably more or less similar to the beliefs and cultures of my local community in Ga-Rankuwa Zone 16, whose majority, as far as I know, do not approve homosexuality), become indirectly implied as having developed homophobia due to problems similar to those associated with the ancient Israelites.

Another impression (which I regard as misleading) given by Davies is that the Apostle Paul had interfered in other cultures and had unfairly condemned them. The truth is that Paul had never imposed his beliefs on anyone, especially after he was converted as a born again Christian. In fact the opposite is true. He had instead imposed his beliefs on other people prior to his conversion to being a follower of Christ.

That is what I did in Jerusalem. I received authority from the chief priest and put many of God's people in prison; and when they were sentenced to death, I also voted against them. Many times I had them punished in the synagogues and tried to make them deny their faith. I was so furious with them that I even went to foreign cities to persecute them, (Acts 26:10-11).

Contrary to enforcing his belief on other people, Paul was rather persuasive in his approach.

When working with the Israelites, I live like a Jew in order to win them ...

In the same way, when working with Gentiles, I live like a Gentile

... Among the weak in faith I become weak like one of them, in order to win them ..., (1 Corinthians 9:20-22).

Culture as a contributing factor towards tracing the origin of homosexuality by way of encouraging or discouraging it implies people who are influenced from birth. According

to Freud (1974:23) homosexuality is an **inborn reality**. Therefore, it is traceable to birth and nature.

However, this in turn does not deny the reality of the existence of the problems about homosexuality. In conclusion Berliner (1987:141-142) proposes that the church ought to support any culture that promotes the **independence and accountability** of all adult people. The church needs to be less restrictive and to not exploit other people.

In summary, the various backgrounds given by Towne, Berliner, Cole, Scroggs and Freud respectively, give various sources to which homosexuality can possibly be traced, namely, biological, psychological or perceptual, cultural and natural factors.

### **4.3 Politicization**

As far as I know homosexuality has for a long time been a matter of informal discussion. Especially around religious circles, it is where it was condemned in passing. Churches looked at it as a sin for which there was no time to waste discussing it. My personal impression about it is that if ever it was discussed, it could not be given official political recognition. Even the scholars whose works I have come across, said nothing about its official political recognition, except its cultural acceptance. My aim in this chapter is to try and show how and when politics have contributed to the enhancement of the sense of both human dignity and human rights by extending the official political acknowledgement to homosexuality. In doing so it enhanced and supplemented the long acknowledged sense of human dignity, which, in my view gave people not only a sense of more freedom and independence, but a sense of personal accountability, too. With the

constitutionalization of sexual orientation, homosexual people find themselves on the stage where they are fighting against being stigmatized and for recognition.

#### **4.3.1 Formalization**

To the best of my knowledge, I could not find anywhere in history and in the world where homosexuality had ever been formally organized. Most of the scholars I have come across, who spoke about homosexuality, had spoken about it only as an informal cultural issue, which was never formally and officially recognized and accepted by a particular government. This is confirmed by a research article by Waller (1995:205-264) which shows how the homosexuality movement started most recently in 1987 in the United States of America. A group of religious professionals organized and coordinated the gay and lesbian people to set up a movement that would fight for the rights of the homosexuals. A place known as the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill was used for the meetings of both the gay and lesbian people.

Waller explains how in the years 1987-1992 the Baptist churches split over the issue of homosexuality. In the centre of this controversy were the two Baptist churches, namely, the Pullen and the Olin T. Binkley Memorial, which respectively happen to bless the marriages of the homosexual couples, as well as publicly licensing a gay person to preach in the church. These two churches' actions were strongly rebuked and condemned by the Southern Baptist Convention.

There have been disagreements on homosexuality for a long time. According to Lienemann (1998:7-21) there have been conflicting views about homosexuality by the various churches in the last thirty years. These churches strove to find common points

about which they agreed on human rights, non-discrimination and unions which represented the homosexuals. They were the United Reformed churches from North America, Europe, India and Australia. With them were the Episcopal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Roman Catholic churches.

The significance about this controversy is that it highlighted the issue of human rights. What is significant is that homosexuality among others, was discussed and debated as one of the human rights problems that needed to be addressed. It is interesting that these churches represented the views of a variety of groups and individuals who professed the same Judeo-Christian faith. Though there might be differences of opinion and understanding amongst these groups and individuals, in my opinion, love that is patient (as described by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13) becomes a testing criterion as to how they disagree with one another. Agreement or disagreement based on a particular understanding does not determine the credibility of the outcomes from the debate. What counts, in my opinion, is the type of attitude adopted towards the argument. My understanding of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 13:2 is that even if a person (who is religious or non-religious) may have all the knowledge and facts, if whatever that person does, does not show love with tolerance to other people, then all the knowledge and wisdom that a person has become useless and fruitless in the eyes of God.

#### **4.3.2 Constitutionalization**

Both churches and states have their respective religious and political views about homosexuality. Their respective constitutions probably state their organizational belief about homosexuality. In South Africa denominations have their respective constitutional statements while the government also has its own about homosexuality, which is

comprised of secular and religious views.

After there had been a serious debate about homosexuality amongst the religious groups (especially Christians), it soon became clear there would be divisions caused by disagreements about homosexuality. Most churches and individuals disapproved homosexuality from either a moral or cultural point of view or both, while other groups and individuals on the other hand approved it. In general the greatest part of the Church disapproved it. But outside the church, from a political and legal point of view, as it is presently the case in South Africa, homosexuality was approached democratically and subsequently constitutionalized. It, therefore, became accepted in principle from a constitution point of view. From a socio-political point of view, it became necessary for the constitution to be broad enough to encompass all the various views of the South African society, who are comprised of both the religious and non-religious people of South Africa.

But, in my opinion, this should not create the general impression that all the countries in the world have constitutionalized homosexuality. My opinion is that countries tend to give their political stance towards homosexuality in proportion to the socio-political feeling of their citizens, as well as pressure from the globalization of homosexual rights. Other than globalization of human rights, which has had room for homosexuality, the latter could have found it difficult, if not impossible to get the extent of publicity and acceptability that it has presently gained.

My impression is that, from both a cultural and religious point of view, there was silence

in many circles on homosexuality. In the light of my residential area, Ga-Rankuwa, homosexuality has been seen as a strange culture that is immoral. This kind of negative attitude towards homosexuality is as old as humanity. For example, according to Scroggs (1983:70-84) the Hebrew Bible, namely, the Torah, is almost silent about homosexuality. The reason for this silence is that apparently there was no homosexuality in Israel. It was not practiced as an acceptable culture.

The same phenomenon seems to repeat itself in our modern times. The extent to which homosexuality has been a strange culture is confirmed by the absence of reference to it in the ruling policies of many countries. The lack of reference shows how in many countries people in general have been living along their traditional and cultural lines which have not acknowledged homosexuality as a culture. \_

My impression is that there are many such countries around the world today which are without an official policy towards homosexuality. For example, in Namibia there has been no policy with regard to homosexuality. Isaak (1998:71-77) gives a survey of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia on homosexuality. The Lutheran Church in Namibia is still busy formulating its official view about homosexuality. As its starting point, it has first accumulated the views of the African Namibians on homosexuality. According to Isaak, the African feeling is that of regarding the homosexuals as their brothers and sisters. These native Namibian perceptions on homosexuality will then be reconciled with the Biblical teachings and the Christian morals. For the time being, the Lutheran Church in Namibia therefore, does not have an official stance of its own on homosexuality. That is why it has therefore requested the Lutheran World Federation to



provide it with some guidelines in dealing with homosexuals, who happen to be in their local congregations. For example, one of their guidelines would be that a homosexual person in the local congregation would neither be ordained nor allowed to be active in the affairs of the local congregation. While the Lutheran Church in Namibia claims not to have an exceptionally official stance on homosexuality, it uses its mother church official document on homosexuality as a guide.

Against the exemplary background of the church in both Namibia and India (K C Abraham & A K Abraham 1998:22-29), it is probable that there is a large portion of the church in many other countries around the globe, in which the church collectively has not yet established a revised common stance towards homosexuality. As the churches in both India and Namibia did not recently have their officially agreed upon ways of dealing with homosexuality, they were still waiting to be told as to which stance to take. The probability is that in most, if not all the countries, where there has been no political constitutional stance towards homosexuality, the church has approached homosexuality along the traditional cultural and religious lines which disapproved it.

### **4.3.3 Stigmatization**

The current campaign for homosexuality by the gay and lesbian movement is an indication that little, if not zero official acknowledgement of homosexuality had taken place in the past.

Social unacceptability of homosexuality had probably forced many homosexuals into secrecy. Apparently there still are many countries where homosexuals are forced into suppression and hiding due to social unacceptability. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, for example, has been known for among others, his tough stance against

homosexuality. More or less the same as my residential place, Ga-Rankuwa, there are probably many other places to whose majority of citizens homosexuality is unacceptable and has forced the homosexuals into secrecy.

According to K. C Abraham and A. K Abraham (1998:22-29) in India, too, homosexuality was considered to be shameful and confidential. Since then it has further been criminalized by the government. Homosexuality is therefore highly clandestine. Consequently, studies on homosexuality became difficult to conduct. Subsequently these studies became impersonal in turn. Seemingly this has in turn contributed in highly commercializing homosexuality. This is happening when both family values and structures are being challenged by the current social life. The Abrahams', therefore, appeal to the church locally and internationally to come up with answers that will encourage responsible sexual behaviour amongst humanity.

While for a long period the other countries were without a policy that had anything to do with homosexuality, there were those countries that formed constitutions which further outlawed it. Instead of homosexuality being constitutionally acknowledged and protected, it was outlawed by some countries. Berliner (1987:137-142) shows how homosexuality unfortunately developed into homophobia in some people. With the influence from the traditional culture and belief, homophobia grew forth to be institutionalized in other countries like Great Britain and the United States of America. These were the countries which had previously opposed homosexuality. Their citizens who were found involved in homosexual acts were prosecuted and charged. He regrets the part played by the church, which in his opinion, was negative and anti-homosexuality.

#### 4.3.4 Sustainability

There is a perception that the various traditional beliefs had inconsistently been maintained by people in the history of humanity. Some of the traditions were continuously sustained, while the others fell by the way side. Homosexuality was one of these traditions, which in my view, never got constant sustainability generally, when compared to heterosexuality.

According to Larry R Petersen and Gregory V. Donnewerth (1998:353-371) there has been a decline of support for the traditional beliefs such as gender roles and homosexuality. The fact is that every belief needs to have a high level of support of the people from within the believing group. With it also is a need to have the support of the other people outside its group. This other support may be in the form of the media. What is essential is that both supports from within and without are necessary to sustain a particular belief for a particular length of time. From this type of observation both Petersen and Donnewerth have perceived how amongst Christians there has been a decline in the support for the acceptance of homosexuality.

Nelson (1967:271-274) agrees with the extent to which homosexuality has been traditionally criticized amongst the western societies. He explains that another aspect that is known about homosexuality is that it had never been given constant societal or religious attention. Instead, it has been disapproved or sometimes ignored until recently. The only positive thing about homosexuality that is mentioned by Nelson (1967:272) is that it has always been tolerated within a particular period of history. As for within the Judeo-Christian culture, homosexuality was never tolerated, but abhorred. The influence

of this Judeo-Christian culture is believed to have found root in the western societies.

#### **4.3.5 Homophobia**

Homophobia (irrational or persistent fear of sexual relationship between people of the same sex) is the inability to accept people of the same sex. Just like homosexuality, homophobia, too, I believe is as old as humanity.

Homophobia became one of the reasons why homosexuality became disliked in general.

To most people that I have spoken to in my area, Ga-Rankuwa, zone 16, a sexual relationship between people of the same sex does not exist publicly, except as being seen on the media. In a sense it is seen as a foreign culture that some citizens understand and accept in principle against the international background concept of the culture of human rights. In other words, to the majority of the people I have spoken to about it, it has not yet been accepted as part of my community's culture.

There are those scholars who associate the beginning of homophobia with the existence of the children of Israel and their religious literature, namely, the Torah and the Old Testament as a whole. Berliner (1987:138) is one of these scholars. He considers both the Old and New Testament to be the prominent proponents of homophobia, which he believes, is still maintained by the current Judeo-Christian faith. He explains what he believes was the main cause of the Judeo-Christian faith's negative stance toward homosexuality. According to him, the ancient Israelites were a small nation amongst the many big and strong nations of their time. Like all the other nations they needed to feel safe from the threatening power of their neighbouring states. According to Berliner, the Israelites could only match the apparent standard of their threatening neighbouring

nations if they, too, grew in number. He believes that it was then that they began developing an attitude of disliking anything that would contribute towards slowing down their population growth. Therefore, homosexuality, birth control and other nonreproductive sexual acts became a taboo to the Israelites.

Nelson (1967:272) goes on to show how culture had influenced both the religion and the theology of the Israelites. He believes that the two often quoted passages of scripture in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy against homosexuality have been written from a cultural perspective as an attempt to maintain a pure culture. The latter could hopefully be achieved by the non-loss of both the life-bearing semen and the male dignity in the patriarchal culture. Therefore, according to him, it is believed that these scriptures were directed not to the homosexuals as such, but to the heterosexuals who acted contrary to their nature. This goes without saying that from this point of view the problem of homosexuality has to do with hermeneutics. What is implied by this kind of perception is that all the passages of scripture in the Bible that other people understand to be about homosexuality have actually nothing to do with it. It further implies that the writers of these passages of scripture had aimed at purifying and strengthening their cultures, while accepting homosexuality as being culturally right in cultures other than their own.

But I personally have a different view from the perception that anti-homosexuality is purely Israelite culture. In my view it goes beyond the Israelite culture. For example, in my residential area, Ga-Rankuwa north of Pretoria, South Africa, shame and stigma had for a long time been attached to homosexuality. I only started to hear about the concept of homosexuality at the age of fourteen from the Bible. Culturally this was never even

heard of in the 1980's, except in reference to prisoners in prisons. In general homosexuality was a new concept and culture that we, the people of our place, were busy learning to adapt to. During the research on homosexuality most of the people I interviewed about this topic would say **'this is new to us, these are the things that come from over-seas, especially the United States of America.'** I often found myself to be talking about an issue that most of the people were not interested in or did not have much to talk about. It is a lifestyle that even people who are homosexuals find difficult to confess publicly. It feels like it is in the present time that those who are homosexuals are being encouraged to accept themselves and to disclose themselves to the public, and to challenge their communities to accept them for what and who they are. This is mostly done in rally meetings, mass campaigns and forms of marches. These are some of the ways how this taboo situation is being addressed amongst the homosexual groups in South Africa and internationally.

In Christian terms homophobia can be regarded and defined as unacceptable and resistant attitude towards an unacceptable relationship between people of the same sex. It is as Serapion (1998:78-85) explains that homosexuality is considered to be sin within the Church. It is regarded as being against both nature and the Scriptures, namely, the Old and the New Testaments. It is seen to be lacking love but lusts. The teaching by the social scientists that homosexuality is a normal and an inborn thing is rejected.

In agreement with Serapion, Berliner is of the opinion, too, that there is much hostility towards homosexuality by many people. For example, according to Berliner (1987:141) in the United States of America 75% of the church going people disapprove

homosexuality. What is commonly known about homosexuality is that it has always been disapproved by most people around the globe. This, in my view, is very significant. The extent of most people's disapproval of homosexuality in general is confirmed by the risk and possibility by a homosexual person to lose his or her freedom to be honest and open, if he or she freely reveals his or her homosexual status. This of course goes contrary to the concept of human rights as generally demonstrated by the western countries like the government of the United States of America. As already stated, this is where the gay and lesbian movement were first launched and constitutionally recognized. The irony of it is that it is also where the majority of the Christians still are opposed to homosexuality. This in my view portrays the United States of America to have a constitution that promotes human rights by giving its people the freedom to agree to disagree.

Serapion finds it difficult to reconcile hatred towards homosexuality with the love for God. Therefore, for those people who find it difficult to love the homosexuals and consider homosexuality to be a problem, he believes that they need to develop to love God for a solution. What is implied by Serapion here is that those who hate or have a problem with homosexuality have not yet developed the love for God in themselves. The other implication is that, if a person loves God, he or she does not have hatred for and problem with homosexuality. In other words, the love for God in and by a person justifies homosexuality.

It has increasingly become more challenging to the church in general to define its common stance on homosexuality, in the light of the kind of rationality that is brought forward to justify and to promote homosexuality against the church's traditional

disapproval of it.

#### **4.4 Irreconcilability**

Although homosexuality has been politically and constitutionally recognized and accepted in many countries around the world, my impression is that it has not been officially accepted in most religious circles, especially amongst the Christian churches. While there is much more consensus on human rights and life issues related to them, there is, however, disagreement on the morality of homosexuality which is related to them. The division between homosexuality and those who disapprove it, in my opinion, is an obstacle that can be overcome by nothing except a choice by every person to see himself or herself as being accountable to God. My opinion is that where people cannot reconcile homosexuality with what they consider to be sound morality, it should not be forced down their throat by striving to make the Bible sound irrelevant and out of fashion. On the other hand, those who disagree with homosexuality must not impose their views and beliefs on the homosexuals and their proponents. Irreconcilable perceptions and feelings need to be looked at with the attitude of agreeing to disagree.

##### **4.4.1 Diverse contexts**

It is my belief that, from the human rights point of view, homosexuality should be viewed from both a political and a religious perspective. There should be no false assumption that all people are religious (or Christian for that matter). This obvious demand shows that politically homosexuality needs to be looked at from various perspectives and contexts.

According to Murchison (1998:48-53) homosexuality has been looked at from different



contexts such as the Scriptures, tradition, knowledge and experience by the Biblical scholars, ethicists, theologians, social scientists and practical theologians. The conclusion reached by some of the groups is that homosexuality is beyond the circle of the Christian norms and values. It is regarded as being outside the perimeter of the Christian morality. On the other hand, the other groups are said to accept homosexuality and put it within what is believed to be the broader contexts, such as human sexuality, ordination and Christian community. Against these contextual backgrounds there appear to be, therefore, a variety of deep-seated beliefs amongst the Christian groups about homosexuality.

Ellingsen (1993:354-371) agrees with Murchison that there are various contexts from which homosexuality has been debated amongst the various churches. Disagreements on homosexuality were, however, not based on the common scriptural content and context. For example, some were mostly based on the medical and psychological nature of being gay or lesbian. In other words, the nature of being gay or lesbian has been looked at exclusively from both a medical and psychological point of view. In another context there has been debate amongst the Christians about the ordination of the gay and lesbian to serve as officers in the church. This debate is still going on in many circles.

Scroggs (1983:7-16) gives a typical debatable example of a particular context from which homosexuality can be approached. He shows the importance of the social and scriptural context when interpreting the passages of scripture. He explains that homosexuality ought to be treated and condemned alike with the rest of the other sins, which appear with it in the Scriptures. For example, passages of scripture such as 1Corinthians 6:9;

1 Timothy 1:10; and Revelation 21:8; 22:15, mention other kinds of sins, of which homosexuality is not an exception. Scroggs explains that homosexuality must either be mentioned or condemned within the context of the other sins.

My impression of what is said by Scroggs is that, it is as if homosexuality has been the most exclusively unfairly condemned of all the sins mentioned in the passages of scripture mentioned. He further gives the impression that if it were condemned equally with the rest of the other sins, then it would have justified its being condemned by those who condemn it. In my view, the cry for equal and fair judgement does not make it better than the rest of the sins. It rather puts it on equal level with the rest of them, which is their common condemnation.

He further expresses his belief that the present debate about homosexuality emanates from the New Testament rather than the Old Testament. According to him, the various churches differ from one another on their views about homosexuality. Some churches seem to have been influenced more by the Old Testament, while others seem to have been influenced more by the New Testament. Therefore, he believes that homosexuality is being approached from unlike perspectives by individuals and churches.

One significant concern by other churches about the present debate on homosexuality, however, is that, **what is given exclusive consideration is human dignity, without equal consideration of Biblical norms.** A much closer and deeper look at human dignity from a Biblical perspective shows how the issue of human dignity is very essential, as it shows how the current concept of human rights has to a certain extent been

diverted from the moral Biblical norms. It further shows how the concept of human rights is derived from both the different contexts, namely, the secular and the religious (in this case the Judeo-Christian) beliefs.

My opinion is that the Old Testament is the beginning of the New Testament, and the latter is the end of the former. Therefore, they are two sides of the same coin. Every side had a special role to play. The Old had to introduce the New, and the latter had to fulfill the former. But, it is the New Testament from whose understanding and interpretation that controversy is arising. I am of the opinion that Christ has directly and indirectly been referred to as the main point of focus for both the Old and the New Testaments. I am also of the view that **it is only when their common main character, Jesus Christ's demonstrated exemplary life style is emulated by people, that conflicting and contradictory feelings and thoughts can be reconciled.** What I mean is that, it does not matter what we do, whether we argue, debate, agree or disagree. The question is how we do it. Is it the way Christ would do it? That is, is it out of God's unconditional and impartial love? (1 Corinthians 13:1-13).

#### **4.4.2 Compromise**

Richard Dayringer (1996:57-71) acknowledges the Judeo-Christian context from which homosexuality is being approached by some scholars. To him the attitude and belief of both the Old and New Testament and the writings of the church fathers about homosexuality are disapproving towards it. They all condemn it. Contrary to this acknowledgement, however, Dayringer suggests that the homosexuals need and ought to be treated like the heterosexuals. He makes a personal appeal that the same ethical norms be equally applied to both homosexuality and heterosexuality. According to him, they

need to be given the same kind of treatment and respect.

The appeal by Dayringer is that regardless the background that does not approve homosexuality, the Judeo-Christian faith is asked to review its stance, and to see people of the same sex in a much more humane perception. This must not be seen to contradict the spirit and moral norms which have been inter-confirmed by both the Old and the New Testaments together. In my opinion, if Dayringer's appeal was anything to go by, it would mean that those who cherished the Biblical norms and values would have to extend their understanding and acceptance of what might be the newly discovered truth and experience about homosexuality.

Contrary to the appeal to the church to change its stance towards homosexuality by Dayringer, Joseph Nicolosi (1993:76-82) **refuses a similar challenge to be directed to the homosexuals.** According to him any attempt to try to convert homosexual people is incorrect. He considers it as an attempt that is motivated by nothing except psychological biasedness.

In my opinion there is a loop-hole in what Nicolosi stands for. He rightly tries to defend homosexuality. But, at the same time he acknowledges the disparity that exists between the homosexuals themselves. There are those homosexuals who believe that they were born homosexuals, and those who believe that they were not born homosexuals. What I find significant in Nicolosi's views is that he condemns those who try to convert the homosexuals, whereas he acknowledges that all the homosexuals are not the same by nature. In my view, he needs to give all of them the freedom to choose what their nature

requires. For example, conversion to what others believe to be Christian principles need not be denied them, if there are those homosexuals who find it necessary to be converted to them. To deny them would be violating both their human dignity and rights as people.

Just like Nicolosi, Griffin (1999:209-219) is against those who are anti-homosexuality. He believes that there ought to be a rethinking of negative attitudes towards homosexuality, as there was a rethinking of negativity towards slavery during the 18th and 19th centuries. During that time many peoples' positive attitude towards slavery began to change. People began to consider slavery as being a violation of human dignity. Against this background, Griffin appeals to people that they must do the same with homosexuality. They need to change their negative attitude into a positive one. This can be achieved by developing a **more open-minded attitude towards homosexuality**. The attitude needs to be supplemented by a serious dialogue with both the gay and lesbian people.

In my opinion being open-minded like Griffin is saying, and persevering to being at peace with all people and keeping a clear conscience are difficult to separate them. In my opinion, open-mindedness does not necessarily mean that I agree with homosexuality or disagree with it. The same applies to being at peace with all people. I agree with the way Griffin puts it that, there ought to be a serious dialogue with homosexuals. At the bottom of it all every person's rights need to be respected.

## **4.5 Communication**

I am of the opinion that there ought to be communication channels (in the form of dialogue, reasoning and contextualization) to discuss homosexuality from the perspectives of the homosexuals, homosexual opponents and Christ. This I believe will help to promote humane and empathetic relations between homosexuality and its opposition. There is, therefore, a need for Biblical instructions and teachings like the Ten Commandments to be understood from both what they communicate verbally, and what is implied and remains to be learned from them through personal experience. I am convinced that a properly reasoned and contextualized dialogue (i.e. discussion) between the three will result in effective and fruitful acknowledgement and recognition of one another's human rights. While there might be different opinions and feelings at the end of the discussion, my appeal is that the maker, manufacturer or creator's opinion (based on his original intention with what was made, manufactured or created) be allowed to carry the most weight. In so doing I am of the opinion that human rights for every person will be fairly acknowledged and honoured.

### **4.5.1 Dialogue**

Against the background of the international need to promote unity on the issue of human rights, it has become essential to have a dialogue amongst the various groups and individuals to promote the issue of human rights.

Dialogue can be a way of teaching and of learning how to articulate the teaching of the church in a manner relevant to the contemporary context. Dialogue can also be a place where others correct us in our errors. For all these reasons, we should be in dialogue (Jones & Yarhouse 2000:19).

There are those who feel that a positive contribution can be made by the church, if steps that can be taken by the church are first, to set priorities, establish a forum for public discussion and finally to get one of the agreed upon international ways of interpreting the Bible concerning the issue of homosexuality. (cf. John Milbank 1990:174-191).

The aim and need of the dialogue is to promote human rights. In other words it is to promote unity in diversity. There is also an appeal by many scholars such as Nelson (1967:274) that the greatest challenge facing the church today is how positively can and should the church support and promote civil rights and social justice for the lesbian and gay men. The other challenge is how both the lesbians and gay men can be allowed to participate in all church activities. The church is one of the many role players that must contribute to the achievement of this goal. In my opinion, it has become crucially important for the religious people, especially Christians, for example, to make their positive contribution without sacrificing and losing the norms and values of their faith.

In the light of the nature of the message of the Old and New Testaments about homosexuality I am convinced that there is room for dialogue between them and homosexuality. The synod of the bishops of the Anglican Church in the Province of Southern Africa express the same ‘desire to dialogue and facilitate such dialogue and listening among all ...’ (Sowetan, September 23, 2003). The bishops express determination ‘to ensure that members of both homosexual and heterosexual orientation and practice are included in such a dialogue,’ (Daily Sun, September 23, 2003).

Dialogue, in my opinion, can help to develop sympathy and empathy. For example, even if I happen to be homosexual or HIV/AIDS positive, as a human being I have the right to

be loved and respected. **What I consider to be important is the kind of attitude and approach of people in an attempt to reconcile one another.** While for political purposes countries provide constitutional guidance to promote political stability in them, for religious groups (especially Christians) it remains every person's challenge to choose to emulate Christ's exemplary impartial loving attitude to all people.

My personal reaction to this genuine challenge is that it is very serious because it is about every person's rights. Rights are rights, founded among others upon freedom of choice. In other words, every person's choice is inherent in his or her human dignity. For example, the story about the first people, Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis 3 teaches that God allowed both of them to have freedom to choose. They were allowed to choose between obeying and disobeying the command that the creator, God, gave them. The same approach had been followed in the book of Deuteronomy 30. Here the children of Israel, (representative of all humanity before God), were given a moral choice to make, whose ultimate results would either credit or discredit their choice by its outcomes of life or death. Later on the same children of Israel had to make another choice which was political, of whether to have an earthly king or not (1 Samuel 8). Therefore, in the light of the examples provided above, there is often a possibility to negotiate any controversial moral issue. My opinion is that a person's choice is determined by his or her perceptions, which are subject to change.

But there are those to whom a dialogue is impossible from either side. For example, Thorsen (1996:34-38) in agreement with Pannenberg cannot see how the church can compromise its stance. He believes that tradition, reason and human experience are all



subject to the authority of the Scriptures (i.e. the Bible). Even though tradition, reason and human experience might be good, their being good is secondary to that of the Scriptures. He bases his views on the Church's belief in the supreme authority of the Scriptures over the authority of tradition, reason and human experience. He makes it clear that in discussing homosexuality, there are no conflicting thoughts about homosexuality within the Scriptures for which we need to look for a balance. We are not trying to seek a resolution that result from a balance of various views from the Scriptures, tradition, reason and experience. Instead, the Scriptures' view and stance about homosexuality are clear. They do not enter any dialogue with it. Instead, they seem to judge it to be wrong without entertaining any debate or argument with it. It means that the attitude of the Scriptures towards homosexuality is that of non-negotiation. It is a matter of take or leave it.

But the Scriptures (i.e. the Bible) also give us not only their negative side about homosexuality, but their positive side about it, too. The general scriptural message in and through the person of Christ shows a loving approach towards homosexuality. **Instead of isolating and exclusively condemning a single unacceptable life style or behaviour, Christ shows a loving attitude towards all people. He openly welcomes all people indiscriminately, as according to the Bible all people are equally sinful by nature.** It is our sinful nature as people that indiscriminately leave all humanity on the equal and common platform of sinfulness. However, it is God's impartial love (through Christ) for all humanity with which all people need to look at one another and themselves. I am convinced that the manner in which Christ had treated every person, is the only best example ever, whose imitation by people can positively and constructively contribute

towards the current culture of human rights. His impartial love for every person was persuasive enough in making every person see himself or herself the way God did. It also persuaded people to see and understand God's intention with their lives.

My other opinion is that the Bible is being treated unfairly by many scholars, who judge it by its ordinary characters, other than by a person who I regard to be **its main character, Jesus Christ**. Conclusive comments which exclude Christ have been made. For example, Pannenberg (1996:35-37) acknowledges the total rejection stance of homosexuality by the Bible. On the other hand he simultaneously acknowledges the need for homosexuality to be acknowledged as it is, without being condemned. In the same breath Pannenberg cannot foresee how the church can change its norms to accommodate homosexuality. For example, 'The Vatican has opposed moves to give homosexuals the right to marry, to receive the same benefits as heterosexual couples, and to adopt children,' (Sowetan, June 9, 2003:9).

Therefore, those who advocate that the church should change its norms are directly or indirectly promoting division.

My personal opinion is that Pannenberg believes in agreeing to disagree between the church and homosexuality. It requires a spirit of tolerance between the two parties. People can still be friends while they do not compromise their beliefs and life styles. For example, **one of Christ's highly standardized principles is that his followers need to love their enemies**. 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the children of your father in heaven,' Jesus commanded his disciples

(Matthew 5:44, 45). My understanding of this instruction is that while Jesus had expected his disciples to love their enemies, he did not mean and expect that the disciples should also do to their enemies what the enemies did to them. In other words, a person might love his or her enemy without necessarily enjoying or approving or justifying the bad acts of the enemy. In my opinion **to love one's enemy goes far beyond acknowledging or honouring another person's rights**. It means that as a person God requires you and I to love other people, even though they might disagree with or hate us. This is a challenge that goes far beyond the essence of the current culture of human rights.

Therefore, my conclusion is that it is not enough just to conclude what the Bible is saying in the light of what its ordinary characters are saying, while ignoring its protagonist's (i.e. main character, Christ's) mind about the issue concerned. My belief is that whenever there is a genuine attempt to find a solution from Christ's point of view, even opposing views are inclined to be positively and constructively influenced to a considerable degree by his exemplary unique loving attitude. The most important question to ask ourselves would be what and how would be Christ's attitude toward the problem concerned? 'There are things in every culture that are good, and there are things in every culture that are sinful. The Christian ought to measure everything according to the teachings of Jesus, asking, "Does this glorify or honour God? Is this something that Jesus would do?" If the answer is "yes", then we can do it, but if the answer is "no", we must leave it behind', comments Marais (2003:10). In the light of the manner in which Christ reacted to many controversial situations, it becomes obvious how his attitude would be like even in current controversial issues. For example, the manner in which he reacted towards the

woman who was caught while committing adultery, in my opinion, gives us an exemplary way in which people need to treat every controversial matter kindly with the knowledge that all people are sinners and have no right to judge others, except God (John 8:1-11).

This is the kind of attitude, which needs to enliven this kind of dialogue, which I believe needs to be allowed to take place between every person and the message of the Bible.

#### **4.5.2 Reasoning**

In order to develop further and to strengthen dialogue between homosexuality and its opposition, reasoning is seen as a criterion by some scholars, with which the condemnation of homosexuality by the Bible should be assessed. For example, Scroggs (1983:73) is of the opinion that the Bible does not give enough reasoning that justifies its condemnation of homosexuality. He believes that there is not much motivation given in the Bible about the disapproval of homosexuality.

My personal reaction to this view by Scroggs is that this kind of demand for reasoning is misleading. There are many instances where the Scriptures would be instructive, without entering into much reasoning. The Ten Commandments is a good example of this. I believe that the reason for this was that an improved understanding of the divine commandments would come through personal experience. For example, Luke (24:45-49) explains how the followers of Jesus' minds were opened after his death and resurrection. They began to understand the purpose for which Jesus had come to live and die on the cross for all humanity, after he had died and risen from the dead. It was only after his death and resurrection that they managed to relate what was written in the Scriptures about him with what was happening in their lives.

Another modern example within the South African politics that I can think of is that of Nelson Mandela. Though he was previously seen as a communist in the negative sense during the apartheid era by the South African government, he has recently come to be seen and accepted as an icon of democracy by most people inside and outside of South Africa. His non-retaliatory leadership in South Africa after his release from prison after twenty seven years has made his opponents and critics to change their previously negative perceptions about him. It is obvious that it was after they had heard his political claims and later had time to see him implement them that he was seen as a political role model world wide.

I believe the same thing can be said about the seventh commandment, namely, 'Do not commit adultery,' (Exodus 20:14). My impression is that for a long time in the past this commandment has been proclaimed with the other commandments to humanity. But there were seemingly not much reason given by way of elaborating as to why adultery or promiscuity was prohibited. I believe that to some scholars it probably did not make sense, because it seemed like there was not sufficient reasoning with which this commandment could be substantiated. Indeed, it seems like it still sounds nonsensical to some scholars and theologians even today. But I would like to use the same commandment, namely, 'Do not commit adultery,' against the background of the destructive HIV/AIDS pandemic to illustrate my opinion of this commandment's prescriptive nature. The quick spreading of HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is busy growing into a pandemic killer disease all over the world, is fast forcing many organizations and individuals to change their views and life styles related to HIV/AIDS. This is what I mean: many people could not trace the spread of HIV/AIDS to promiscuity. Unsafe sex

was given as the main reason for the spreading of HIV/AIDS. People had been advised and encouraged to practice the so-called safe sex. The wearing of condoms by people who were involved in sex was regarded as one of the best ways to limit the spread of the disease, as well as to protect oneself against the disease. But with no decrease in the number of people who continue to contract this disease, it has begun to become clearer that there is no better method to effectively prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS than abstinence and faithfulness to one partner. Amongst many Christians abstinence is mostly used to relate to the unmarried and faithfulness to one partner to the married. My opinion is that, what we experience currently with the incurability of and the need to prevent HIV/AIDS disease makes one to realize the prescriptive intention of this commandment. Indeed the Scriptures give us prescriptive moral instructions, which to others may seem and sound to have not enough reasoning. My opinion is that, with these instructions we are given the freedom to learn either by merely listening and obeying, or by discovering the truth through personal experience. The latter creates enough room for reasoning.

#### **4.5.3 Contextualisation**

It has become a norm for the passages of scripture and their interpretations to be assessed, among others, against their historical context. The interpretation as well as the application of the scriptural message need to be done first in the light of the original historical context, and then within the current historical context. Therefore, against the need for proper contextualization, I consider it necessary that any historical background to be used as a base for any issue (in this case homosexuality), need not be an embarrassing background which distorts the noble picture and nature of human rights as rights. Rights are rights and they will forever stand as rights. But, in my opinion, even what has been

legally and constitutionally acknowledged as a human right can only be fairly reconfirmed after communities and societies have experienced the ultimate consequences of the acknowledged rights.

I consider both the Greco-Roman and Israelite cultures to be good examples to illustrate how old historical contexts are used to try and support the current cultural and religious perceptions. In our case homosexuality and heterosexuality are being promoted from either the Greco-Roman or Judeo-Christian (which emanates from the Israelite) cultural points of view respectively.

In as far as sexuality was concerned it is claimed by some scholars that the Greco-Roman culture acknowledged and accepted homosexuality as being normal and cultural. This was the kind of homosexuality which was practiced between the adult males and the young boys. According to Scroggs (1983:32) it was initiated by the adult males in order to satisfy themselves, while on the other hand the young boys accepted it with the main purpose of earning what was offered by the adults. During the sexual act the only active party were the adult males, while the young boys remained passive. Mutual gain by these two parties was not a common thing experienced simultaneously. While the adult male would get what he had desired during the sexual act, the young boy would get his payment either before or after the adult had satisfied himself.

What is special about these relationships between adult males and young boys is that they existed only between the adult males and the young boys. They never existed between same-age adults, (Scroggs 1983:35). My opinion is that Scroggs, therefore, justifies the

current homosexual practice by this different practice (age wise). Despite the impression given by Scroggs, it is very unlikely that this practice was regarded as a cultural norm among the Greco-Roman people. Pederasty (i.e. sexual love for boys by adult males), is currently unpopularly known as child abuse. The contexts of both the ancient pederasty and the current homosexuality are disparaging. This, in my view, is to try and create both a historically noble foundation for the current homosexual practice by an old practice that, instead, indirectly degrades people who are said to have practiced it. In my opinion, this is a disproportionate relationship between the current concept of homosexuality and the old adult-child relationship which is currently regarded as a violation of human right (in this case child sexual abuse).

On the other hand this culture was also bisexual. It means that the adult males had sexual relationships with other people other than the young boys. They married the females and had sexual relationships with them. However, the relationship with both the different and the same sexes could be maintained and kept simultaneously (Scroggs 1983:27). This in my view is an attempt to credit homosexuality by firmly establishing and founding it on a sexual practice, which unfortunately, by its very nature happened to be highly promiscuous. I need to make it clear that, against the background of the promiscuity of the mentioned sexual practice, homosexuality identifies itself or is made to be seen as a promiscuous cultural practice.

It is here where the human rights issue with its noble intention plays a critical role.

Different beliefs and perceptions of people are acknowledged and each allowed space to co-exist harmoniously with others. Every person or group of people is given the freedom



to be who and what they are as human beings. But, this in my opinion is necessarily not a do as you like situation. It is rather, provided one is a Christian, a situation not to impose on other people my beliefs or perceptions. It is time to show love to other people like Christ did. I must bear in mind that all people are accountable to God. To me to see every person as having human rights is to see every person as being accountable to God. This vision of seeing others as being accountable to God needs to be accompanied by caring acts of love to other people as demonstrated through, in and by Christ.

Scroggs (1983:11) is also of the opinion that the messages of the passages of the Bible are limited by both the times and culture within which they existed, such that they cannot apply to times and cultures beyond their own. For example, he takes much space and time showing how acceptable homosexuality was in the Greco-Roman world where the Apostle Paul lived and preached the Gospel. He goes on to express his belief about the Apostle Paul that he probably wrote about homosexuality mainly from a Israelite point of view, without a first hand experience of the kind of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world. Therefore, according to him, Paul's messages against homosexuality did not necessarily refer to other people, but the Israelites. He also believes that Paul was not well versed with the kind of homosexuality, namely, pederasty, which was the sexual relationship practiced between the adult males and the young boys in the Greco-Roman world. He believes that the authority and integrity of the Bible should be kept by allowing it to serve as a solution only to those modern times problems which are the same as those that had existed at Paul's time.

He goes on to explain that the only basis for the prohibition of homosexuality were the

two passages of scripture, namely, Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13. The fact that there is not much mention of homosexuality in the Torah gives him more courage to believe that the Torah was not radical in its opposition to homosexuality. The impression he gives is that the Torah, on behalf of the Old Testament, was highly ignorant of homosexuality, thus the limited saying about it. My opinion about this is that the Scriptures describe more of positive things than negative ones. Against this background the Torah, too, aimed at explaining more of what it was promoting than what it was not promoting.

Further on he explains that the Torah's references to homosexuality are not specific. It means that they are general in meaning. They convey 'a general prohibition of male homosexuality,' (Scroggs 1983:72). There was no technical term that referred to homosexuality in the Torah, as did the technical term, 'pederasty,' in the Greek literature and culture.

My personal reaction to this view is that indeed the Torah passages of scripture did not differentiate which kind of homosexuality they were referring to. Homosexuality was prohibited in general. In the light of the general approach of the Bible there was no type of homosexuality which was more acceptable or better than the other.

The other view by Scroggs (1983:72) is that the Torah provides the passages of scripture which oppose the male homosexuality only.

My personal reaction to Scroggs' view is that, it is true that homosexuality did not exist in Israel. But its non-existence in Israel can only be understood to be true, if it means that it

was culturally not acknowledged and acceptable in Israel. It was not existent in the sense that it was outlawed both culturally and religiously. But, it was existent hence the Israelites were warned against it.

My other opinion about Scroggs' view is that he supports and justifies the current belief in homosexuality by showing from the ancient Greek and Roman writers how culturally acceptable homosexuality was in the ancient times. But **he could not show how this 'acceptable' culture of the time, which had the greatest probability and likelihood of the support by the governments and empires of its time, had boosted the social and cultural acceptance of homosexuality world wide.** In other words, Scroggs stops short of showing how these great empires positively impacted on the spreading of homosexuality as a culture. Its social and cultural acceptance seems to have stopped growing or disappeared with the fall of these empires under whose rule it is claimed to have existed. My impression is that Scroggs is trying to justify and revive the current homosexuality, by relating what is presently acceptable to a growing few to what he claims was acceptable to more in the Greco-Roman world.

Scroggs (1983:48-49) is of the opinion that homosexuality was believed to be more natural than heterosexuality. Contrary to this view, I am of the opinion that, if that was true, it should have contributed towards its greater social and cultural acceptance. It seems to have been incapable of enhancing its social and cultural acceptance in many communities. It is common sense that if homosexuality was equally natural as heterosexuality was, homosexuality should have been equally acceptable to people in general just as it is the case with the general acceptance of heterosexuality. The gay and

lesbian movement which was launched in the United States of America in the past few decades of the twentieth century could not have been formed. The need for both the launching of the movement and the campaigning for homosexual rights indicates the lowest extent to which homosexuality has been generally acknowledged and officially recognized. It is obvious, therefore, that the numerical magnitude of the belief by people in the naturalness of homosexuality claimed by Scroggs is questionable.

Contrary to Scroggs' view, Yates (1995:71-87) is of the opinion that it is heterosexuality that is natural. It reflects the multi-faceted nature of the creator, God. Thus, when looked against this multi-pronged nature of God it looks natural. The image of God was reflected by both the male and the female together. It was not expressed in terms of two individuals of the same sex. '...God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female ...' (Genesis 1:27). In my opinion, the complementary nature of male and female relationship is the most original and the most natural, which is in line with God's expressed nature.

What I find to be significant about both homosexuality and heterosexuality is the discrepancy in their respective geographical and cross-cultural acceptance by world communities. Their respective credibility is expressed by either the minor or majority of citizens, which each sexual orientation draws from every community. It is the discrepancy between the two, in my opinion, which indicates the degree of credibility every society gives to each sexuality. For example, it is my impression that in places that I have come across most people believe that homosexuality is morally wrong. It is not in agreement with nature, thus, anti-nature. This is also the view of Michael Pakaluk

(1993:53-57).

#### **4.5.4 Church Potential**

Regardless of a different context from which the greatest part of the church approaches the issue of human rights, Berliner (1987:137-142) believes that the church today, just as it was in the past, has the potential to influence the society either for or against homosexuality. Unfortunately, according to him, in the past the church had played a negative role in as far as getting rid of homophobia was concerned. But today he considers it fortunate in that it has more advantage of succeeding to work against homophobia, by working in partnership with the other institutions who have the same interest.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Scripture-Christ imply human rights**

I have done my best to show the significance and importance of the Bible amongst my community of Zone 16, Ga-Rankuwa, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa (among others for occasions such as funerals, bereavement, weddings and festivals). I have also tried to show some aspects of the Bible, which make it authoritative, namely, stories of various social and cultural contexts, whose messages are about or related to God's plan of salvation. These stories are believed by many Christians to have reached the climax of their collective message (as an aspect of God's plan of salvation) when it became fulfilled in the personhood of Christ. The latter is regarded by me as the source of and incomparable role model for human rights by the way he had related and reacted to all people respectfully, lovingly, sacrificially and compassionately. His attitude toward the Scriptures, as well as both his authoritative interpretation and implementation of some of the passages of scripture, had resulted in a modified (i.e. an adapted and developed) view of their messages (especially for those who believe in the Lordship of Christ). When

Christ's positive attitude towards all Scriptures and both his compassionate and respectful attitude towards all people are believed and emulated, the Scriptures begin to be seen to be more relevant to all cultural and social contexts including the current culture of human rights.

## 5.2 Choice in dignity

In the light of the fact that every person has been created and is born with human dignity, he or she must be treated in accordance with the respect and honour that human dignity deserves. Homosexuals and heterosexuals are equal humans and they equally have human dignity, which necessitates equal honour and respect for both. In this case **respect and honour should not be mistaken for agreement or consensus on all sexual acts by heterosexuals and homosexuals**. Both respect and honour here imply that there ought to be common acknowledgement of sexual orientation, which influences people to choose to be either homosexual or heterosexual. However, I agree with Jones and Yarhouse (2000:90) that

homosexual persons are not subhuman robots whose acts are predetermined. They are moral agents who inherit tendencies from biology and environment, and who share in shaping their character by the responses they make to their life situations.

It also needs to be acknowledged that inherent in human dignity is free will of choice. It means that **every person has the right and power to choose what they want to be**.

The choice will determine the type of sexual acts a person does - homosexual or heterosexual acts. I have been impressed by Jones and Yarhouse (2000:88) that there is no scientific evidence that whatever influences a person to be either homosexual or

heterosexual over-rides human choice. Our actions are the results of our choice.

### 5.3 Rights in accountability

In my opinion the essence of human rights as part of individual and personal accountability to both God and other people has vividly been painted in the story of Jesus and the woman caught committing adultery (John 8:1-11). Instead of condemning the accused woman according to her accusers, Christ acknowledged the woman's rights with the words: **'...neither do I condemn you ... Go now and leave your life of sin,'** (emphasis mine). Christ's reaction to the woman's accusation by her accusers shows how he had acknowledged the woman's rights, which were necessarily not acknowledged by her accusers and probably also her own community. Her personal rights were in a sense her accountability to choose the kind of life that she preferred. At the same time we need to perceive how Jesus against the culture and religion of the time protected the woman against the pending judgement and persuaded her to change from her sinful life style (which according to the current human rights culture could have been her right to live the way she chose) to a new life style.

Concerning the rights of heterosexuals and homosexuals I ask myself, 'How would Christ react towards both heterosexuals and homosexuals respectively, if they were standing in front of him? Whose sexual acts of the two would he justify? Who of them would he condemn?' In the light of how Christ reacted towards both the woman who was arrested while committing adultery and her accusers (John 8:1-11), I find it difficult to bring about a clear cut judgment, except to adopt what I believe would be Christ's attitude. I believe **Christ would have sympathy and empathy for both and show them that they are**



**each dignified with freedom of choice.** ‘I would be shocked if the Jesus I believe in would be going hammer and tongs at gays and lesbians,’ comments Desmond Tutu (Stephen Robinson 2004:19). **Each needs to use freedom of choice to do sexual acts which they would account for in the light of what God had intended for them to do.** The credibility of their choices would depend on the positive or negative nature of their consequences.

But it is the solution of Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar that I believe clearly illustrates the essence of human rights against the greater background of **personal accountability to people and God** (Matthew 22:17-22; Luke 20:22-26). In the story there is a dilemma between paying and not paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus was asked to support or discredit payment of tax to the government of the time. He avoided going to either extreme - blaming or crediting the government tax system. ‘Well, then, pay the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor, and pay God what belongs to God,’ (Matthew 22:21). My personal interpretation and conclusion about Jesus’ solution out of this dilemma is that **Jesus advised his audience to observe both the earthly and divine rules or governance.** His solution encouraged people to be personally involved and accountable to issues that affected their lives. In my opinion it boils down to implementing personal choices (i.e. decisions) which will naturally be followed by either positive or negative consequences, which will reflect either the credit or discredit deserved by the made choice. It, therefore, means that all of us have equal human rights (which are characterized by people’s conflicting interests, which in turn need tolerance and love from people), which imply also that all people have accountability towards God, before whose eyes nothing is hidden (Hebrews 4:13).

In my opinion the fact that human rights do stampede and conflict show that they need to be subjected to and guided by a sense of being accountable to God (in accordance with his principles as shown in the Bible and the personhood of Jesus Christ), who is able to judge people's hidden inner motives fairly.

## SUMMARY

I did my utmost best to present what I consider to be the essence of human rights from the perspective of the Bible. In my view human rights are a modern discovery and re-defining of what had long been implied, acknowledged and taught in the Bible. The implied form and acknowledgement of human rights in the Bible need not be overshadowed and hidden away by many of Bible characters' sinful nature and acts (as all Bible characters except Christ were also born with a fallen and sinful nature, which needed God's redemption by faith). Instead, they need to be perceived in God's divine intention, which has **progressively** been revealed in God's interaction with the Israelites and other nations and culminated in both the personhood and exemplary saving acts of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:23,24).

My opinion is that in the Bible human rights have been expressed in the context of both the Israelite religion and culture, whereas currently there is a need and tendency to express them in an inter-cultural approach, which is driven by the trend of globalization. While in modern times context human rights have been expressed as human rights, in the Bible context they had long been implied in and acknowledged and expressed as an integral part of every person's free will of choice imparted at man's creation.

In my view the Bible is authoritative because it is probably the only classic book that identifies every human being with our creator, God. It highlights the need for and possibility of a unique God-man relationship, which all people are worthy of to be

identified with the only highest being such as God. The Bible serves as the source of information about the needed meaningful relationship that identifies people with their creator, God. It contains stories that inform us about various people's counter-active relationship with God. Its authority, in my opinion is further demonstrated by the way it shows the necessity and possibility of developing the creator-creature (i.e. God-man) relationship, which lifts up human beings to the status above all other creatures. The authority of the message of the Bible from its various stories needs to be understood and accepted in the light of Christ's exemplary constructive attitude towards the Scriptures of his time. His un-conniving but constructively critical attitude towards the unacceptable cultural aspects before and during his time show us the exemplary attitude people must adopt towards all cultures and the Bible. My opinion is that Christ needs to be seen as a corrective measure against both Bible and non-Bible characters before his time. He also needs to be seen as the role model to all people of our times, so that we can meaningfully implement and promote human rights. Christ-like love and attitude towards other people need to underscore everything we do or say in order that we may meaningfully implement and promote human rights.

Human dignity, in my opinion, is one of the underlying factors, which has undisputedly long been acknowledged and promoted by the Bible. The identification of every person with the creator of the universe, God, implies the acknowledgement of human dignity in the highest dimension that cannot be surpassed by anything. Human dignity in the light of man's identification with God puts God as the highest moral criterion worthy to be complied with by every person.

Human dignity also implies that every person was created and is born with a free will of

choice. With free will of choice goes the responsibility for every personal choice made by a human being at the age of accountability. In my opinion there is commonality between the need for every person to be accountable and God as every person's highest moral criterion worthy to comply with.

Current controversy on homosexuality is regarded by me as a situation that challenges us to agree to disagree as groups and individuals. None of us should judge another. None should compel the other to think and believe against personal choice. While there will always be disagreements, it is only practical outcomes of our choices and acts which help us have a much more objective judgement of them. The present general consensus on promiscuity as one of the contributing factors to the spread of HIV/AIDS is a good example. Here the ultimate concrete results serve to unite the previously divided opinions on the culpability of promiscuous life style, which according to human rights is blameless as a result of consensus of two individuals. In the words of Jesus (Matthew 13:24-30) undisputable judgement will finally be affirmed by God. My opinion is that God's judgement will amaze all people. God's ways and thoughts are higher than human beings' ways and thoughts, (Isaiah 55:9). Therefore, his judgement will be unique. He will judge people's acts and thoughts in the light of seen and unseen motives behind them.

While every person has the freedom to choose what he or she wants to be, every person is accountable for the outcomes of his or her choice and actions. 'Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account,' (Hebrews 4:13).

## OPSOMMING

Ek het met my beste insig gepoog om die wesenlike aspekte van menseregte vanuit 'n Bybelse aan te bied. Volgens my siening is menseregte wel 'n moderne "ontdekking", maar dit is tegelyk ook 'n herdefiniëring van wat reeds lank gelede in die Bybel geïmpliseer erken en geleer is. Hierdie geïmpliseerde vorm en erkenning van menseregte in die Bybel mag ook nie oorskadu en verborge bly deur die wandade van verskeie karakters wat mens in die Bybel teenkom nie. Dit getuig van die sondige aard wat in die natuur en optrede van mense navore kom, wat ook duidelik geroep het na die verlossende werk van Christus. Intendeel, hierdie vergrype deur sommige karakters teen basiese menseregte kan beskou word teen die agtergrond van God se oorkoepelende bedoeling wat progressief na vore tree in God se openbarende interaksie met die Isreliete en ander nasies en soos wat dit kulmineer in die menswees en voorbeeldige verlossende gebeure in Jesus Christus ( Romeine 3:23 en 24).

My siening is dat die saak van menseregte in die Bybel tot uitdrukking kom binne die konteks van die Israelitiese godsdiens en kultuur, terwyl die behoefte tans bestaan om dit in die raamwerk van 'n inter-kulturele benadering en met die tendens van globalisasie tot uitdrukking te bring. Terwyl dit in die moderne konteks as menseregte na vore kom, is dieselfde saak in die Bybel-konteks geïmpliseer en erken as integrale deel van elke mense se vrye wil en keuses wat aan mense gegee is as skepsels van God. Na my mening is die Bybel gesagvol omdat dit waarskynlik die enigste klassieke bron is waarin elke mens met die Skepper-God geïdentifiseer word. Dit beklemtoon die nodigheid en moontlikheid vir 'n unieke mens-God verhouding en waarvoor hierdie skepsel waardig geag word. Die Bybel dien as bron van inligting in verband met die behoefte aan so 'n betekenisvolle verhouding waar mense geïdentifiseer word met hulle Skepper.

Hoewel die Bybel verhale het oor verskeie mense se kontra-aktiewe verhouding met God, toon die Bybel tog die weg aan hoe hierdie skepsel-Skepper verhouding tot stand kan kom waardeur die mense tot 'n status verhoog word wat hoër is as enige iets ander in die skepping.

Die gesag van die Bybel, met al die verhale daarin, moet verstaan word in die lig van Christus se konstruktiewe houding en omgaan met die Skrifte van sy tyd. Jesus se afwysing van die onaanvaarbare kulturele aspekte het in 'n konstruktiewe kritiese houding na vore gekomen het daarmee die voorbeeld en norm geword waarmee mens omgaan met alle kulturele aspekte - ook soos dit gevind word in die Bybel. Christus is die korrektief op alle verkeerde optrede van karakters in die Bybel. Hy behoort ook gesien te word as rolmodel vir die mense van ons tyd sodat ons die saak van menseregte reg kan implimenteer en bevorder. 'n Christus-gelykvormige houding en liefde teenoor ander mense moet die basis vorm van alles wat ons sê of doen in die betekenisvolle bevordering van menseregte.

Menswaardigheid is die onderliggende waarde wat onbetwisbaar lank reeds in die Bybel erken en bevorder is. Die identifisering van elke mens as skepsel van God, impliseer die erkenning van menswaardigheid wat eintlik deur niks oortref kan word nie. Daarmee saam geld God nou as die hoogste morele kriterium waaraan daar voldoen moet word. Menswaardigheid impliseer verder dat elke mens geskep is met 'n vrye wil en keuses oor die lewe. Die verantwoordelikheid vir elke keuse beteken dat elkeen ook aanspreeklik is vir keuses wat uitgeoefen word. Daar is dus 'n verband tussen die aanspreeklikheid van elkeen en God as hoogste kriterium waaraan elkeen moet voldoen.

Die huidige debat oor homoseksualiteit bring myns insiens 'n situasie na vore wat ons uitdaag om as individue en groepe saam te stem m te verskil. Niemand behoort oor iemand anders te oordeel nie. Niemand moet gedwing word om teen persoonlike keuse in te dink of te glo nie. Terwyl daar oor hierdie saak altyd verskille van mening sal bestaan, is dit slegs die praktiese uitlopers van ons keuses wat ons in staat stel om nugtere oordele daaroor uit te spreek. Daar is tans algemene konsensus dat promiskuiteit een van die oosaaklike faktore is in die verspreiding van MIV/VIGS. Dit is die uiteindelijke konkrete gevolge wat daartoe dien dat daar eenstemmigheid kan kom oor verantwoordelikheid om nie losbandig te lewe nie, terwyl menseregte op sigself die klem laat val op die blaamloosheid van twee mense se vrye keuse.

In die woorde van Jesus (bv Matteus 13:24-30) sal die ontwyfelbare finale oordeel deur God gemaak word. Na my mening sal die eindoordeel van God ons waarskynlik almal verras. God se weë en gedagtes is hoer as mense s'n ( Jesaja 55:9). Sy oordeel sal uniek wees. God sal oordeel oor mense se verborge motiewe agter hulle gedagtes en dade. Terwyl elke mens vryheid van keuse het om te wees wie hy of sy wil wees, is elkeen aanspreeklik vir die gevolge van daardie keuses en dade. "Alles is oop en bloot voor Hom aan wie rekenskap gegee moet word." (Hebreërs 4:13)

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